

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON ARTS AND MUSIC
EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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

UNCORRECTED

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Monday 25 November 2024

The Committee met at 2:15 pm

PRESENT

Ms Julia Finn (Chair)

Legislative Assembly

Mr Kevin Anderson

Legislative Council

Ms Abigail Boyd
The Hon. Anthony D'Adam
The Hon. Jacqui Munro

PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Mrs Judy Hannan
Dr Joe McGirr (Deputy Chair)

The CHAIR: Welcome, everyone, to the fourth hearing of the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Julia Finn, and I am the Chair of the Committee.

I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures.

Dr CHRISTINE HATTON, Director of Research, Drama Australia, on former affirmation

Ms AMY GILL, Vice-President of Professional Learning, Drama NSW, on former affirmation

Mrs DEBRA BATLEY, Chair, Australian Society for Music Education NSW, on former oath

Dr THOMAS FIENBERG, Vice-Chair, Australian Society for Music Education NSW, on former affirmation

Mr OWEN NELSON, Member, Australian Society for Music Education NSW, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome, and thank you for making the time to give evidence. Would you all like to start by making a short statement, ahead of our questions? We will go from Ms Gill through to Mr Nelson.

AMY GILL: We are going to make a join statement.

CHRISTINE HATTON: It will start with me. We would like to begin by thanking the Committee for reinventing us to discuss the crisis in arts education and training in New South Wales. Unfortunately, the current situation has deteriorated further since we last met, with NESA releasing poorly conceived draft senior arts syllabuses that undermine teacher expertise, disregard feedback and limit the rich, experiential learning that has underpinned over 30 years of excellence, particularly in New South Wales, in drama education. These changes diminish equitable opportunities for students, particularly as they transition to adulthood and their careers.

AMY GILL: Drama NSW rejects the draft year 11 and 12 Drama syllabus, the draft year 11 and 12 Drama Life Skills syllabus and the accompanying draft assessment and examination requirements. The proposed syllabus removes the group performance—a vital, collaborative assessment and core external examination component that has been transformative for students, with 90.9 per cent of current and former students surveyed by Drama NSW reporting overwhelmingly positive experiences with the GP. This survey has been distributed to the Committee prior to today.

Alarming, no compulsory performance element remains in the external examination, shifting the focus toward written assessments and narrowing the scope of creative, collaborative learning. This fails to align with the goals of the curriculum reform, which are aimed at preparing students to be lifelong learners, equipped with essential skills for future-focused careers such as communication, creativity, critical thinking, empathy and innovation. One student in the survey writes, "The group project was the most challenging. It was where I was pushed to use my knowledge and skills. I have been learning in collaboration with others. It's where I developed collaboration skills and the ability to listen to others, to be bold with ideas and to think divergently. I have used the collaboration skills I developed through the group project in every aspect of my life since—in university, the workforce and community groups."

CHRISTINE HATTON: The curriculum reform priority two, "Draw on the expertise of teachers to ensure the review's outcomes continue to support their work", has not been fulfilled. If this priority had genuinely been addressed, there would not be such widespread disdain and dissatisfaction across the drama education community in New South Wales.

AMY GILL: We would like to table this document, a formal submission from Drama NSW to the inquiry outlining the numerous concerns about the proposed changes, including but not limited to the impact of learning and progression, removal of collaborative and creative assessment and examinations, and reduced accessibility and equity, amongst other issues.

CHRISTINE HATTON: We call on this Committee to urge NESA to take the following actions: Extend the "have your say" period to allow meaningful consultation with teachers, students, researchers and industry experts; develop a new draft syllabus, life skills syllabus, and assessment and examination requirements that reflect the evidence base, best practice and academic rigour, and ensure alignment with the progression of learning from the earlier stages; reinstate the key practical assessments and examinations in a meaningful form, such as the group performance and the diverse individual projects, to preserve inclusive, practical and collaborative learning opportunities for all students; and prioritise assessments that accommodate neurodiverse learners, EAL/D students and those students in rural and remote areas, recognising the value of practical and collaborative outputs over an overemphasis on written work. By championing meaningful reform, this inquiry can ensure the arts remain a cornerstone of education in New South Wales, equipping students with the skills to thrive in a creative and rapidly evolving world.

THOMAS FIENBERG: I'll be speaking for ASME NSW. I'd like to begin by acknowledging the country that we're on of the Gadi people in their language. [Speaks in language.] We meet today on the very beautiful lands of the Gadi people. The Australian Society for Music Education, New South Wales chapter, calls for the

urgent suspension and removal of the draft music syllabuses from circulation and a restart to the review process with improved policy safeguards. We strongly believe that a comprehensive, consultative, transparent and research-informed approach to reform is required to ensure that students in New South Wales continue to have access to a world-leading music curriculum.

While we acknowledge NESA's recognition of the value in retaining four distinct courses—Music 1, Music 2, Music Extension and Music Life Skills—as the peak association representing stakeholders across all sectors, ASME NSW expresses deep concerns regarding the current draft syllabuses, which are a significant backward step for music education in New South Wales. At the heart of our concern is the misunderstanding of the "core facts" in music education. The draft syllabuses fail to adequately recognise that composing and performing music are not merely skills to be developed but are, indeed, "core facts" of musical knowledge and understanding. ASME NSW feels that a key issue leading to this misguided draft is the Government response to the Masters review. In particular, the interpretations of recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 9 have led to a situation where the draft syllabus produced was almost inevitable, disempowering syllabus writers, technical advisory groups, critical friends and subject matter officers.

As explored in recent reports tabled to the inquiry by classroom music teachers and tertiary researchers—and I hope you've had the opportunity to view those over the last few days—these draft music syllabuses do not align with leading international music curricula and research. They also fail to adequately prepare students for post-school opportunities in the music industry, with a disregard for student choice, autonomy and creative expression. This is particularly evident through the unhelpful binary of art music and contemporary music courses, leading to a less inclusive and culturally responsive syllabus; a lack of alignment to the 2024 7-10 music syllabus structure and rationale; unnecessary written examination length and weighting; mandating of all topics; loss of elective components, including the removal of the externally assessed composition; and the complete absence of musicology in Music 1.

If these structural issues, among many other concerns, are not addressed, we forecast a significant reduction in students completing stage 6 music courses, leading to a substantial impact on the music industry and arts economy as a whole. As seen in the current petition to the Legislative Assembly which has over 5,500 signatories, ASME NSW calls for an immediate suspension of the current draft syllabuses and the initiation of a new review process. This process must be transparent, genuinely consultative with music educators and stakeholders and firmly grounded in current research and best practices in music education.

We urge the Government to ensure that the new syllabi correctly articulate the core facts of music, including the integrated and active learning experiences of composing, performing and musicology, as fundamental aspects of musical knowledge; align with leading international music curricula, research and industry practice; adequately prepare students for post-school opportunities; and, most importantly, be inclusive for all students across New South Wales, no matter their stylistic preference, providing flexibility and choice to cater for students'—and I quote from the year 7-10 syllabus published by NESA—"interests, strengths and needs". In conclusion, while we acknowledge NESA's commitment to maintaining four distinct music courses, ASME NSW affirms its desire to work together, using all available expertise, to create a world-leading music curriculum for New South Wales. Our future students deserve nothing less and are the ones with the most to lose if the proposed syllabus structure and processes are maintained.

DEBRA BATLEY: Could we also table two documents? We'd like to table the Government response to the curriculum reform, which we referenced in our opening statement. We'd also like to table the ASME response to the Masters curriculum review. They are historical documents, but they give you an idea of what we're referring to as we answer questions today.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you, all, for being here at such short notice. What involvement have you each individually had with the development of syllabuses before in terms of things like marking or writing or drafting a syllabus, just to get an idea of your expertise and background?

AMY GILL: I'm happy to start. I've been teaching for 24 years. I'm a deputy principal of innovation and impact across six special assistance schools. I have been a practical marker—I have marked the practical assessment numerous times—as well as a project marker, marking the design projects within the Drama syllabus. I'm doing a PhD in arts-based pedagogy for at-risk young people and looking at how that has an impact. I've also been in the Drama NSW voice, in consultation on the K-6 syllabus and the 7-10 syllabus, which has already been released.

CHRISTINE HATTON: I think I've got 30-plus years of experience. I have been a practical examiner for the HSC, and then a senior examiner for the HSC. I have also sat on the examination committee, writing the written papers in the past. I research about drama, particularly about group devising, which is at the centre of the

issues that we have here. I supervise students who are doing research on drama education, particularly with a New South Wales focus. I'm a past president of Drama NSW. I serve on Drama Australia as a director of research. We were trying to work out how often we've met at committees over the years. I have been involved in curriculum processes in New South Wales for a very long time. I was the last drama curriculum adviser for the Department of Education way back—the very last one. I was very much part of the curriculum development processes around that. In my role supporting Drama NSW, I have served on many a committee, wherever they'll allow me to speak about what is considered to be high-quality curricula for our students.

DEBRA BATLEY: I have marked the practical components of the HSC and the composition components of the HSC in all—sorry, composition only in Music 1 and practical in all courses. I have been involved in standard setting for both courses. I'm a sessional academic at Sydney Conservatorium. I am currently in the end stages of completing a PhD that is focusing upon curriculum development in the 7-10 space. I was a syllabus writer for the 2018 process involved in the K-6 creative arts curriculum and I wrote support documents for that curriculum, which were endorsed but then not adopted because of the Masters review. I was a syllabus writer on the 7-10 2024 music curriculum. As a chair I have been involved extensively in consultation since about 2017, which is before I was chair, but I was working in that space. I'm also on the part-time staff of Tamworth Regional Conservatorium, teaching piano.

THOMAS FIENBERG: Deb, did you mention that you teach students? That's probably the most important thing. They are the people who really matter.

DEBRA BATLEY: I also teach at an independent school in Tamworth. The school I work at is a K-12 school, which is why I have been able to work across all those years of curriculum development, because that has been my particular experience.

THOMAS FIENBERG: I'm going to start with the students who I have taught, as being the most fundamental thing in being able to speak here today. I taught Music 1 for 13 years. Importantly, I only taught Music 1. I actually wrote a thesis on Music 2 and the problems with it back in 2009, but I never had the chance to teach it. I worked in low SES public schools and they only had the ability to offer one subject, and that subject was Music 1. I have had experience working with culturally diverse communities and high populations of Aboriginal students. I have been able to see that course provide them with the flexibility to thrive and to do the music that they want. I have also been in the situation of seeing the music that they would like to write not being able to be supported in the current curriculum framework for music because it had to be scored.

I have seen students submit scores for compositions but never actually look at it ever again once it has been submitted to NESA, but highly value the recordings that they completed to do that process. I have had the pleasure of marking HSC both as a practical marker on multiple occasions. I have also marked the composition component. I have marked the written component for aural in Music 1. I have been nominated by ASME to be a curriculum writer or tag member for each of the processes. As part of that process, you have to submit an expression of interest to NESA. On each of those times, my nomination has not been accepted by NESA. I am not currently employed by NESA; here today I work for the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. I am very interested to continue that discussion about this particular process here.

OWEN NELSON: In my work at Hills Grammar, I am head of music there and I mostly teach high school. In terms of the courses, my experience is mostly in the Music 2 and extension space. But I also have taught the Music 1 course a number of years ago. I'm also a member of the Australian National Choral Association. I have been a past president of the New South Wales chapter here, which is quite an interesting role to undertake. My main connection with this process is as supervisor of marking. At the moment, I am undertaking a dual role as supervisor of marking in both practical and written.

You may be aware that the HSC examination process is divided into two separate operations, as we call them. I lead both of those groups, which involves the appointment of around 300 markers from around the State. The process begins in about May, where we do some benchmarking, and it runs through. We are actually finishing up this week with the showcase selections for this year's HSC. I have been undertaking that role since 2021. It is a five-year appointment. I'm in the fourth year of my practical appointment and the third year of my written appointment. I have also twice been involved in the exam committee which sets the paper for Music 2, from a couple of years ago. That has also been very enlightening and gives you another angle on the whole process. I am currently a member of the TAG, which consults on the syllabus. That is an ongoing process.

The CHAIR: How does the current and proposed syllabus compared to other States? Also, what does world's best practice look like?

CHRISTINE HATTON: How does best practice—sorry, what was the last part?

The CHAIR: What does world's best practice look like? Whether it is in Australia or internationally, what does—

CHRISTINE HATTON: I think other States—well, we have a different situation in New South Wales in the sense that, firstly, we have not yet had curriculum that has spoken to the Australian curriculum. That has characterised, in the other States, the way the curriculum is taught and managed because other States have taken up the Australian curriculum right from the get-go. We haven't done that in New South Wales. We've kind of been a bit of an enclave of our own, I guess, since that whole process. I was there at the first draft shape paper meeting of that process long ago. Different authorities have different forms of examination that happen in different ways. Ours probably most aligns with the Victorian models of syllabus in drama education, particularly. I think Queensland has had very much an in-school moderated approach, although they've moved towards an ATAR and those processes with a lot of resistance, I think. I can't speak for the majority of teachers in Queensland or in Western Australia, of course. Each of the States has their own approach to those things.

I think New South Wales has had, as the most densely populated area, a very strong and long tradition of the arts in schools at all levels. Particularly, 34-plus years ago, the HSC in drama was crafted by some of the great, wonderful academics and educators and leaders. The HSC has actually informed everything that has gone below it, in lots of ways. Devising and play building is now, or has been for a long time, part of the whole continuum of the learning from the early years right through to the HSC. I think best practice—when you look at arts education, we are looking really very much at the ideas of quality, and quality of experience, as being really the most fundamental linchpin of good-quality curriculum, and allowing students in all of their wonderful diversities to be able to have access, and positioning students, particularly in New South Wales, as artists right from kindergarten. What do you want to do? What do you see? What ideas do you have? That is very much central to our curriculum in New South Wales, and that was deeply embedded right from the start.

I have had other academics in other countries say to me, "You guys have such a great curriculum." Now, that's anecdotal. I have written about the high-quality curriculum in New South Wales before and done my own research on that. But the centrepiece of that is this devising process: allowing young people to come together to learn how to collaborate and to tell the stories they want to tell in their imaginations, not something that is necessarily coming from outside in. That agency of the learner as artist is a fundamental principle that underpins our curriculum and is in the hearts of every drama teacher in this State. It is so important, the human right to be creative and have access. I think that is best practice.

Other systems and examination processes around the world try to micromanage young people—limiting their artistic voice, perhaps, in making it administratively easier. I think we really need to think about how we position young people to be agents in their own worlds and lives. That is important to New South Wales arts educators. I think that's a sign of our best practice, really, if you're going to compare it to other curriculum work in other countries.

THOMAS FIENBERG: I think a lot of what you said there is mirrored in music. Having the student central as an artist and a creator and having the agency to pursue the artistry that they wish to pursue and the elective options to be able to further develop their skills—that's been dramatically cut back in this particular draft. When I appeared earlier in the year with my colleague Dr James Humberstone, who is in the room supporting, we tabled some numbers about the enrolments in senior courses. In New South Wales we have the largest number of students doing music. We also have the highest percentage of students doing music. That, in many ways, signifies the strength of the current syllabus documents.

As was referred to by Christine, the real evolution of this curriculum was led by giants in our field, particularly in the tertiary field, who are very much silenced in this new space, as well as leading classroom practitioners working together—and, as Deb referred to, almost like a constant have your say period, not a few weeks here. There were always meetings that people would be having. It would be transparent and it would be open, to lead towards the best possible document. In relation to other States, we see some warning signs about what has been proposed here. In Western Australia they have a 50 per cent exam and the percentage of people doing music reflects the impact of having such a large exam, which takes up all the teaching time. So, instead of actually doing music, people are ticking off content points to be able to sit an exam. Surprise, surprise: That turns off students from doing the subjects.

In Victoria they have just recently implemented curriculum reform in the past couple of years. You would have received submissions, I believe, from Emily Wilson, combined with Brad Merrick, who was formerly from New South Wales and is doing good work down there in Victoria, as well as Neryl Jeanneret, who was one of those giants who is responsible for the syllabus that we have right now. They've been actively trying to implement processes of New South Wales into the Victorian curriculum. In Queensland there are some things that I think we

could definitely learn from them. But, again, I want to caution that we have currently the highest enrolments anywhere and the highest percentage, and that indicates our strength.

One of the key problems that seems to be happening in other States is issues with ATAR. One of the strengths of the music curriculum is the fact that there are multiple courses that enable students to not study an advanced or a beginner course but to study a tailored music course that suits their interests. Primarily, that's driven from one particular curriculum: Music 2, which is more centred on scored musical traditions, and Music 1, which provides access for students who are also in scored traditions but really places a far greater priority on music as an aural art form and an oral tradition which, if we think about the acknowledgement that we gave at the beginning, is how music has been practised on this country for generations immemorial. We have flexibility within our curriculum, which is a key strength, and I'd like to again acknowledge NESA for keeping that differentiation of courses because I believe that that is fundamental to the success of our numbers.

What does a world-leading curriculum in music look like? To answer the second part of the question, in New South Wales we received a number of awards for our curriculum internationally, particularly with the mandating of composition in the Music 2 course. At that point in time, music was very much about replication, similar to your AMEB exam structures, where you'd go in and you'd master being able to play an instrument and do it really well. But what the Music 2 course did is it set up a generation of composers. You had Matthew Hindson here. He's an example of somebody who benefited from that system. This opportunity in Music 2 for everyone to be a composer has really shaped the arts music industry. Music curriculum has really been at the forefront of that. We don't have that same set-up in Music 1, and I think that's where a possibility of growth is in terms of creating a more culturally congruent form of composition that reflects the artistic practices that the students who take that course pursue.

That's a sign that, yes, we have great documents, but there is room for change here, and growth. And 1999 was a long time ago. I'm sure Drama would agree that there are things that we can improve upon from current. Internationally, music education is a fight. There are very different systems in America to what's in Finland, but we should be really proud of what we have here. The direction that NESA are going—we've seen the cautionary tales in other States of this kind of approach to large exams and de-centring music as an action. We definitely can't afford to have our curriculum go in that direction.

I think, too, one of the things about a world-leading curriculum is—often when I talk about just what good education is, our current curriculum is such a good example. When we talk about what engages students in the classroom and what motivates students, Professor Andrew Martin talks about students being motivated by having autonomy, by having a sense of mastery and by having control over their learning. That's reflected in the music curriculum. There's an evidence base supporting that, and it's actually an incredibly well researched area in the field. There's a lot of research there, and some of those people that did that research actually wrote the syllabus that we're using at the moment, and that is through the syllabus. The music syllabus, which was written back in 1999, talks freely about formative assessment and assessment for learning, at a time when other syllabuses weren't doing that. But we actually know that that is best practice.

In answer to what is best practice, I think our syllabus is tired. We've had it for a long time. It does need review. But it's a very, very good syllabus, and it's hard to find better. When I first started teaching, it was right at the time of the implementation of this syllabus. I remember going to conferences where people talked about how amazing it was that we had a syllabus that mandated Australian music. I've just taken it as that's what I've always taught, but we have teachers that remember when that wasn't the case. The mandating of composition, as Thomas said, was incredible. When I did my HSC, I went into the room, with my knowledge of harmony, and got a question. I wrote out a quick harmonisation, and that was how I demonstrated my knowledge of composition, which actually wasn't knowledge of composition; it was knowledge of harmony.

THOMAS FIENBERG: And that's a cautionary tale to the potential of a long exam that may embed composition within it. It's just not a real-world experience. I want to point out that the examination conditions that Owen is leading—and he's the person who's best to speak to it—are also world-leading for the in-person experience. They are costly to NESA, and there is a lot of fear that that is potentially one of the reasons why some changes have been here. But the cost to the students and the benefit it affords them, I think, is priceless.

OWEN NELSON: Yes, I'd agree. I think that what's terrific about the syllabus documents that we currently have is that the way that students see themselves as a musician, whether they see themselves as predominantly a performer, a mix of performance and composition, a mix of a student that can analyse and critically think about music and submit an essay, or discuss their music in the Music 1 course with the examiners—all of those components that are part of the suite of offerings that we have in music for the HSC—students can

see those pathways fitting the person that they are. That's one of the strengths that I think is crucial to the way that our syllabus works at the moment. We see that very strongly in the exams that we're marking.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good afternoon to all of you. Thank you again for coming along and giving us the benefit of your expertise. Everything you say makes very good sense, and it's quite a compelling argument about the quality of education for students and the autonomy of the teachers. NESA is coming in the next session and I want us to be prepared to ask sensible questions. In that light, can we talk about the resourcing difference between what is being proposed and the current curriculum, not just for teachers but also the stage in which assessments are marked. What is the difference between the two?

AMY GILL: We actually met with NESA and asked earlier in the week about the rationale behind these choices. We were told unequivocally that it was not economic and that it was not about resourcing, so I think it's really important to note that was explained to us. We were given a rationale for the removal of the group project, for example, as placing emphasis on the making component. They said that they'd consulted experts, and it's the making component that they've heard is the important part of that. I would agree that is the case; however, they've then devalued making within the internal assessment. Where it was 40 per cent, it's now down to 35 per cent. You can now go through HSC drama, a performing arts subject, and not do any performing for your HSC exam, which is kind of ridiculous. I can see heads shaking around the room.

We were told that teachers were most qualified to mark this internally. They learnt that from COVID and it worked in COVID. That was the rationale. We were then told that they had heard it takes up drama teachers' time at lunchtime and in the afternoons. One of the curriculum reforms is to provide more time for teaching. I'm a teacher. That's where I get my joy. That's where I want to be spending my time. I would think that the other teachers on the panel would agree with me. We need to look at other ways to reduce the impact on teacher time and resourcing, because this is not what we're complaining about when we say our workload is too high. This is what we love to do. I don't think that's clearly coming through.

For individual performance choices, we were told they've removed director's folio, research, lighting and video drama. Video drama is generally the second-highest uptake; this year it's the third-highest uptake for individual performance. We were told, "We'll park that over there for the moment." The other choices have been removed, they've told us, because of small uptake. I've got the numbers for individual projects for this year. Director's folio—which is the conceptual, big critical thinking piece for our gifted and talented students—has been removed. It actually has higher numbers than the critical theatrical review project. We feel it needs to stay because our rural students don't have access to live theatre so, if you're going to take one out, why are we taking this one out? It's a written project that they can all have access to. The numbers aren't adding up there.

We do understand with lighting that might be the case. For lighting students, there were only 20 young people studying lighting. Chris, correct me if you don't think I'm right, but as someone who has done design marking previously, you would have a senior marker onsite anyway, a pilot marker, and it would be, at most, two days of actual external marking. So resourcing-wise I don't feel that has a really big impact to take out that option. They're also quoting industry standards around that, and justifying their choices around what industry standards are. Yet, again, we've taken out director's folio. We need a director to put on theatre or film.

As for the video drama, they said that video drama was actually something they could access in other subjects. English Extension does offer a video option, but it is only students who are academically gifted, as such, who would be put into extension English. Our other students do not have access to any form of narrative storytelling through film across any of our curriculum areas. As we said in our last presentation here, we are the only State that doesn't offer media arts in a digital world. Our students are already at a disadvantage. Yet here we are, further taking away quite a significant choice.

As for resourcing, we are again being told that that's not the issue or why that's the case. We've had our individual project submissions moved to being electronically marked. In set design, the industry standard is to make 3D models with working parts. That has been completely removed. It is now a sketch or a drawing of that. We also question the equal access to technology. You need design programs, CAD skills and all sorts of things to create a high-quality work that is going to be submitted electronically. That is, we think, also detrimental to access and equity for our students across the board. I don't know if you also want to add to that?

CHRISTINE HATTON: Just to stay in the drama space—and I won't be long, I promise—

THOMAS FIENBERG: It's the same space.

CHRISTINE HATTON: Going back to the question about best practice, I have been part of the senior marking team for many, many years for Drama for the HSC. Some of the SoMs are my longstanding colleagues and friends. We think it's the same, probably, for music, but almost yearly the feedback from NESA for our external

examination processes were how wonderful the arts external examination processes were because they were authentic. They ran like a well-oiled machine. They were beautifully supportive of teachers from all different kinds of contexts who were then trained to go out into schools and work with students of all different types of interests, backgrounds and contexts that they did their exams in, irrespective of resources.

I have been in state-of-the-art theatres for students that would put my university to shame in terms of its facilities. I have been in other schools which have been a demountable in the back of the school which is over 40 degrees and incredibly difficult for those contexts. It does not matter what kind of space you are in. That's the actual legacy of having such a fantastic process. Regularly, we were told by quality assurance, "Your process is the greatest. We're really proud of the way things were run this year." This has been for decades, and yet suddenly, it is so good that it doesn't need to happen anymore. I fail to understand that.

You can't take performance out of the performing arts. You can't take that need for young people to have that live component. It raises the bar for their achievement. All the teachers in our survey are saying that. All the students are saying that. We've seen it if they have to perform for examiners who don't know them. Does their art matter? Does it rate? That process validates them, and their achievement extends because of that. Just getting back to something that you said—my own two children, who are now adults and interested in the arts and working in the arts, only came to school for music and drama.

THOMAS FIENBERG: That's true.

AMY GILL: It's written in all our student responses.

CHRISTINE HATTON: The engagement level of this process of moving towards this public examination means they actually stay until the end of year 12. Whereas, if they didn't have that, I think a lot about students wouldn't even turn up.

THOMAS FIENBERG: It's meaningful.

AMY GILL: It's authentic.

OWEN NELSON: I think I'd like to add there that, in music, we send examiners around the State for exams that take anywhere between 15 minutes and up to 35 to 40 minutes—or 45 minutes for extension and Music 2 together. Assuming that that process is going to continue, I think that you want to get the best value you can out of sending markers around the State to hear students perform. At the moment, students can do between one and six pieces if we look at both courses. With the new requirements in the exam specs, that's going to be potentially halved. Then again, in some cases, it's going to be increased.

In Music 1, if I'm correct, you can currently do one piece as practical and then the rest are submitted—that's if you did all compositions. But if you did a combination of musicology viva, that also involves the examiners. So these things are being removed. The exams are going to be truncated, that's for sure. From a logistical point of view, you would think would make it easier to undertake, although I'm not quite sure that is the truth, because we still have to get examiners out to every student in the State to see them. It's not a matter of just making it less, therefore it's easier. It's a very complex operation, it is very layered, and it takes months and months of planning.

THOMAS FIENBERG: It's one of the great things. I think I spoke about last time a school in Lightning Ridge having HSC music for the first time. Those students did their HSC exams and markers would've made their way for a long trek out to Lightning Ridge—maybe caught a flight then got in a hire car—and similarly for students in Broken Hill. No matter where you are, you have exactly the same experience, and that's what equity it is.

OWEN NELSON: I think it's great recognition of the students' efforts.

THOMAS FIENBERG: Exactly.

OWEN NELSON: And it's validation of who they see themselves as, as people, and completing their HSC in the way they see it being possible for themselves. In short answer, I don't think there's going to be as much of any kind of a gain in terms of costs by changing things. We want to make sure that when we do send examiners out into the field that we're getting the best value we can out of the experience, as well as in terms of the outcome from the marking.

THOMAS FIENBERG: I think it's interesting when you said about the reasons NESA gave and the number of people doing elective options. I have a feeling that that is potentially some of the reason why the assessment team at NESA have reduced, for instance, the musicology essay in relation to the percentage of students who do that in relation to other elective choices. Maybe that's something that statistically is less. But

I would argue that with musicology, for instance, because they're working off a curriculum that was written in 1999, there are changes that need to be made to make that a more authentic experience for students to be able to do that elective.

For instance, in musicology, if you're doing Music Extension, you really need to include a lot of score analysis and you need to be very analytical. But research within my own institution, the musicologists who work there—that's only a very tiny percentage of what musicology actually is. It fails to view music through a social lens, through a political lens. So the criteria that was established 20 years ago is different to where the art form itself has moved now. I would imagine that if changes were made to that particular elective, you would see a greater increase of students wanting to study music through a social lens. In fact, for a lot of study for musicology essays, you're probably better off doing a PIP in society and culture to get into the real reasons why music functions than to actually do music itself.

Similarly, in Music 1, the removal of the composition elective, statistically, the number of students who do composition as an elective is very small in relation to performance electives. The assessment team has likely looked at that and said, "Well, most people perform, so let's give them what they want, and it will be easier for teachers to understand." But, again, there's a reason why that exists—and I alluded to it earlier—in that composition in Music 1 is currently not culturally congruent. I want to read an article here about a contemporary music student at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. He's a First Nations student. It states:

Jake first picked up a musical instrument when he was in Year 8.

Funny that, it was an instrument and that physical playing that a student is connected to. It continues:

He started with bass guitar, then quickly moved on to ukulele and guitar before discovering songwriting. "I started out writing surfy, indie, punkish music that was big around the coast near Ulladulla where I grew up".

This is the interesting part:

"Then for my Aboriginal Studies major work, I wrote a reggae song which was about how I felt about the representation of Aboriginal people, as an Awabakal-Garigal man."

The truth is, he could not do that currently in the Music 1 course unless he wanted to write out every single note for how that was played. He would need to write out the melody line in Western notation. He would need to write out his surfy/indie/punkish music in Western notation. The last time I checked, the people who are on my T-shirt today, a collection of First Nations artists—on Thursday in Parliament, you should be wearing your T-shirts of your favourite rock band from Australia. They probably wouldn't let you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We did it last week.

The CHAIR: We did it in advance, because we're not sitting this week.

THOMAS FIENBERG: In advance! I like that. But I don't think that when Nooky enters the studio he is writing out Western music notation to his music. So I find it really difficult for that argument to be made by NESA when a clear update could be made to enable Jake to say, "For my Music 1 major work, I wrote a reggae song, which was about how I felt about the representation of Aboriginal people as an Awabakal-Garigal man." I think these changes in updating are going to lead to more participation. I think that reflecting on the statistics of the current is actually quite flawed, because it doesn't view the possibilities of a world-leading curriculum with some minor changes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I want to close off on the other part of the question. I've heard a lot about the marking side, which was great and very useful—thank you. But are the changes to the music curriculum that are being proposed, in terms of teacher workload, the same?

DEBRA BATLEY: That's what I wanted to speak to. I think one of the stand-out things is the prescribed works. The syllabuses are referencing prescribed works that will be taught in class. They don't actually name what they are, so it's really hard to give detailed evaluation on that. But at the moment, when I walk into a year 11 or 12 class, I know the kids in front of me, and I pick the repertoire that I know deeply that will connect with the students I'm teaching. That lowers my workload because I'm meeting the needs of the students in front of me and I'm not having to teach something that has been imposed upon us. It's imposed upon us in that I select works that, if I'm teaching Music 2, have been written in the last 25 years, with an Australian music focus, but that's very different to, "You will teach this work." There's going to be an administrative and cognitive load for teachers to all come up to speed with that model, and I think that's significant, in terms of how you approach the classroom. It's a really big change.

THOMAS FIENBERG: There's a lack of trust, I think, in teachers to be able to select things. We've gone from having Music 1 where there's not one mandated topic at all, and you can choose three in year 11 and choose

three in year 12 from a huge list. I might happen to have a student who plays clarinet in my class, and she really loves playing Mozart. Then, "Okay, yes, you can study classical music." But in the same class, I might have a student who's a heavy metal rocker. He's probably going to not want to study the same thing that the clarinet student is going to be doing. As teachers, we've continuously been able to create flexible choices for students to access the music and specialise in the music that they want.

DEBRA BATLEY: We've also had really flexible topics for that scenario—topics like "instrument and its repertoire". The flute player goes off and plays flute, and the heavy metal rocker plays their guitar, and they're still doing the same topic. You frame it so that they're all learning, but you're not being forced into a form of repertoire that doesn't meet the needs of the kids and isn't idiomatic for the instrument that they're bringing to the classroom.

THOMAS FIENBERG: It's a shift away from a project-based approach to music education and teacher autonomy to an explicitly taught curriculum where you can download programs and teach—and guarantee that in every school they're going to be doing a very similar thing for a 50 per cent exam, which does not represent the diversity of constituents. Like, I think that Anthony—we discussed about students in Granville. What is the music curriculum that they want to do? Is it going to be the same as Hills Grammar School? Probably not. Is it going to be the same as at Deb's school in Tamworth? Is it going to be the same as students in Lightning Ridge? The answer is no, and we need to have a flexible curriculum that supports those students' needs and interests and strengths.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you think that the motivation behind the NESA decision-making is ideological? I detect "project base versus explicit teaching" as the clear narrative that's running through the rhetoric that's coming out of NESA in a range of disciplines. Do you think it's trying to squeeze music into that way of looking at the world?

THOMAS FIENBERG: A hundred per cent. We feel that the curriculum—we alluded to it, and Owen might speak to it a little bit further. We felt that this isn't a problem with the syllabus writers. It's not a problem with the technical advisory group. It's not a problem with even the subject matter officers. They have a set way in which they have to try to implement a curriculum under this current reform, and it favours an explicit approach to an understanding of core facts. We need to be able to shift core facts in a creativity space. What is a core fact in a creative expression? There is a real disconnect between the rhetoric that it might be useful in mathematics and it might be useful in history—I know that English extension teachers are not that happy about having an exam added on to extension 2, but we're not here, and this is not the point of the inquiry, to discuss that. One thing that we're really advocating for is being able to design music curriculum, and arts-based curriculum more broadly, with recognition of the evidence base. Each syllabus currently has about three paragraphs of an evidence base justifying their existence, and they're just plain wrong.

CHRISTINE HATTON: We agree. The evidence that they have used is actually not evidence at all. They've got some of my work there, and I do not support the changes.

THOMAS FIENBERG: In music, similarly, we had 31 academics sign a letter. Many of those are cited in the evidence base. If the evidence base is disputing their citation in the documents themselves, then we've got a problem.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Where is that evidence base?

THOMAS FIENBERG: In each of the syllabus documents, you will see—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's in the publicly available proposed draft?

CHRISTINE HATTON: Yes.

THOMAS FIENBERG: We feel if we are to have evidence-based curriculum, then we should be able to—

CHRISTINE HATTON: Innovate.

THOMAS FIENBERG: Innovate and do the things that we've spoken about here today, because that's the Masters review. The Masters review has so much potential in the arts.

OWEN NELSON: What's interesting in reading the Masters review and then reading the response that came from the Government is that there's so much in the Masters review that people talk about very positively that unfortunately has not transferred through to the implementation of the syllabus that we're finally seeing. In particular, the creation of what's referred to as an aligned system, and I'm not quite sure what that means for music, but what I'm seeing is—

DEBRA BATLEY: That's page 21 of that document.

OWEN NELSON: What I'm seeing in the syllabus documents is no specialisation, yet one of the recommendations is that students:

... build a coherent system ... so that individual needs can be addressed with appropriately targeted, evidence-based teaching.

Unfortunately, specialisation has gone from both Music 1 and Music 2 courses. There's some in Music Extension, but nowhere near what there currently is. Secondly, is this understanding of core facts and what that means for music. What we're seeing is that there's not an understanding of music as a discipline or a knowledge—the knowledge that goes with that discipline in terms of performance, composition, musicology, which is heavily linked to the demonstration of critical thinking. If there was a broader understanding of what the core facts are in music, then that would enable the kinds of documents that we would like to see be written. It's a very narrow path being followed at the moment. Out of that is coming—for example—every Music Extension student should do a two-hour exam with two questions. We're not quite sure what that will mean. It will be a mix of a set repertoire and repertoire that they've studied at school.

If you're asking about what that will do to the teaching that is happening in schools of that subject, I think that's a massive increase in the workload. These extension students—who, I might add, are amongst the highest achieving at the HSC—have to practise for hours every week, sometimes every day, to maintain the skills to even play the two pieces. We have to take that into account, and then their teachers will now be required to prepare them for a two-hour exam. That's quite a massive exam. Question 4 in the Music 2 paper is usually given 25 minutes. Sometimes it's 20 or 30, depending on how the exam committee sets the paper and divides up the time.

The amount of material that those students are able to produce in the time that they're given is really quite astonishing. The depth and the level of recall of the information is really astounding. To then see that we think it's basically going to be replicated, in a way, in the Music Extension two-hour exam, although we're not quite sure because we haven't seen that much detail at the moment—it doesn't seem to be that different. The work in preparing that for the number of hours that are given, on top of the practice that they'll be needing to do—or those students who are going to be doing a composition—that extension course needs to be seriously looked at. That's a huge increase in workload.

THOMAS FIENBERG: You mentioned the teacher time after school. That's when Music Extension is generally taught. It's taught out of timetable because it might be two or three students. The teacher will be teaching period 7 or whatever. After 3.10 p.m., usually that time is working on those pieces and building the ensembles. Now that time will be preparing for this examination. It's going to add significant workload pressure. Deb, you go.

DEBRA BATLEY: I was just going to say that I think sometimes the term "explicit teaching" is quite misunderstood in curricula. People hear "explicit" and they go, "If the teacher is not teaching a list of facts, they're not doing explicit teaching." I would argue that when I walk into my classroom and say, "Today we're going to look at some Leonard Bernstein; we're going to look at this movement, which is from a ballet, and look at all of the cool jazz things that happen in this piece of music," and I have a plan for my lesson, I'm teaching explicitly and students are growing in their knowledge of music. But that is not what is being actualised in this curriculum reform process. That's one of the key problems. I don't think anyone here is arguing that we just want to be able to do what we want; we want to be able to deliver really strong curricula.

THOMAS FIENBERG: And when Deb teaches that, she teaches it in an integrated manner. It's not just in preparation for an exam; it's through performing, composing and listening activities done simultaneously to build understanding.

DEBRA BATLEY: I think every good music lesson needs to have those three things.

THOMAS FIENBERG: We don't teach to tests.

AMY GILL: I just wanted to add to what Owen was saying. He was talking about those academically gifted young people. I also think this syllabus really disadvantages those young people who might struggle at school, might express themselves in different ways and might learn in different mediums. As I said earlier, I work across special assistance schools and alternative education. Students are leaving mainstream schools in droves and looking for alternative ways to assess. We've taken a performing arts subject and made the emphasis on those written components, which disproportionately benefits academically inclined students and leaves out those young people who really want to show us their knowledge and their understanding of the world in an absolutely different method.

This is coming out in our student voice survey. We have one young person here that says, "I am someone with learning difficulties, dyslexia. Drama was my safe place. I found my place on stage. While there were written components, the practical elements helped me through. I didn't have a great time in school in terms of making friends and feeling like I fit in. However, in drama, all that was put aside. Everyone supported each other; we had no choice. Being able to step into two different characters and showcase my talents on stage was what I was looking forward to my whole schooling life. Honestly, the only thing I wish was different was that I didn't have to write essays—leave them to English!"

Over and over again, we have this student voice coming out. Talking about going in there, I love this one from a student—"Kids do not want to be robot adults; don't encourage them to be by making them search for and fight for creative outlets." Unfortunately, I think that's what this syllabus is doing. I think we need to listen to student voices. We asked NESA how much student voice impacted on curriculum development. They said they had one overarching youth action group consultation, but it seemed to be for the broader syllabus. As of yesterday, there were 820 survey responses to our student voice survey of current and past senior drama students. Of those 820 responses, 66 students were yet to undertake the group project, but only 21 of the remaining 754 respondents had a negative experience of the GP—so 2.7 per cent—with 686 having a positive or very positive experience with the GP, or 90.9 per cent. They say, "I got more transferable skills from my group performance than I did from any other class in my HSC that year."

Another student says, "Drama stood out more than any other subject, as these practical assessments allow creative people to thrive and it's something that I actually remember and take away with me from school. I honestly couldn't tell you about English essays or geography exams. Drama stood out." And it goes on and on and on. Four respondents say that this curriculum saved their lives. So when we're talking about world-class curriculum, I would say if we've saved four out of 700 kids' lives through this syllabus, then we've got something world-class here.

THOMAS FIENBERG: They didn't say music in those other subjects—

AMY GILL: No, they did not.

THOMAS FIENBERG: —so they can remember it. That's important.

OWEN NELSON: They'll remember the repertoire.

AMY GILL: And I would say that would be a comment across the board. But we want to prioritise that voice in what we're putting out there. We're talking about where do we want teacher time—teachers and students want to be spending time on the things they love. The curriculum reform calls for lifelong learners. That's coming out in everything we're saying. You can generate a piece of written work in five minutes on AI with the right input. Our group assessment is now a written reflection exam. We don't know if that young person has engaged in that making process or that devising process, so it makes that examination completely invalid. There are three components of the year 11 syllabus, all the way down to K-12: making, performing and critically reflecting. But, as I said, performing isn't even assessed now in that final examination. So I think we're just disadvantaging our young people and disadvantaging some of those young people that struggle the most in school, as well as our gifted and talented young people that we've heard over there.

CHRISTINE HATTON: I think there is probably a little bit of an imposed binary. I take the point about what explicit teaching actually looks like. In the arts, it's very hands-on. It is "playing with", and we rely, particularly in the performing arts, on ensemble-based approaches to learning. That notion of ensemble is highly researched across the performing arts and validated as being a way of actually teaching through practice and praxis. So it is done and experienced. It is not necessarily a subject to be understood at arm's length. They are immersed in that process and that's the fundamental nature of the performing arts. Now, if we don't have that, what do we actually have? A Frankenstein approach.

AMY GILL: And we assess what we value, right? We measure what we value. What are we saying we value when we're taking out all of those creative components in what we're assessing?

THOMAS FIENBERG: That's the world-leading approach that we didn't mention: the praxial approach. That's the world-leading approach to curriculum, where it's an action, it's a social function, it's—

DEBRA BATLEY: It's doing.

THOMAS FIENBERG: It's doing; it's not learning about.

CHRISTINE HATTON: And it doesn't make them not exclusive, by any means.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: Amy, you touched exactly on where I was going to go—keeping those students engaged. The Committee has been to a number of schools. I was recently up at Kempsey with the ACMF and what they did up there. It was extraordinary to see the engagement from all walks of life at all levels. When you think about what keeping them engaged means going through from primary and public all the way through to secondary, if they're not going to be engaged, then they're going to start thinking about other things and they'll start to switch right off. Those core facts versus creativity and expression are really important. If they talk about keeping them engaged and trying to hold them through to year 12, I don't think that they're taking the whole picture.

AMY GILL: It's a very western-dominated lens on what we're doing as well.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: Yes. They're missing pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, in my view. What would you like to see happen, being mindful of time?

DEBRA BATLEY: I've been involved in syllabus writing under this review and previously. The previous syllabus writing consultation process was very good, still run by NESAs. There was consultation with teachers before and key points of syllabuses were put out to teachers through surveys. There was a lot more buy-in from the professional community because the consultation process was so strong. The first thing we would like is for the consultation process to be fixed, I guess. I think the arts community do not have a lot of confidence that the consultation process will make a difference. I know it can be said that there have been a lot of syllabuses delivered and there hasn't been this much noise. I would like to suggest that the reason we're being heard right now is because your Committee exists.

THOMAS FIENBERG: One hundred per cent.

DEBRA BATLEY: Actually, if your Committee didn't exist, it's quite possible that what has happened with the other syllabuses that have been released over the last few years could happen again.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: Yes. Just respectfully, Chair, the consultation, I totally agree, but there needs to be action on the back of that consultation.

DEBRA BATLEY: Yes.

THOMAS FIENBERG: Yes.

CHRISTINE HATTON: Absolutely.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: You can consult until the cows come home; it is whether you use that consultation as part of that process.

THOMAS FIENBERG: I think that's where the starting again is really important. The temptation for NESAs will be to say, "We will open another have-your-say period and we'll give you another draft", but it's the same system.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: Correct.

CHRISTINE HATTON: It's still commenting on something that doesn't work.

THOMAS FIENBERG: We haven't even talked about so many other issues with this curriculum. There's a temptation for the easy fixes. The next draft might have the GP backing, but it's going to miss a whole lot of other things that are wrong with it. By starting again and going back to the evidence base, speaking to the experts, expanding the TAG group, ensuring that there are moments when people can speak before drafts are released and can have that opportunity to provide impact and that advice can be acted upon, giving syllabus writers the ability to inform assessment practices—I have heard information that syllabus writers wrote the syllabus but didn't write the assessment that was produced. They're two different documents.

AMY GILL: We asked that question of NESAs—if there were subject specialists sitting on the assessment panel—because we also heard that the assessment panel was just made up of assessment specialists. We were told that there wasn't a group, that it was just assessment specialists and the subject matter people had been consulted—consulting of experts, critical friends and senior markers, many of whom will be gathering at the Seymour Centre later tonight to share their disdain for what has been put forward.

OWEN NELSON: I think in music we would like to see the reinstatement of specialisation at both Music 1 and Music 2. There is some specialisation in extension in the current draft, but we'd like to also see the reinstatement of the musicology specialisation there, and, in particular, the weighting of the written exams in both Music 1 and Music 2 would need to be adjusted. From a personal viewpoint, I would like to see the removal of a

written exam in extension. I just don't think that there's room for it. That may not be reflected across all of the responses that NESAs are receiving, but that's how I feel about it.

DEBRA BATLEY: The other thing is, when you look all of the syllabus documents associated with this reform, from maths to science to English to music to drama, they all use the same structure. That is a website structure that they've come up with. Some of us have been in consultation meetings, going back to 2020, saying this doesn't necessarily work for this type of subject.

CHRISTINE HATTON: Or earlier.

DEBRA BATLEY: I think a must-have is that we get a curriculum structure where the curriculum and the subject area is shaping the structure of the curriculum, not a uniform structure across every single subject. They have different needs. At the moment, I was reading the visual arts and music syllabuses last night, they have the same structure, but that works because they are both creative arts syllabuses and there is a lot of commonality. But it is actually not the same structure that was used in the previous English syllabus or maths syllabus because those subjects have particular needs. We really need to be able to have a structure that works for our subjects. At the moment, you can't have a big group of knowledge that is then applied to different subsets of knowledge. For instance, if you call out something in performance and then you call it out in composition, that might be described as too repetitive. Actually, that big idea might need to sit above it all. We end up with endless lists of content because of that and because we are trying to differentiate between different ideas.

THOMAS FIENBERG: That's what starting again could like, as opposed to another "Have your say".

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: Can they start again?

AMY GILL: We actually asked about a rewrite when we met with NESAs. He assured me that we would have a syllabus that we all agreed on by February. We asked for an extension. He told us that he had already extended it by two weeks. We got a letter from Minister Prue Car just before we came in saying that she has requested it of NESAs and they have said they have already given us an extra two weeks. It is the busiest time of a teacher's year. We did note that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can you just explain why that is please?

AMY GILL: Yes. It was released right as HSC marking started, so all our experts have been busy doing HSC marking during this process. We're also creative arts teachers, and I don't know how many of you are parents and have Christmas concerts and end-of-term celebrations—

THOMAS FIENBERG: Deb just did a musical.

DEBRA BATLEY: I'm in the middle of it.

AMY GILL: But NESAs said to us that they have put it out in term 4 because year 12 teachers will have additional time because they no longer have a year 12 class, which I just think is insulting.

CHRISTINE HATTON: They're rolling over to their new year 12 class.

DEBRA BATLEY: When that was announced in PTC meetings, people questioned it and said, "This will not work." PTC is the Professional Teachers' Council in New South Wales, where we all gather together. It was questioned in those meetings that this was not a timeline that would work for creative arts. I am in the middle of a school musical and to be here today I have given my cast a rest day from rehearsals.

THOMAS FIENBERG: I thought you were going to say they are learning autonomously.

AMY GILL: Just going back to what they were going to do with those extra weeks, we did ask if we could have additional time for "Have your say". We were told they were going to be kept in the back pocket in case we needed additional time to review it. But we would be calling for a rewrite with a second "Have your say" period moving forward. I think that needs to be guaranteed, because if we go away and rewrite and there is no further consultation, then we could be in an even more dire state than we are. Drama is also calling for the reintroduction of the group performance in a meaningful form and reinstating those diverse individual project options to accommodate all learners.

We will also be calling for prioritising assessments that accommodate different types of learners: neurodiverse learners, EAL/D students and those in rural and remote areas, recognising the value of practical and collaborative outputs over an overemphasis on written work. We would also like to reinstate the removed second text from Australian drama and theatre. There are traditionally two texts where you compare and contrast. We are down to one text, and we don't feel that ensures the rigour and reflects the breadth of the Australian cultural and social diversity across our country.

We've told NESAs we're willing to work with them to find solutions. We went in hoping that if we understood the rationale, we could put solutions that could hopefully meet the needs of all parties. So we're willing to work with them on that. I believe there have been less TAG consultations in the 11-12 syllabus than any other previous syllabuses. The reasoning behind that, I'm unsure of, but that also needs to be questioned. But when you have so many people gathering and so many people making noise—there is a gathering of drama educators tonight that will be quite public—I think that says that the experts, the senior markers and the syllabus writers are not being heard. And the students are not being heard, and that's very clear in our student data.

THOMAS FIENBERG: Back to the timeline, I think that there is time, because visual arts hasn't started.

AMY GILL: Visual arts is on a different timeline.

THOMAS FIENBERG: So why can these two subjects not be shifted to the visual arts timeline?

DEBRA BATLEY: I actually think that even the timeline in itself is part of what has shaped this. We need more realistic timelines.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Surely the syllabus isn't being rolled out for next year, is it? Is that the intention?

THOMAS FIENBERG: No.

AMY GILL: It's to be examined in 2028, which means it's to be rolled out in 2027 with a year for teachers to give feedback. So we get the final syllabus next year, in 2025. Teachers would have a year to prepare and then they would start teaching. Can I suggest that, as a teacher, I would much prefer to start having this examined in 2030 and really get it right.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Because they last for 20 years.

DEBRA BATLEY: Yes. That's exactly right.

THOMAS FIENBERG: One would hope not that long. But I think that the visual arts timeline is incredibly important to consider here because other subjects are on different timelines. I don't think that NESAs will see what has happened from this have-your-say period as being useless. There will be so many lessons that have been learnt through these misguided drafts that can ensure that visual arts, when its time comes, will get a better curriculum. If they do push it back to start again with the process and if visual arts, drama and music are part of that process, then all of those subjects will have a better experience because there are some lessons that are going to be learnt.

One of the key things in our petition that is cosigned by Drama NSW and ASME New South Wales is looking at your report that you're going to put together. You've tabled hundreds of submissions. You've had multiple days of sessions. You had a second session where you had two of the leading experts in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music sharing their thoughts on curriculum and the space of music education. That is a very valuable tool to be able to construct syllabuses. It will assist that process. Your report is due relatively soon, and we apologise for forcing you to do additional work to hear these things.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: It's all good.

THOMAS FIENBERG: We understand that this is a very generous offer, to have this discussion here today, and we really think that the inquiry's report—we know that a report doesn't necessarily mean things get actioned, with the Masters report being a good example of that in practice, as we discussed earlier. But by waiting for that to come out and then starting—which would be at the beginning of next year, along with visual arts—we could have a far better curriculum if it has those policy safeguards of more consultation that Deb mentioned.

DEBRA BATLEY: Can I just add one last thing? I think we need to ensure that the professional voice is heard—I'm not just talking about consultation—from within the TAGs, the syllabus writers and the subject matter experts who are employed by NESAs, because they are our best and brightest.

AMY GILL: And aligning with industry.

CHRISTINE HATTON: And researchers, I should say, as well.

THOMAS FIENBERG: They're silent in here.

CHRISTINE HATTON: And all of these kinds of issues also have knock-on implications for initial teacher education. Many of our students in the arts have had wonderful experiences at their schools and then want to be specialist teachers. That's their motivation for entering into teaching. I don't want to muddy the water about teacher shortages, but we've seen programs for professional discipline-based arts courses changing in universities.

That affects our teaching fraternity and the new teachers that are coming forward. My own teacher education students are outraged that they might be walking into a landscape that fundamentally undermines the core focus of their work. This is going to have knock-on effects if we don't rectify and make sure that whatever changes are made are not done just in consultation backwards and forwards but are actually creative and productive and making sure that we've got the very best we can have, rather than a kind of deficit model of what the arts are.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I just wanted to quickly ask two things. One, it's your evidence that the changes are likely to drive down student enrolments in your courses?

AMY GILL: Yes.

THOMAS FIENBERG: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The second question I had was about this. In the submissions, there's a suggestion that NESAs have been saying this is all about injecting rigour into the assessment process. I wanted to ask about the question of moderation and whether this is what's driving it, exams and the sort of focus on ATAR as being the sort of objective of this reform process.

THOMAS FIENBERG: Rigour came up in our discussions last week with NESAs, in a consultation meeting. And we wanted to point out that rigour does not equal written work. Rigour is in artistic practice. There was a great point made, in a group, about—people in my institution have PhDs, and their PhD is through creative practice. Dr Humberstone, who's in the back here—50 per cent of his PhD was based on his composition, his creative work. Rigour is an artistic pursuit as much as it is a written form. So I think that that's again a misinterpretation of the core facts that were called for.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: And the nexus with the ATAR? Do you think—

THOMAS FIENBERG: Yes.

OWEN NELSON: I'm not an ATAR expert in any way, shape or form. However, I think it's interesting that the review recommendations—the one about ATAR was not supported. It was noted, sorry—that's not quite correct, what I just said then. So I think there is quite a lot of work there to do in terms of how subjects like practical and creative arts—anything with a submitted work or a project—then transfer down the line in that process. That is, obviously, quite a challenging area, and it is something that, in the marking of music performances—we do need to be able to, for example, differentiate right at the very top of the group of students that we have, and there are challenges associated with that. But I just don't see that the answer to that is a two-hour written exam, for example, for extension students, and a reduction of the amount of practical work that a Music 1 student is allowed to undertake—a maximum of only two performances there. I think that one of the issues that the current syllabus allows for is providing a stamina in a performance, over a number of performances, those types of things. Those kinds of issues need to be addressed, I understand, when it comes through from the marking operation.

THOMAS FIENBERG: A criticism of our curriculum and the marking process is that too many students get high marks. There's a high average for Music 1. It's nearing the bottom of a band 5. I would say that the reason why there's high average marks is because it has the most culturally responsive curriculum. That enables students who may not be the best writers in the world to be able to succeed. When I worked in Mascot, at a low SES school, in Blacktown, at a low SES school, the students in my classes, 99 per cent of the time, got their highest mark in music. That was because it didn't have a three-hour exam. Those students were English as an additional language or dialect. Those students were from a refugee background. Those students from a refugee background got up there and they played the music of their culture. They sang in their language.

They don't get the chance to write in their language in the English exam, and then they get a band 2 or band 1. They don't get the chance to create and compose a piece. I had students who created pieces for two doumbeks. Again, that's something that isn't an opportunity afforded to them in physics. The systems around all these other subjects are very much for a Western frame. The music curriculum is far more open and inclusive, and it leads to more students' success because they are doing electives that relate to their interests, needs and strengths. That's why you see higher results. It's not because of an assessment flaw; it's because of a syllabus and curriculum—

OWEN NELSON: They're highly engaged.

THOMAS FIENBERG: They're engaged.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: Music helps with literature, reading and maths. It helps across the board.

THOMAS FIENBERG: Yes. As we said, it helps them stay at school.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: Absolutely—100 per cent.

THOMAS FIENBERG: Many students would not be at school if it wasn't for these subjects.

The CHAIR: We are now running over time, but there are two more questions that people wanted to ask, if we can perhaps go for the next four minutes.

Dr JOE MCGIRR: Chair, we've run out of time. Thank you. Sorry.

The CHAIR: No worries. Ms Munro?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's probably not a quick question, but I know that people don't feel very confident about this consultation process. You talk about disregarding feedback and not having a genuine consultation. Are there some examples of how experts haven't been listened to in the development of this?

THOMAS FIENBERG: Deb and Owen have been there, so they would be able to speak.

OWEN NELSON: Examples of how they have not been listened to?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes. There's a concern that I'm aware of that people who are involved in this process often have to sign confidentiality agreements.

OWEN NELSON: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That has meant that in this process of developing the initial draft, people have to put their names to something that they haven't been affirming of.

OWEN NELSON: That's true, yes. I think that there are very good reasons for that, because the process needs to be respected. Also, it's very high stakes. I don't necessarily find an issue with the confidentiality that is surrounding a lot of aspects of working or engaging with NESAs. They do hold these things in very high regard. However, in my personal experience, I'm looking for maybe the voice of the subject matter experts. I do feel that there are quite a lot of layers and competing interests. From a personal viewpoint, I would like to see those subject matter experts be able to talk more freely and respond more freely in those consultations, if that's at all possible.

THOMAS FIENBERG: It would be nice to hear them here today.

DEBRA BATLEY: Yes—what Owen said, pretty much. I also support the idea of confidentiality. I don't think it's a terrible thing. Like I said, I was a syllabus writer in 2016 through to 2018. It was a very different process. I signed a confidentiality agreement for that as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you felt comfortable with that process.

DEBRA BATLEY: Yes. The process was quite different, and people felt heard.

OWEN NELSON: I'd like to just reaffirm my complete confidence in all the people who I work with at NESAs. They're all very professional and highly engaged. They really do know what they're doing.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Except not in this case, because the syllabuses are—

DEBRA BATLEY: There are many layers here.

THOMAS FIENBERG: It's the system.

OWEN NELSON: It's the way it's being interpreted that's not enabling the outcome that we want to see. That's the issue.

DEBRA BATLEY: It's the issue of what is a key fact? How is it structured? Those things, if they're not clarified, lead to less optimal outcomes for our subject. There's a sense in which that has maybe not been heard throughout the process. The reality is that people aren't thrilled with the other creative arts syllabuses that have come out thus far. That's the other thing. But we didn't have a parliamentary inquiry that took up our cause, so it was harder to be heard on that matter.

THOMAS FIENBERG: In our report, we did say that the system was almost inevitable, and it disempowered syllabus writers, technical advisory groups, critical friends and subject matter officers. Our attacks are not on people. We really do believe that the people who have put forward there want to have the best possible outcome, and I believe NESAs do too. I'm sure that your next witnesses will say that they want the best possible outcome. Drama NSW said, "We want to work with them." ASME NSW definitely wants to work with them, but let's work with them from a clean slate and start again.

AMY GILL: I think there are some specific examples. We did have people that have signed NDAs reach out to us, knowing we were coming today, that did not feel confident in—well, we didn't feel confident, obviously, because we don't want them to break their NDA in talking to us. But we encouraged them to put their own submissions in. Whether or not that will occur, I don't know. In consultation with senior markers, as NESAs has quoted—as I said, most of those senior markers are about to gather and sit on a panel at the Seymour Centre this evening, which tells me they feel that they have not been heard. We have one professor who was engaged as a critical friend who has resigned from NESAs after seeing the syllabus.

CHRISTINE HATTON: Other researchers and academics were not consulted at all and were not allowed to be on the TAG. I applied twice, as well.

The CHAIR: Sorry, we really are going to have to move on. Thank you so much for your time this afternoon and your evidence. We really appreciate you coming in, especially those of you who have come in a second time.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Mr PAUL MARTIN, CEO, NSW Education Standards Authority, affirmed and examined

Dr PAUL CAHILL, Executive Director, Curriculum, NSW Education Standards Authority, on former affirmation

The CHAIR: Welcome and thank you for taking the time to give evidence this afternoon. Would you both like to start by making a short statement?

PAUL MARTIN: No. I think we're okay and ready for questions et cetera.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Were you listening to the previous evidence?

PAUL MARTIN: No, not at all.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Basically, the evidence that we just heard and the evidence that we've received in written submissions has described the music and drama syllabus—there's obviously a few different courses within that—as "unworkable", "appears to disregard 30 years of successful practice" and "a crisis of confidence in NESA's ability to understand student needs and develop services that support student access", and advised that the syllabuses should be immediately suspended and removed from consideration. We just heard again that groups are calling for the complete restart of this process, not just an extended "have your say" period. Would you agree that the overwhelming majority of teachers and educators do not think that the current syllabus for drama and music that has been proposed meets the expected standards of their profession?

PAUL MARTIN: I would agree that there is significant conversation, disagreement and agitation around those creative arts syllabuses—those two in particular. I would agree that there are people with very strong views about the content of the syllabuses and the way the syllabuses should be assessed. But I would also say that we are in the middle of a consultation period—described and designed as a consultation period—around draft syllabuses and that, at this point, in most of the syllabuses we have released, we have so far consulted on more than 50 and there are 113 or 114 syllabuses to consult on.

There have been views expressed at various points in most of those syllabuses, perhaps not as vociferous and not as heated as there are in some, but in each of them we have stood by the consultation process, listened to what teachers, community members and other organisations have said. In every single syllabus to date, there have been changes between draft and final syllabus. Some of the changes have come about because the arguments were absolutely irrefutable and we needed to learn from the arguments put forward by those who opposed various elements. Sometimes there have been significant additions to syllabuses on the basis of strong advocacy. We will continue to do that because the nature of consultation requires the advice and activism, to some degree, of those people who are concerned.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have any of the other draft syllabuses come to a point where teachers have started a petition to Parliament, which now has over 5,500 signatures?

PAUL MARTIN: None of the other syllabuses, to my knowledge, have had that degree of questioning and antagonism. Having said that, in terms of the consultation we've received, there is opposition, to some degree, that is consistent across music and drama, and other consultation and other views about different parts of those syllabuses. Until we have completed the syllabus consultation process and had a good analysis of the advice presented to us, it's probably premature to make overarching decisions midway on the basis of petitions, given that the congruence of the views presented hasn't yet been assessed.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We just heard evidence that experts and academics have been cited in the evidence base for the new syllabuses. They're saying that they don't agree with the new syllabuses and that they're essentially being misrepresented in the evidence base that's being presented in the drafts. How does that happen? How is that a process that people can be confident in?

PAUL MARTIN: The arguments presented are quite general. I'd be interested to know which parts are being represented. We're happy to take that on notice. Having said that, the consultation and the expert advice we get is over a range of issues, not all of which is synonymous with each other—it's not all in agreement. Experts provide us with advice across a range of the issues in a syllabus.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But these people are saying specifically that they have been cited and they don't agree with what has been presented and that they're being misrepresented.

PAUL MARTIN: Presumably, the citing in a syllabus—NESA is not a dishonest agency. We make sure that all of the work we do is firmly founded in advice and consultation and research. I'd be interested as to which parts of the syllabus that they say they're quoted on or researched in relation to being misrepresented.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We just heard from Dr Christine Hatton, for example.

PAUL MARTIN: I would love to go to the specifics of that because that would be completely inappropriate if we misrepresent advice as if it agrees with the syllabus and it doesn't. Without having knowledge of the specifics of her evidence and also the question, we can't come back to you until we have seen that on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Surely you would accept, Mr Martin, that something has gone horribly wrong. In my time in this Parliament I have not seen a consultation process on something like this evoke such a strong reaction. There are meetings and people are very angry with the outcome that seems to be being rolled out by NESA. Do you acknowledge that something has clearly gone wrong with your consultation mechanism to provoke this level of agitation around this proposed syllabus?

PAUL MARTIN: I think, Mr D'Adam, that one of the things that this has indicated is that the consultation and the public—we didn't put a syllabus out that was put into practice immediately; we put a syllabus out for consultation. I would also argue that it is to some degree unprecedented because the syllabus was written 24 years ago and hasn't had amendments since 1999. So syllabus development processes and changes to syllabus and the writing of these syllabuses is a generation ago. Back when they were first put into practice, around the time of what they called the new HSC, which was researched by Barry McGaw in the year 2000, the engagement of the arts communities and the history communities and all of those particular subject specialisations was in the first reiteration of the syllabus.

Now, I would argue that 24 years later it is reasonable to expect some changes in both content and assessment—that we go through our processes and if we find that we have put things into place that have strong opposition, if the opposition fits with rational arguments and objective positions and doesn't work, we, of course, will change, as we have changed every other syllabus. But putting out a consultation draft in the first instance where there is nothing that changes from the previous syllabus, or where the changes are only supported by those people who are engaged in the original writing of the syllabus, is not something that we have done with any of the syllabuses.

If I can go more broadly, the Masters review deliberately suggested and argued and was agreed to by government at the time that the syllabuses would be content-based, that they would provide an entitlement for all students to have access to the same content and that they would be sequenced appropriately. The word that was used in that Masters document is "decluttered". It is quite an ugly term, but what it means is making sure that all of the content is understood by every student and every teacher as mandatory across New South Wales, and that we all have the same expectations in terms of teaching and learning and assessment.

All of the syllabuses have gone through this process. I think, to some degree, the effects of some of these directions have had more of an impact in some syllabuses than others. But again, I come back to the point that it is the first time in 24 years these syllabuses have been consulted on. They have been consulted on so broadly that virtually everybody in those communities understands and knows that their views, as has occurred in every single consultation period, will be taken into account.

The CHAIR: Is there any further rationale for the reforms, particularly about reducing the assessment of performance in the performing arts?

PAUL MARTIN: It's a really good question. There is no reduction in the assessment of performance. The reduction, or the change—it is not a reduction—is moving it from external NESA assessment to internal school-based assessment. Each of the components of assessment for the HSC are of equal value: 50 per cent school-based and 50 per cent NESA assessed by external examiners when it comes to the performing arts or those subjects that produce major works. Now, NESA has, over the past four or five years, been deliberately and decisively moving towards making sure that teachers who are closer to students or teachers who are involved in schools have more say and more context in being able to understand what is happening in the teaching and learning process. And over a range of other matters, whether it is school registration or teacher accreditation, we have been decisively moving away from external, quite overly egged rules, I would say, to giving more time for teachers to understand and note the context of students.

This reached a high point, I would argue—outside of our control to some degree—in the COVID period where we were unable to visit schools for the external marking. We couldn't do the assessment tasks in the creative arts or where there were major works. We provided an enormous amount of support for schools and were congratulated and applauded for our capacity to move around and to subtly allow a level of sophistication in the marking that empowered teachers because they knew the students better. I think, quite reasonably—though it has received quite negative publicity—we suggested in a consultation document that, instead of NESA markers externally going into schools to assess the performance of students, the teachers themselves, who know the

process, who know the students, could, with NESA's support, build that into their school-based assessment. It's not a change to the amount of performance that's being assessed; it's a change to the manner of performance. And we have received an enormous amount of support in the last few years for giving more of that responsibility to teachers, who understand and know their students.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That's a workload shift, though, isn't it, shifting work away from NESA to make a saving, putting it on teachers?

PAUL MARTIN: There are no savings involved in any of these—there are no savings requirements or expectations involved in any of the proposals that came forward out of these syllabuses. That was not discussed in any way. There was no direction given. It was merely an attempt—and a reasonable one, I still think—to suggest that there are some things that could perhaps be best assessed at schools as opposed to externally, both with the time and the knowledge of teachers. It's not a workload shift.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You don't think it has any workload implications for teachers?

PAUL MARTIN: It's a change to the nature of assessment because the students already have 50 per cent of their school-based assessment assessed at schools. Fifty per cent is still the same. They are still assessing students, but the major works or the performances potentially could be assessed more realistically and more authentically within the schools.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: The intention may not be resource focused but one of the outcomes appears to be that you are, in effect, moving this burden to teachers.

PAUL MARTIN: We have made no assessment of economic benefit or otherwise, but my guess would be that the change would simply be to shift from a particular type of cost of assessment to another type of cost of assessment and there would be very little, if any—and, as I said, no estimation of. Can I say at this point that, particularly in terms of group performance in drama, the, I suppose, positive element of some of the consultation has been the degree to which schools and drama teachers have endorsed the external NESA assessment process: the fact that NESA provides a level of authority to the nature of the assessment.

Right from the beginning, that external assessment has been the number one issue raised by drama teachers to us. We will be changing and moving from the consultation document that suggests that it be an in-school assessment. The teachers have spoken pretty clearly, I think, that they would prefer NESA's external assessors to go to schools—that the students prepare for it, that they like that as a part of the performance element and that performing for someone outside of a school gives a level of status that they really enjoy and feel rewarded by. We already, I think, would say that we should move in that direction.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We keep referring to it as being a draft document, which of course it is, but it's not nothing. When we release a draft in the middle of the consultation process or after the first round, there is an expectation that people think that much of that is baked in and we're just tweaking. There's a concern that there is so much people would like to see changed in this particular set of syllabi that they're worried that they won't get another chance to be properly consulted on the next draft. What is the possibility of being able to consult again, so add another round, when a new draft is produced?

PAUL MARTIN: Without giving any indications or assurances around that, I think that we've still got a few weeks left on the consultation and we need to see the consistency and unanimity around some of the requests and arguments in relation to changes because they're different from drama to music and they have different emphases and they're different in different parts of the music syllabuses. We will be making sure that we have a good look to see what consistency there is around some of those arguments. I do take your point—and it's a very reasonable one—that a dramatic shift in a syllabus or even an incremental shift can create levels of concern if people are opposed to those shifts.

If I may use the history syllabus as an example, when we first produced the history syllabus, there was not very much information in there around civics and citizenship. We had to pretty much radically change that syllabus and mandate something that had been optional, in order to fulfil the requests of those people who spoke to us and wrote to us and whom I met in relation to civics and citizenship. In areas of PDHPE, where we had very, very highly visible and contentious issues in relation to consent and sexuality, and all sorts of issues of great moment in the public debates, we shifted, changed and amended to make sure that we dealt with both the concerns of the subject associations who were presenting us with their arguments but also the broader concerns of academic experts, the broader community and entire the State of New South Wales, who have a stake in what children are taught.

Going right back to your point, we have made significant shifts. We have been trusted by the education community in New South Wales with almost 50 syllabuses thus far, and this level of agitation clearly denotes the passion of those interested for their subject area, and it will be and should be listened to by NESA. I've already indicated a shift from the school based—a move away from that option in drama from school based to externally assessed because, of all of the information that we've had presented to us, I think that particular issue is one that simply cannot be ignored, even at this stage. We would prefer people to be able to concentrate on some of the other arguments, rather than that specific issue of the mode of assessment.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just to answer the question, though, will there be another opportunity for consultation when the second draft comes out?

PAUL MARTIN: At this stage, this consultation is the only consultation. There are still another couple of weeks to go, but I think what we will need to do is make sure and assess how much we feel that there needs to be changed and where we need to go with it. But other syllabuses, whether they have this level of concern or not, have had the same—largely the same, depending on the nature of the syllabus consultation process—and it has worked very successfully thus far with 50 syllabuses. So while I'm concerned, and we have to maintain the faith of the creative arts community and their trust, which clearly is a problem for us at the moment, we'll see when we finish the consultation period before we go any further and make any other judgements.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But then it's going to be too late, isn't it? Obviously it'll be a done deal at that stage, and so the opportunity, whether you've done irreparable damage—my concern is this Committee has been set up because this Government wants to listen to the arts community. We want to foster and engage with the arts community. We want to make sure that the student numbers grow, not go down. We've been told in the earlier evidence that the consequence of these changes is likely to actually drive down student numbers. How can we in this Committee be satisfied by your assurance that it'll all be tickety-boo on the second draft, when no-one else is going to get a look-in after that draft is done? How can we have any faith in that process?

PAUL MARTIN: In every single syllabus, there is an end of the consultation process and a final syllabus. In each case, there are people who are very happy with syllabuses and some who wish they had more emphases or less, or wish there were to be changes that there aren't. We believe that our track record over X number of years—20 years since the McGaw review—has released syllabuses that are the best syllabuses in the country. I would argue that most of the syllabuses—in fact, all of the ones thus far—have been celebrated, quite rightly, for their capacity to deal with not just issues arising now but the future education of students.

I'm concerned about the loss of students to drama. With the syllabus that's currently there, with an increase in student numbers in years 11 and 12, we've gone from 5,000 to 3,000. So we already have an issue with drama. We can't possibly be doing an argument that will make it worse at this moment, and maybe it's potentially a real argument. But at this stage we're not concerned about making things worse; we want to make things better. The HSC and the school syllabuses that we have, the broad range of them, the numbers—120-odd make the New South Wales schooling system—have a broader range of opportunities for students with their abilities than any other State or Territory in the country. That's replicated in the HSC.

We want more students doing art, music, dance and drama and visual arts, because there are capacities that students have in every single one of those creative and performing arts. But we also want to stay committed to the idea of the entitlement of content—that students shouldn't have to rely on their social capital or the capital of their school or the experience of their teacher. There is content in these syllabuses that, at this stage, gives that entitlement in a way that currently isn't there. Then there are issues of assessment that we may or may not have got wrong, but we will hear from the community—as we are—and adjust it accordingly. But to your main point, every single syllabus consultation finishes at some point, and not everybody is happy with every syllabus when it finishes, but our experience is that, largely, that occurs.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: Mr Cahill, thanks for your time. I'm wondering if the TAG received a copy of the draft syllabus or assessment before it was published on 28 October?

PAUL CAHILL: I'd have to take that specifically on notice, because they would have, at different iterations, seen copies of the syllabus.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: I'm talking about the draft, Mr Cahill. I'm talking about the final draft before it was published.

PAUL CAHILL: The final draft—again I'd take that on notice. As Mr Martin said, the process is taking advice from a range of people. The TAG is one group, assessment group is another, some critical friends that we use—we're getting multiple voices, and we form the draft. So at which point the TAG actually saw the final

syllabus, I don't know. It may not have been the one that has gone out for consultation completely. But, as I say, I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can that be music and drama that you take on notice please?

PAUL CAHILL: Yes, absolutely.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: Mr Martin, do you have an answer to that?

PAUL MARTIN: No, if Dr Cahill has taken that on notice. The number of people who have had input into the syllabuses, including the TAGs, is broader than it has been in previous syllabus iterations. That's deliberate. I will take it on notice, as Dr Cahill has indicated.

Dr JOE MCGIRR: Mr Martin, we've received some feedback that the Music 1 written examination will double in length and nearly double in value. If I've got this correct, you made the contention that the performance assessment process will move from external to internal, but won't change in value or percentage contribution. Is that correct? Because that seems to run contrary to that advice that we've received about the value and length of the written examination.

PAUL MARTIN: I'm going to refer the specificity of some of your question to Dr Cahill but, in relation to internal versus external assessment of group performance in drama, there is still a judgement of the assessment of group performance, but it becomes part of the internal school-based assessment. That may change the length and the nature of the external written HSC, but the balance of performance to written, in terms of fifty-fifty, as far as I understand it, doesn't change. But I will confirm that with Dr Cahill and on notice as required.

PAUL CAHILL: In regards to that, there is a proposal for the written and aural exam for Music 1 to be extended by 50 minutes. That would take it to 10 minutes reading time, one hour and 50 minutes. One of the things that I would note with that is that it is an aural exam. What we would be proposing is a written aural paper—as I said, for an hour and 50 minutes—and performance of two pieces on an instrument. The current syllabus has a written and aural exam—60 minutes plus 5 minutes reading time—worth 30 marks, and the core performance is worth 20 marks. There is a change in the written and aural component, but it would be false to think that's just a written exam.

Dr JOE MCGIRR: I think this gets to the heart of the issue that we do need to clarify, because you referred to the Masters review need for a content-based, decluttered curriculum. That came back to us in evidence as being a focus on what was described as "explicit knowledge". As you've indicated, Mr Martin, clearly there's a lot of concern around the assessment process and the role of performance versus written exams. It wasn't entirely clear from Dr Cahill's answer there, but there hasn't been a substantial change. I think this actually gets to the key point from my point of view, and that is that I understand the focus of the Masters review. I understand the process that we've gone through with other curriculums, but I think what we've heard from the drama and music community here is that this focus on content and decluttering—which is clearly driving the review—may, in this instance, not be productive.

You've said that you're not focused on savings, and I accept that. I can see how focus on content and on equity may lead to a greater focus on written exams, even if they've got an aural component. We heard pretty clearly the importance of the group performances, the performances in general and, I think as you yourself admitted, the performances being externally assessed and the rigour associated with that. It was very strong feedback. It seems to me that the curriculum that's been produced may well have come from a well-meaning attempt to implement the Masters review. I'm just putting back to you that that may not be appropriate for these particular creative curriculums.

PAUL MARTIN: I think that analysis—I agree with it largely. There are two parts to the content area that you've mentioned. Firstly, thank you for your view of "well intentioned", because it is. We have no desire to reduce the numbers of students doing any of these courses, and we celebrate those who do. In fact, I celebrate the teachers who are being active in this process at the moment. There are arguments that there should be much more experiential—and reasonably so—emphasis in creative and performing arts, and that the relationship between content knowledge is different in creative and performing arts than it might be in other content areas. I agree with that. Getting the balance right between performance, which is why the students are largely doing these things, and abstract knowledge about discipline is key to the issue that is confronting us at the moment—getting that balance right.

There is an argument that says there doesn't need to be very much content at all, and in fact it's mostly performance that comes from the students. I would, with respect, disagree with the purity of that view and argue that there needs to be, and should be, the entitlement of discipline-based knowledge. The balance has to be in

favour of the performance to make sure that the intent of those creative performing arts is demonstrated through both the teaching and learning and what the students do at the end of their course. The significant opposition to what we've done is a belief that we have unbalanced the content knowledge or the discipline knowledge from the performance aspects. As a point of principle, that is something that we've been listening to for the past four or five weeks. The second part of that, which I did mention, is that we would continue to strongly argue that having content knowledge and discipline knowledge within even the creative arts syllabuses—and I don't mean "even" in a derogatory sense—and within those performance-based courses is still necessary. There will be arguments about that as well.

Dr JOE McGIRR: Can I follow up, Chair? Thank you for those comments. I appreciate that. You also raised an important point, which was access irrespective of social milieu. I can see how that would lead to a focus away from lots of instruments and drama if those facilities were better in some schools than others. I can see that. Maybe a focus on content is a way of levelling that playing field. I put to you, however, that there are also differences in the way students learn and engage with subjects, and a focus on content in the assessment process might actually penalise, inadvertently, some students who learn in different ways, and that in itself would not be equitable. And if we have differences in access to performance and to musical instruments because of socio-economic background then we need to focus on providing those resources rather than changing how people are assessed. Could you make a comment on that?

PAUL MARTIN: Yes, I could. The disciplines that sit and the epistemologies that underpin disciplines require, in HSC levels of study, content. That includes music and drama and woodwork and metalwork—anything that has a practical or performative aspect. So we wouldn't resile from the argument that all of those students, including those who are going to perform, need to understand both the history and the theories behind the work that they do. There are some students who will be much better at the performance aspects than the theory aspects, and that will be the case in a lot of subjects. But we also need to make sure that, as I said before, the entitlement of the understanding of the discipline is still within the subject but with the right emphases. One of the strongest arguments we've received is that the emphases are wrong between theoretical and/or performative aspects. So, of course, as part of a consultation process, we will take that up.

I also mentioned that the more open-ended some syllabuses are, the more it requires teacher experience, the cultural capital of what kids bring to school, their socio-economic background and the resources of the school, but there is no end in terms of workload for a teacher with an open-ended syllabus. One of the things we have found with teacher overwork—perhaps the most important and significant issue with teacher workload over the last decade—has been that the syllabuses are so open-ended that teachers don't know where they begin and what is the essential content and knowledge. So providing very clear understandings for teachers to say, "This is the not negotiable, the essential, the areas that need to be taught", is of benefit to them but also to the students, because every student in every school, irrespective of where they are in Sydney or New South Wales, has access to the same common entitlement. But getting the emphases right—I won't go down the students' different abilities to learn, but I do understand and take the point that there will be some students who can't write an essay or do some aspects in many, many of our subjects, but are much better at the performance aspects.

The HSC is a comparison within a content area and across other content areas. Music as a two-unit subject, visual arts or any of the others—history et cetera—are not only compared within but across. So the content entitlement gives not only a level playing field for all of the students in New South Wales; it provides some level of level pegging for the students within a two-unit context in a school. But I do agree that there are some students for whom the written exam is the worst bit and they love the performance, and potentially vice versa, but it will be more so in the creative and performing arts that they like the performance.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do the experts cited in the evidence base that you provide for the syllabus see the draft syllabus before it goes out, or parts of the draft that relate to the citation?

PAUL MARTIN: I'll ask Dr Cahill, but my view is that a lot of the consultation that occurs with various experts—and I have used English, because I remember that quite distinctly—we would use a professor whose expertise is in writing from a particular university or someone who might be an expert in phonics from another. We may have the head of English literature at a university talking about the way that literature should be dealt with. Their input is considered and they become part of our reference point, but they don't get given the syllabuses to say, "We agree with this bit or that bit," or that they don't. That's my understanding. Dr Cahill?

PAUL CAHILL: We don't give any early release to the syllabus before it goes out to "Have your say". There is the likelihood that at times we may misinterpret some of the evidence. If I can just speak to one piece of that, it underpins the reason why we thought of moving the group performance to school-based assessment. It is because a lot of the evidence that we were looking at was suggesting that it was a matter of process for students.

The great value in the group performance was the process that students learn—skills of collaboration, communication, leadership and the like. It was for that reason that we put it out. Now, I understand that there's a different view, but that's the way that we read the evidence. If we misread it, we would come clean in the stakeholder engagement report that comes out with the syllabus and make amendments as appropriate. I think that's the right thing to do.

PAUL MARTIN: Ms Munro, some of the most positive feedback that we received in the very difficult COVID period was providing advice, work samples and marking advice to teachers when we couldn't do the external marking. The level of professional learning that they felt that they got and their capacity to engage more directly with students is one of the reasons, notwithstanding other evidence that we may have received.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The reality of that, as you said, was because we were in COVID, and it was never intended to be an ongoing practice or process. I want to note as well that you've referred a lot to the group performance and also the external examination in drama. But we haven't had the opportunity today to go into the details, particularly around the content of music—not just the examination aspect—and that content has really shifted. You said before that you don't want to see kids dropping off music, but how is it true to say that reducing the level of choice for students will increase the availability or capability of schools to offer an exciting music education for students, particularly in Music 1, which is about 85 per cent of the music enrolments?

PAUL MARTIN: I think that some of the breadth of opportunity or options provided, many of them were open ended. It was useful to provide more advice around how various aspects of the music syllabuses related to particular instruments. I think the main issue is that in all of the syllabuses that we've produced across all subjects and disciplines, there have been significant shifts and changes to options and opportunities, based on the advice and also what we understand to be the best way that students can get access to the most important or necessary content knowledge.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I guess there's a concern that the best—

The CHAIR: We really are well over time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sorry. The feedback that we're getting suggests that the development of the music and drama syllabus has not been based on that expert guidance and evidence, and people don't know where this has come from.

PAUL MARTIN: All I can say is that there were a range of views going into the development of the syllabuses. There is some opposition, and I refer to Mr McGirr's comments before, around the specifics of the content in some of the options, the mandating of some things and the elective nature of others that has shifted and changed; there are arguments around that. But most of the opposition that we have experienced—and we haven't yet finished the end of the consultation period—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Except you've made a decision on drama already, evidently.

PAUL MARTIN: We decided to make a decision on drama, and I had a conversation with my team internally in order to try to get attention on the content of the drama syllabus for us and the external performance element. Part of the problem is the level of misinformation—that we were no longer assessing dramatic performance, no longer assessing group performance—meant that particular issue became so much of an issue to deal with that it is my judgement, and it is still my judgement, that dealing with that immediately would allow proper consultation on other parts of the document.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That seems a very strange way to engage in consultation.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for your evidence this afternoon. The secretariat will contact you in relation to the questions that you took on notice. We would like to have those answers back within 24 hours because we extended our inquiry period to include this evidence today without extending the final date for our report.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 16:35.