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Review of the New South Wales school curriculum

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Review of the New South Wales school curriculum

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Terms of reference

That NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education inquire into and report on the contents of and proposed changes to the NSW school curriculum, and in particular:

1. The extent to which the Masters Curriculum Review addresses its terms of reference, including:
 - (a) Curriculum content, flexibility and pedagogy
 - (b) Quality and relevance of the evidence-base underpinning the recommendations (compared to CESE findings)
 - (c) Recommendations for student-centred 'progression points' and 'differentiated learning' in schools and whether such initiatives are research-based and proven to be effective
 - (d) Relationship with the national schools curriculum
2. The extent to which the Masters Review meets key Government policy objectives, including:
 - (a) Addressing concerns about the overcrowding of the curriculum
 - (b) Ensuring students' acquisition of excellence in literacy and numeracy, as well as deep knowledge of key subjects
 - (c) Professor Masters' explanation for NSW declining school results and the role a revised curriculum can play in reversing this decline
3. Other matters of public concern and interest in the development of the NSW curriculum:
 - (a) To what extent, if any, 'cross-curriculum priorities' are needed to guide classroom content and teaching
 - (b) To what extent, if any, knowledge and the curriculum are 'socially constructed', requiring the teaching of source verification and fluidity principles
 - (c) Whether and to what extent schools should be involved in the 'social and emotional development' of students, as per the Melbourne/Alice Springs Declarations, and growing popularity of 'wellbeing programs' in NSW schools
 - (d) Adequacy of the content and depth of teaching of Australian history, pre- and post-1788
 - (e) Given the importance of English literacy across the curriculum, adopting the most effective evidence-based approaches to language acquisition, especially for reading and writing
 - (f) Role and effectiveness of vocational education syllabuses in NSW schools
 - (g) Effectiveness of NESA in curriculum development and supervision
4. Any other related matters.

The terms of reference were self-referred by the committee on 6 February 2020.¹

¹ *Minutes*, NSW Legislative Council, 25 February 2020, pp 784 - 785.

Committee details

Committee members

Hon Mark Latham MLC	Pauline Hanson's One Nation	<i>Chair</i>
Hon Matthew Mason-Cox MLC	Liberal Party	<i>Deputy Chair</i>
Hon Anthony D'Adam MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon Wes Fang MLC	The Nationals	
Hon Scott Farlow MLC	Australian Labor Party	
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Chair's foreword

For a matter of public policy vital to our state's future, few processes could be as unusual as the Masters curriculum review. At no time did Professor Masters analyse the details of the existing NSW syllabuses or visit a NSW school during school hours. It's hard to know how this can even be described as a curriculum review.

It was more like a one-man tutorial in experimental syllabus theories, including untested, unworkable ideas like 'progression points' (aka 'untimed syllabuses'). Adding to the surreal process, Professor Masters was supposed to give practical meaning to the Berejiklian Government's ethos of 'back-to-basics' in curriculum design. How could this be achieved by a policy reviewer who did not actually look at the NSW curriculum?

I have never seen a government-sponsored report so at odds with the government's stated policy direction. Masters produced a document based on 'high-level architecture' disconnected from the basics. He failed to deliver on the all-important task of stripping back the current syllabuses and decluttering the curriculum. It has now been left to the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) to get back to basics, to do the serious work Masters' theoretical approach ignored: to rely on a proven evidence base in literacy and numeracy, to focus on core content in other subjects and foster deep knowledge in student learning.

This report of the Legislative Council Education Committee aims to end the disconnect, to highlight Masters' flaws and to show how back-to-basics can be realised in practice. It takes seriously Minister Sarah Mitchell's public declaration that overtly political content must be removed from the classroom and that parents are in charge of the moral, political and social development of their children. Importantly, in this regard, political content is not just party-type material on the traditional left-right spectrum, it also includes the growing trend in education for neo-Marxist propaganda like post-modernism and post-structuralism to pollute the minds of students.

An essential starting point for the Berejiklian Government is to stop pretending that the Masters review is something it is not. When the final report was released 12 months ago, government spin-doctors sold it to the media as a return to spelling bees and times-tables in the classroom, yet the 118-page document makes no mention of these practices. Much was made of the abolition of school-developed senior-year electives such as 'puppetry', 'leather' and 'wearable art', yet these courses are only offered at one NSW high school each.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Minister Mitchell have made many commendable public statements about the direction of NSW schools: emphasising literacy and numeracy, deep knowledge and student inquiry, quality teaching and practices that are known to work in the classroom. It is frustrating, however, that there is no detailed government reform plan for turning these goals into educational reality. Too much trust has been placed in the 'Education Establishment' – the same 'experts', union leaders and vested interests that talk a big game in schools policy but rarely deliver student academic growth.

This is why the Legislative Council Education Committee has examined the Masters process and its implementation. When the entire NSW curriculum is being redeveloped, parliamentary oversight and input is vital. Professor Masters himself has said that since the turn of the century, New South Wales has the fastest falling school academic results in the world. Our state is not in a position to entrust major decisions about the education system to those who have failed in the past. NESA must take a fresh approach, consistent with the Berejiklian/Mitchell philosophy of back-to-basics.

While there are many valid criticisms of Masters, there are also commendable proposals in his thinking. It is bizarre, however, that the best parts of the Masters approach are virtually invisible in his final report.

It's as if political correctness has taken hold, that he's too worried about backwash from the Education Establishment to clearly state several reform propositions. There are three examples of this process.

The first is in the teaching of literacy. Masters has little to say on the vital question of how to best teach children to read. Yet the evidence is clear: John Hattie's research assigns Phonics a 0.6 effect level and Whole Language 0.06 (with 0.4 as the 'hinge point' at which something is worth teaching). Learn-to-read programs in the NSW curriculum must be based on the explicit teaching of phonics. Despite the weight of evidence supporting this approach, many school leaders persist in pursuing failed ideas involving whole language reading.

Incredibly, Masters makes no positive mention of phonics in his report. The closest he comes is at page 99, where he advocates, 'This curriculum should be grounded in research into how young children learn to read' and footnotes a 2018 Macquarie University report by Castles, Rastle and Nation. This is quality, evidence-based research highlighting the importance of phonics. Instead of a footnote, this conclusion should have been up in lights. Nothing matters more than the foundational skills of literacy. The new curriculum should embed the Macquarie research findings into every NSW classroom.

Second, by recommending a traditional subject structure in the new curriculum, Masters rejects the faddish approach of building syllabuses around so-called 'general capabilities'. This is a left-wing economic theory that the nature of work is being transformed, requiring students to equip themselves with the 21st century skills of 'communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking'. Every 20-30 years this speculation is recycled under the banner of 'the coming of the machines', with automation supposedly creating mass unemployment in Western economies.

Obviously these theorists are in the wrong business. If they can accurately predict workplace and industry trends, they should be working as investment advisors and share market billionaires. In practice, the chances of education bureaucrats and politicians anticipating the changing nature of work in a complex market economy are minimal. There is no need to punt wildly on matching up the school curriculum to unpredictable labour market trends.

The best approach, in the best interests of students, is to concentrate schooling on the foundational skills of literacy, numeracy and deep knowledge – a base from which students can then develop more specialised work-related skills, as the need arises. This was the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation's conclusion in its 2019 paper on 'General Capabilities', finding that attributes such as critical and creative thinking 'are best developed in the context of a knowledge-rich curriculum, where learning is carefully sequenced. This will enable learners to develop an increasingly sophisticated capacity to understand and apply knowledge, as they journey from novice to expert.'²

The third mystery is why Masters believes in abolishing the three cross-curriculum priorities (for Asian engagement, environmental sustainability and Indigenous studies) but fails to say so in his final report. Professor Masters made his view clear in briefings to our committee.

Given Australia's deteriorating relationship with China, Asian engagement has become problematic. There is no sound reason why it needs to be taught across all NSW curriculum domains. The Federal Government now has a policy of diversifying Australia's trade and diplomatic links. The high point of optimism about Australian-Asian relations from the 1990s has long passed.

So too, as Australia recovers from a nasty COVID-induced recession, it is difficult to know why 'Sustainability' is a higher cross-curriculum priority than say 'economic growth and recovery' or

² NSW Department of Education, 'General capabilities: A perspective from cognitive science', Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation Report, July 2019, p 7.

‘workplace productivity and prosperity’. An obvious way of de-cluttering the curriculum, of easing the teacher classroom load, is to abandon the notion of all-purpose syllabus priorities.

In Indigenous studies, Masters has recommended and the government supports a stand-alone subject 'that specifies what every student should know and understand about Aboriginal cultures and histories, and incorporate this into Human Society and its Environment' (Recommendation 5.3). This appears to be part of a trade-off whereby Masters would abandon the cross-curriculum priority in Indigenous studies. Yet this is not spelt out in his recommendations or the government's policy response. At the moment, therefore, it's double Indigenous: the new subject combined with the old priority. This is a strange aspect of today's politics, with many 'leaders' afraid of stating the obvious in Aboriginal affairs.

In comprehending this mess, it is worth quoting in full Masters' intent at page 105 of the final report:

The Review's recommendation is that a curriculum be developed that clarifies what every student should know and understand about Aboriginal cultures and histories. The Aboriginal community should play the central role in the development of this curriculum, which should be incorporated into Human Society and its Environment. The recommendation is not to address Aboriginal cultures and histories opportunistically across the school curriculum, but to make this a mandated part of student learning based on an explicit curriculum taught and assessed in all schools.³

It seems extraordinary for the new subject to be devised by the Aboriginal community itself. Usually by now the Education Establishment would be jumping up and down, defending the integrity of 'professional educational qualifications' in syllabus design. It is unprecedented to hand over curriculum content to a group who themselves are the subject of the content. The potential loss of objectivity and historical accuracy is obvious.

In the political system, the Aboriginal lobby clearly wishes for something more glorified than the truth of a nomadic people (hunter-gatherers), but the facts do not support such revisionism. Historians as diverse as Manning Clark and Geoffrey Blainey have reached the same conclusion: that by the end of the 17th Century, Indigenous Australians had a quality of life comparable to the European peasant class. But thereafter, geographic isolation left Aboriginal society behind, compared to the technological advances of the Industrial Revolution.

Historians are united in what happened, mainly because it did happen. The colonial settlement of Australia involved significant mistakes but generally, governors such as Lachlan Macquarie tried to civilise those around them, in both the Indigenous and convict populations. They tried to turn a prison into a new society, ultimately building the best nation on Earth. This is one of the great achievements of human history and should be recognised as such in the curriculum.

The fiction underpinning Bruce Pascoe's book 'Dark Emu' has no place in NSW schools. It's an act of fantasy to say that pre-1788 Aborigines lived in townships with sophisticated agriculture. So too, that European settlers deliberately destroyed the evidence of this civilisation; and that 20th century Australian academics systematically suppressed information about it. We should be teaching facts in our schools, not conspiracy theories.

There's no shame in a people being nomadic. Logically, it meant that a written language, history books and wheeled transport were not practical parts of such an existence. That's how Aboriginal Australia was for 60,000 years, and that's how it should be taught in schools. In fact, there is nothing more disrespectful to Indigenous people than rewriting the truth of who they were and how they lived.

Australian history is important, both pre- and post-1788, but there is no reason for Indigenous culture and history to dominate the curriculum. Currently in the Years 7-10 History Syllabus, there are 133

³ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum* (April 2020), p 4.

mentions of ‘Aboriginal’, 37 of ‘British’ (mostly negative), 14 of ‘Western’ and 7 of ‘Christianity’. This is part of a pattern: downplaying and stigmatising the achievements of the West, while idealising Indigenous culture beyond its historical truth.

As with every other subject, Indigenous studies must be proportional to student need. At a minimum, the NSW Government needs to clarify what it plans to do with the study of Indigenous content. The best option would be to abandon the cross-curriculum priority (as per Masters’ intent) and ensure the new Aboriginal syllabus is developed in an objective and independent way.

This Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education report is the second instalment of the committee’s work in trying to reverse the slide in NSW school and student outcomes. Our first report (on school performance, measurement and outcome-based budgeting) has been influential in improving government policy. It made the crucial point that everything about schools and classroom practice has been studied and measured across the world, many times. We know what works in schools and what doesn’t work, especially from Hattie’s thorough systemisation of the international data.

The task of lifting school performance is quite straightforward: follow the evidence base; eliminate fads and experimental practices; do the things that are known to work. In recent decades, the NSW education system has deviated from the evidence base, triggering an alarming decline in student academic outcomes.

Similarly, the school curriculum has suffered. New South Wales used to have one of the best English syllabuses in the world. Today it’s a Petri dish for the mindless fads of identity politics, gender studies and post-modernism. Political content has also colonised other subjects, from history to PDHPE. Too many teachers have become quasi-politicians, pushing an ideological worldview instead of developing in their students a world of knowledge.

The NSW curriculum needs to return to an evidence base of core content, basic skills development and the use of learning materials proven for the way in which they lift student results. None of this is difficult, but during 30 years of failure, the NSW education system has piled political and other superfluous content into classrooms, overloading teachers and students with a spaghetti bowl of unusable syllabuses.

This committee report recommends a series of solutions. In many respects, it does the detailed work the Masters review failed to do, with a deep dive into the NSW syllabuses and their shortcomings. We trust that the Premier, Minister and NESA will find our work valuable, filling the gaps in curriculum reform.

I am proud to chair Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, the most thoughtful and successful in the NSW Parliament. I thank the committee members and outstanding secretariat staff for their work on this report. I also thank each of the educationalists who made submissions and appeared at the public hearings.

The committee is dedicated to returning the NSW schools system to best practice, leading the world instead of lagging behind. We will monitor the implementation of this report and its predecessor during the course of 2022.

We will continue to work hard and constructively for the very best educational opportunities for young people in New South Wales.



Hon Mark Latham MLC
Committee Chair

Findings

- Finding 1** 4
That, by focusing on 'high-level architecture' and the personal views of Professor Masters, the Masters review missed a number of critical opportunities for genuine and meaningful curriculum reform.
- Finding 2** 4
That, by design, the Masters review did not undertake the type of detailed, rigorous analysis of syllabus documents that is needed to distill the core knowledge, concepts and facts for each key subject area within a 'back-to-basics' curriculum framework (as persistently and correctly advocated for by Premier, the Hon Gladys Berejiklian MP).
- Finding 3** 8
That the Masters review overlooked the critical issue of the best way for teachers to teach, especially the importance of explicit instruction in the classroom.
- Finding 4** 13
That there was insufficient evidence to justify key conclusions and recommendations of the Masters review. The worldview of a single curriculum reviewer was used, in place of hard evidence and comparative analysis.
- Finding 5** 13
That the Masters review overlooked examples of schools in New South Wales making best practice use of the curriculum, thereby missing the opportunity to scale up this success.
- Finding 6** 18
That the teaching of history has become cluttered with educationally questionable source verification, postmodernist theory and political messaging, taking significant focus from engagement with the pivotal achievements of human history discovered through deep knowledge and historical fact.
- Finding 7** 21
That the Masters review missed a critical opportunity to explicitly reinforce the NSW Government's policy on synthetic phonics as the most effective approach to teaching basic literacy skills. The committee endorses and congratulates the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, for ending the 'reading wars' in favour of phonics, especially with the introduction of the mandatory Year 1 Phonics Screening Check.
- Finding 8** 26
That, while some students will require additional support from their schools, the Masters review was wrong in suggesting that the peak effectiveness of the family unit in society has passed and that, increasingly, schools need to assume functions traditionally performed by the nuclear family.
- Finding 9** 26
That student wellbeing, while not the primary purpose of schools, should be complementary to the core functions of student achievement, both academic and vocational.

- Finding 10** 28
That the post-modernist approach to education, which currently features in many courses and subjects, runs contrary to the NSW Government's stated goal of 'back-to-basics' in the curriculum. Post-modernism is an irrational, unproven political theory arguing that everything we know about ourselves, personal identity, scientific know-how and human history has been 'socially constructed'.
- Finding 11** 28
That as the Masters review did not examine the content of the NSW curriculum, opportunities were missed for meeting Minister Mitchell's goal of removing overtly political content. In the committee's view, this goal is most valid.
- Finding 12** 31
That the Masters review did not address the critical issue of early teenagers (mainly boys) disengaging from the academic curriculum and, in many cases, giving up on education and becoming disruptive in classrooms.
- Finding 13** 31
That curriculum reform in and of itself is not enough to address declining academic performance and student disengagement, but is one of several important evidence-based strategies, that, taken together, will improve the learning outcomes for students in New South Wales.
- Finding 14** 37
That the Masters review missed a critical opportunity to abandon unnecessary, inappropriate and superfluous content as part of the 'decluttering' process.
- Finding 15** 37
That the Masters recommendations are unlikely to achieve their stated goal of decluttering the curriculum. In the work that the NSW Education Standards Authority is now undertaking to rewrite syllabuses, it will need to find other ways of achieving this objective, as per the recommendations of this report.
- Finding 16** 38
That, owing to its structure and crowded nature, the existing curriculum does not allow for in-depth teaching of rich knowledge and key concepts. Material that detracts from the teaching of rich knowledge and deep comprehension of academic skills must be removed.
- Finding 17** 41
That reducing the number of School Developed Board Endorsed Courses, as pledged by the NSW Government, while welcome, will nonetheless do little to achieve genuine decluttering of the New South Wales curriculum.
- Finding 18** 46
That knowledge and curriculum content must be factual and evidence-based, drawing on the best work of the academies over centuries. It must not reflect post-modernist theories of knowledge being 'socially constructed'. This is an anti-educational doctrine causing confusion and distrust among school students.

- Finding 19** 74
That the Masters review failed to answer two obvious outcome-focused questions: What is the minimum acceptable standard and outcome for a New South Wales student after 13 years of schooling? What is the benchmark that we want our students to achieve as they leave the system?
- Finding 20** 74
That the Masters review was misguided in its criticism of Australian Tertiary Admission Rankings. The system of year 12 final exams in New South Wales should be fair, rigorous and competitive, as a vital benchmark of school and student achievement after 13 years of education. In particular, the only way students from a disadvantaged background can compete and fully succeed in society is through a school marking and grading system in which they excel. Without year 12 exams and published results, they have no other effective way of letting society know of their abilities.
- Finding 21** 78
That the New South Wales schools system has lost sight of the commonsense reality that high-quality learning materials, especially textbooks, can substantially improve learning outcomes and school academic results.
- Finding 22** 78
That too many schools and teachers have a random approach to identifying and using learning materials, with an over-reliance on searching the Internet, and that the NSW Education Standards Authority and the Department of Education are unaware of the particular learning materials used by schools. The evidence base for high-quality learning materials is being ignored.
- Finding 23** 87
That the NSW Education Standards Authority has been given vast power and responsibility in developing the detail of new syllabuses and, in effect, is undertaking the 'deep dive' that Professor Masters neglected.

Recommendations

- Recommendation 1** **8**
 That, in addressing a significant gap in Professor Geoff Masters' analysis, the NSW Government give greater priority to the most effective ways for teachers to teach, and reiterate its commitment to best practice, evidence based approaches set out in the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation's *What works best* resource and Professor John Hattie's research on Collective Teacher Efficacy. In particular, it must actively support explicit teaching practices and common teacher and student experiences inside schools, from class-to-class and year-to-year.
- Recommendation 2** **14**
 That the NSW Government build and promote best practice curriculum use in NSW schools, narrowing the gap between syllabus intentions and what is actually taught in classrooms. Among other things, this is an important way to realise the benefits of Collective Teacher Efficacy within schools and across the NSW education system.
- Recommendation 3** **14**
 That, in reforming the curriculum, the NSW Government must:
- be guided by sound evidence and research on what works best
 - leverage and 'scale up' proven models of success where possible
 - evaluate all changes for high-effect impacts on student learning
 - implement rigorous evaluation and measurement of any future reforms.
- Recommendation 4** **14**
 That, as a crucial evidence-based issue, the NSW Government ensure that the curriculum reform process is consistent with the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation's evidence base – particularly its research findings for *What works best*.
- Recommendation 5** **18**
 That the NSW Government prioritise the re-engagement of students in the study of history by designing syllabuses that are content-rich, include less 'source verification' and more engagement with the pivotal, fascinating events of human history.
- Recommendation 6** **19**
 That, as a priority, the NSW Government returns to linear (or chronological) teaching of history, with an enhanced focus on the heritage of Western civilisation and the development of modern Australia.
- Recommendation 7** **19**
 That the NSW Government mandate the study of civics and citizenship for students in years 9 and 10 by making it compulsory for all students to take 'Making a Nation' as part of this cohort's history syllabus.
- Recommendation 8** **21**
 That the NSW Government continue its drive towards synthetic phonics in literacy teaching, and that any future education reforms are consistent with this policy priority. Learn-to-read programs must be based on the explicit teaching of phonics.

- Recommendation 9** 26
That – as a first principle in defining the responsibilities of schools – the NSW Government pay due respect to the family as the foundation for children's social, emotional and moral development, and the primacy of parents in educating their children.
- Recommendation 10** 26
That the NSW Government ensure that all external providers at government schools be formally accredited, based on proven professional qualifications, a positive evidence base and feedback loop of evaluation for success.
- Recommendation 11** 26
That the NSW Government ensure that a robust evidence base guides decisions about interventions to improve student wellbeing. The effectiveness of wellbeing programs should be subject to continuous monitoring and evaluation to measure outcomes and determine investment.
- Recommendation 12** 29
That the NSW Government return the focus of schools to academic attainment and vocational qualifications, ending attempts to engineer the 'social development' of students. As much as possible, schools must teach classroom material in a manner consistent with the values of parents.
- Recommendation 13** 38
That the NSW Government ensure that the present decluttering reforms learn from previous attempts, clearly define what success looks like and maintain an uncompromising focus on core facts, rich knowledge and deep comprehension within a 'back-to-basics' framework. Material that detracts from the teaching of rich knowledge and deep comprehension of academic skills should be forensically examined for its value and removed.
- Recommendation 14** 47
That the NSW Government explicitly acknowledge the greatest gains in decluttering the curriculum will come from detailed, rigorous syllabus analysis (unfortunately ignored by the Masters review) – that is, a 'back to basics' approach teaching facts, skills and deep knowledge to students, and removing superfluous material, especially:
- cross-curriculum priorities (especially with the creation of a new stand-alone Indigenous course)
 - material said to be a 'socially constructed' form of knowledge, science and history
 - overtly political content
 - identity politics, with its divisive impact on society
 - a post-modernist emphasis on 'language as power' and 'the art of meaning' in English
 - over-emphasis on source analysis in history
 - subjects constantly needing to position themselves 'in society', such as 'science in society' (thereby introducing unnecessary political content)
 - substantially reducing the long list of syllabus dot points and generic skill requirements.
- Recommendation 15** 47
That the NSW Government instruct the NSW Education Standards Authority to undertake curriculum decluttering in a manner consistent with the recommendations of this report. The NSW Government and NSW Education Standards Authority must also ensure there is no re-cluttering of the curriculum, the incremental process whereby new subjects and courses are loaded into

syllabuses. The committee recommends that the NSW Government adopt a clear policy statement in this regard, prohibiting future re-cluttering by identifying two main culprits:

- (a) caving into knee-jerk political and media pressure points about the latest 'big news story' by announcing that schools will now study this subject area
- (b) using schools as a repository for addressing miscellaneous social issues (usually in health, law and order, fad ideological campaigns and social engineering) through the introduction of non-academic and non-vocational courses and content.

Further, as part of this policy statement, that the NSW Government and NSW Education Standards Authority ensure that any proposals for new syllabus material are assessed against a proven evidence base, testing the fundamental proposition: will the proposed change enhance student academic and vocational outcomes?

- Recommendation 16** **47**
That Minister Mitchell's stated goal of removing overtly political content from New South Wales schools apply, first and foremost, to the English syllabus and its learning materials, so that political material is not allowed to masquerade as 'stimulus' and 'comprehension' items.
- Recommendation 17** **58**
That the NSW Government not proceed with any trials of untimed syllabuses until such time as the practical problems identified in this report are addressed.
- Recommendation 18** **58**
That if untimed syllabuses are ever introduced in New South Wales, the NSW Government ensure that there are state-wide mandatory standards delivering consistency in student progression along with guarantees that no student is left behind.
- Recommendation 19** **58**
That the NSW Government establish a state-wide standard by which each student must achieve at least one year's progress through the curriculum for each year of class time. In doing so, the best students must be extended to their highest level, while all students at risk of falling behind receive intensive, evidence based intervention and support.
- Recommendation 20** **61**
That the NSW Government adopt the Masters' recommendation for the study of a compulsory second language.
- Recommendation 21** **65**
That the NSW Government abandon all three cross-curriculum priorities, as per Professor Masters' intent.
- Recommendation 22** **65**
That the NSW Government avoid a 'general capabilities' framework and maintain a traditional subject focus for the curriculum, as per Professor Masters' intent.
- Recommendation 23** **68**
That the NSW Government not mandate Masters' recommendation to integrate theory and practice in all subjects.

- Recommendation 24** **69**
That the NSW Government set a learning engagement goal and expectation whereby every secondary school student disengaging from the academic curriculum has courses, facilities and career paths available to them to engage with vocational learning and qualifications. Schools should use their Gonski growth funds to buy in TAFE and other vocational training so that each of their students is engaged with some form of productive learning matching their interests and ambitions.
- Recommendation 25** **69**
That in implementing Recommendation 24, the NSW Government:
- conduct further research on best practice vocational programs, such as Hoxton Park High School, and scale up their success to all similar schools,
 - require schools to measure and report on their outcomes in student learning engagement on an annual basis, and
 - adopt a state-wide objective at government schools for every student to be actively engaged with learning, whether academic or vocational.
- Recommendation 26** **71**
That the NSW Government support Masters' proposal for a compulsory major project for senior students as an exercise in deep knowledge development and as preparation for tertiary or vocational education.
- Recommendation 27** **74**
That the NSW Government support a fair, rigorous and competitive system of year 12 final results in any review of the Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking, particularly in achieving the equity goal of students from a disadvantaged background using their year 12 school marks and exam results to compete successfully in society. The education system needs to acknowledge that without an exam and marking system, disadvantaged students have no effective way of advancing themselves in competition against young people with other advantages in life.
- Recommendation 28** **78**
That the NSW Government mandate the use of high-quality textbooks in New South Wales schools and recommend other high-quality learning materials to teachers and schools.
- Recommendation 29** **81**
That the NSW Government ensure that teacher training is aligned to curriculum content and that new teachers are ready to make best use of the syllabus.
- Recommendation 30** **85**
That primary schools in remote New South Wales be better utilised as hubs for distance learning for high school students.
- Recommendation 31** **86**
That the NSW Government clearly define the parameters of success for the new curriculum and ensure that all changes are evaluated for high-effect impacts on student learning. Decisions should be guided by evidence prior to reform and rigorous evaluation and measurement after.
- Recommendation 32** **87**
That the NSW Government urgently acknowledge and learn from the deficiencies of the Masters process, and ensure that the NSW Education Standards Authority does not repeat these mistakes

in its rewriting of the curriculum. As a first step, the government must ensure that NESA is adequately resourced and staffed to carry out the required reforms.

Recommendation 33

88

That in mid-2022 Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education inquire into and report on progress with its two major initiatives and recommendations for lifting NSW school performance, that is:

- the reform process for school measurement, accountability and outcome based budgeting (the committee's 2020 report)
- curriculum reform implemented by the NSW Education Standards Authority (the committee's 2021 report).

Conduct of inquiry

The terms of reference for the inquiry were self-referred by the committee on 6 February 2020.

The committee received 85 submissions and 11 supplementary submissions. The committee also received 243 pro-formas.

The committee held two public hearings at Parliament House in Sydney.

A Chair's discussion paper and committee discussion paper were published in October 2020.

Inquiry related documents are available on the committee's website, including submissions, hearing transcripts, tabled documents, answers to questions on notice, the Chair's discussion paper and the committee's discussion paper.

Chapter 1 Critique of the NSW Curriculum Review

This chapter presents a broad critical evaluation of the NSW Curriculum Review (hereafter, the Masters review), bringing together expert evidence from educators, education researchers and professional associations on the review's overall merits and potential efficacy in achieving the NSW Government's stated objectives.

The chapter begins by highlighting key stakeholder views about the depth of the review, its priorities and methodology, before exploring a number of critical missed opportunities highlighted by inquiry participants. This is followed by a summary of the dialogue about what schools should and should not be responsible for in a child's development. Finally, the chapter concludes by considering whether curriculum reform in and of itself can improve academic results in New South Wales.

Background to the inquiry

- 1.1 In May 2018, then Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, the Hon Rob Stokes MP, initiated a review of the entire NSW school curriculum with the stated aim of ensuring that the state's education system is 'preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.' The review was billed as the first comprehensive review of the NSW school curriculum since 1989.⁴
- 1.2 Professor Geoff Masters, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council for Educational Research, was appointed to lead the review.⁵
- 1.3 The aims of the review were to:
 - make the NSW curriculum clearer to understand and teach
 - examine ways to de-clutter the curriculum so that it allows teachers to focus on the main knowledge and skills that all students should have
 - understand the implications for planning, teaching, assessing and reporting
 - draw on the expertise of teachers to ensure the review's outcomes continue to support their important work
 - provide students with strong foundations of knowledge, capabilities and values to be lifelong learners.⁶
- 1.4 Public consultation for the review took place in late 2018 and again in late 2019 following the release of the review's interim report in October 2019.
- 1.5 The final report, making 24 recommendations and entitled *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: NSW Curriculum Review*, was published on 23 June 2020 together with the response from the NSW Government.

⁴ Media release, Hon Rob Stokes MP, former Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, 'NSW launches school curriculum review', 13 May 2018.

⁵ Media release, Hon Rob Stokes MP, former Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, 'NSW launches school curriculum review', 13 May 2018.

⁶ NSW Government, Education Standards Authority, *NSW Curriculum Review: About*, <https://nswcurriculumreview.nesa.nsw.edu.au/home/siteAreaContent/264c047c-fbff-4593-9740-b0ce37596b85>.

- 1.6 Readers seeking more information about the Masters recommendations and the response from the NSW Government can refer to Appendix 1 of the present report.

Key stakeholder concerns

- 1.7 While there was general acceptance among inquiry participants that the state's education system needs to address the decline in academic results, support for the approach, findings and recommendations of the Masters review was not universal. Some inquiry participants felt that the review was misguided, too vague and high-level in its focus, ineffective in meeting its terms of reference and not adequately supported by an all-important evidence base.

Breadth versus depth

- 1.8 One such stakeholder unconvinced of the review's merits was Dr Fiona Mueller, Adjunct Scholar with the Centre for Independent Studies and former Director of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, who contended that, by focusing on the broad features of the curriculum, the review left the more significant and impactful work – essentially, the detail – to a delegated authority. Dr Mueller commented:

In proposing what it calls 'broad-brush features of a curriculum that could well require a decade to plan and establish', the Masters review devolves the greatest responsibility and opportunity for change to as yet undetermined decision-makers to identify 'the key intentions, guiding principles and underpinning evidence base for the new curriculum.' This may explain why it does not achieve the first two items under the terms of reference:

1. Articulate the purposes of the school curriculum, including underpinning philosophies and principles
2. Identify essential knowledge, skills and attributes as the common entitlement for all learners.⁷

- 1.9 In highlighting some of the review's limitations, Dr Mueller's comments speak more generally to the concern that Professor Master's analysis was too high-level, vague and general, focusing on the broad architecture of the new proposed curriculum rather than delving into the nuts-and-bolts content and detail of the syllabus. This concern was raised in evidence by Ms Vicki Steer, an educator and researcher with 20 years' experience in the New South Wales independent schools sector:

The Masters review report provides high level and broad direction toward the development of a new curriculum for NSW schools. This is the major limitation of the Report; a high level focus which ignores the obstacles to the implementation of the recommendations in schools and a lack of consideration of other developments in education that do not fit with the curriculum design paradigm adopted.⁸

⁷ Submission 54, Dr Fiona Mueller, Adjunct Scholar, Centre for Independent Studies and former Director of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, p 1.

⁸ Submission 38, Ms Vicki Steer, p 1.

1.10 A similar concern was shared by some committee members and played out in questioning of witnesses – in particular, whether focusing on the 'big picture' and not engaging with actual curriculum content undermined the effectiveness and utility of Professor Masters' analysis and recommendations. This was reflected in the discussion regarding decluttering the curriculum explored in detail in the following chapter.

1.11 On the other hand, the broad focus on high-level architecture (and its rationale) enjoyed some level of support amongst witnesses, with Ms Jenny Allum, Chair of the Curriculum Review Working Group, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, telling the committee that, in her view, it would have been unreasonable to expect Professor Masters to delve into particular aspects of what should be taught in any given syllabus:

I do not think you could possibly have expected Masters to get into the particular aspects of what should be in various different syllabuses. ... If you expected Masters to get down to whether we should be teaching matrices or calculus in years 11 and 12 maths and doing that for 191 syllabuses, he does not have the time, the expertise to work on the syllabuses and to be able to consult with teachers in every different area. I think describing at a high level how we reform education and then you get to the next step down you start to do the implementation, that takes a long time. I completely support what Masters has done, which is not to say what should be in any particular syllabus.⁹

1.12 Under examination by the committee, Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), acknowledged that Professor Masters' analysis remained at a very general, broad level, but advised the committee that – far from being a flaw in his analysis – this was part of the brief:

Professor Masters talks about the broad principles and architecture of a curriculum and syllabuses, not individual syllabus areas. There is no reference to them. He was not asked to. It was not in the terms of reference. ... It is a curriculum review in terms of the architecture of the curriculum rather than individual syllabus. The terms of reference for the curriculum review are public, so it indicates what Professor Masters was asked to do.¹⁰

1.13 Mr Martin explained that the 'much larger piece of work' – that is, looking at the detail and composition of individual syllabuses – would instead be undertaken by NESA in consultation with expert stakeholders with a view to identifying what should be taught in each syllabus.¹¹

1.14 Reflecting on how he envisaged his role in the process, Professor Masters remarked that the review was always meant to be a 'macro level' focus and that '[i]t was never going to be possible for me to get into the details of individual syllabuses.'¹²

⁹ Evidence, Ms Jenny Allum, Chair of the Curriculum Review Working Group, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, 30 November 2020, p 9.

¹⁰ Evidence, Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority, 4 November 2020, p 46.

¹¹ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 47.

¹² Evidence, Prof Geoff Masters, Lead of the NSW Curriculum Review, 30 November 2020, p 53.

Committee comment

- 1.15** It has been widely recognised that the Masters review did not actually examine the content of the NSW school curriculum, as it focused on ‘high-level architecture’ and the personal views of Professor Masters. By his own admission, there was no ‘deep dive’ into the detail of the syllabus. As such, in the committee's view, a critical opportunity was missed to identify what students ought to learn in the classroom – the core body of academic or vocational knowledge, skills and competencies that will best equip them for their futures. Correspondingly, the Masters review missed a critical opportunity to achieve real decluttering of the curriculum. The committee returns to this issue in the following chapter on genuine decluttering, providing examples of political and value-laden content that can and should be excised from the curriculum.
- 1.16** While the Masters review has been presented publicly as a ‘back-to-basics’ approach, the 118-page final report itself gives more attention to theoretical issues than the key foundational basics of learning: literacy, numeracy and deep knowledge in key subject areas.
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Finding 1

That, by focusing on ‘high-level architecture’ and the personal views of Professor Masters, the Masters review missed a number of critical opportunities for genuine and meaningful curriculum reform.

Finding 2

That, by design, the Masters review did not undertake the type of detailed, rigorous analysis of syllabus documents that is needed to distill the core knowledge, concepts and facts for each key subject area within a ‘back-to-basics’ curriculum framework (as persistently and correctly advocated for by Premier, the Hon Gladys Berejiklian MP).

The right priorities?

- 1.17** Some inquiry participants suggested that the Masters review placed significant weight and attention in the wrong places, and paid scant attention to the things that matter most in driving real change for academic standards and achievement.
- 1.18** For example, in her submission to the Masters review interim report, Dr Mueller expressed doubts about whether the review asked the right questions, arguing that it was disproportionately occupied with *how* students learn, and not focused enough on *what* they learn. For Dr Mueller, identifying and defining the content that Australian students should be learning is a prerequisite for articulating a clear vision for education in Australia, another area she believes is lacking in the Masters review.¹³

¹³ Dr Fiona Mueller, *Submission to the NSW curriculum review interim report consultations*, Center for Independent Studies, December 2019, p 2. Accessed online: <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2020/01/Centre-for-Independent-Studies-Submission-to-NSW-Curriculum-Review.pdf>

- 1.19 Likewise, in his discussion paper to this inquiry, the Chair, the Hon Mark Latham MLC, characterised Professor Masters' analysis as being overly fixated with how people learn – with a particular focus on emotional engagement – and almost silent on the much more significant questions of how teachers should teach:

The report devotes large tracts to what is clearly the author's pet topic: How do people learn? ... Curiously, however, Masters says little about the bigger question of how teachers should teach to achieve academic growth – a critical area of interest for policy makers, teachers and parents. Item 3 in his terms of reference was to 'Explain how the curriculum could be redesigned and presented to better support teaching, learning, assessment and reporting.' Yet this has been largely ignored in the final report.¹⁴

- 1.20 In a similar vein, Dr Ben Jensen, Chief Executive Officer of Learning First, suggested to the committee that, as a fundamental imperative, curriculum reform must look at what is being taught in classrooms:

Again, I would go back to the starting point. For curriculum reform, I would really want to know what is being taught in classrooms. To be totally blunt—and this is not a criticism of Professor Masters because this is the way we do curriculum reviews in New South Wales and across the country—we have never had a review, for example, of the Australian curriculum that is based on what is being taught in Australian classrooms. That is just a bit nuts to me. Honestly, if I said to you, "We are going to do a strategy for this organisation, but we are not going to look at what the organisation does", what would your response be?¹⁵

- 1.21 Taking a slightly different perspective, Mr Greg Ashman, a head mathematics teacher and education blogger, suggested to the committee that, it being a 'curriculum review', one might have a reasonable expectation that it should examine and comment on the curriculum. However, it made recommendations that essentially affect methods of teaching, actually pulling in the opposite direction of the best ways for teachers to teach. For Mr Ashman, this was 'a strange facet of the review.'¹⁶

Explicit teaching and direct instruction

- 1.22 In response to a suggestion that the Masters review asked the wrong questions, Mr Ashman proposed that more focus should be given to teaching methodologies and principles of instruction – that is, the way teachers teach. In particular, Mr Ashman made a compelling case for 'explicit teaching' as a proven teaching model with a sound basis in research evidence. According to Mr Ashman, explicit teaching is a 'very effective model' that involves 'whole-class interactive teaching' instead of a teacher 'standing at the front lecturing.'¹⁷
- 1.23 Referring to 2009 research by Professor John Hattie, the Victorian Department of Education and Training defines explicit teaching as model in which teachers clearly and directly demonstrate to students what to do and how to do it:

¹⁴ Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, NSW Legislative Council, *Review of the New South Wales school curriculum: Chair's discussion paper* (2020), p 10.

¹⁵ Evidence, Dr Ben Jensen, Chief Executive Officer, Learning First, 30 November 2020, p 60.

¹⁶ Evidence, Mr Greg Ashman, private citizen, 4 November 2020, p 8.

¹⁷ Evidence, Mr Ashman, 4 November 2020, p 7.

When teachers adopt explicit teaching practices they clearly show students what to do and how to do it. Students are not left to construct this information for themselves. The teacher decides on learning intentions and success criteria, makes them transparent to students, and demonstrates them by modelling. In addition, the teacher checks for understanding, and at the end of each lesson revisits what the lesson has covered and ties it all together (Hattie, 2009).¹⁸

- 1.24** Likewise, the NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) defines explicit teaching as practices which involve 'teachers clearly showing students what to do and how to do it, rather than having students discover that information themselves.' According to CESE, students who are taught using explicit teaching practices make greater learning gains than students who do not experience these practices.¹⁹
- 1.25** In advocating for explicit teaching, Mr Ashman suggested to the committee that many of the Masters review recommendations run counter to its defining principles and techniques. In particular, Mr Ashman drew the committee's attention to the common philosophical foundations of Professor Masters' proposal for untimed syllabuses (discussed in chapter 3) and teaching models or concepts which emphasise differentiation and personalised teaching, models he considered to be ineffective based on available evidence.²⁰
- 1.26** Mr Ashman noted that he was 'very skeptical' of approaches which detract from 'whole class explicit teaching' which he considered to have the strongest evidence base.²¹ Furthermore, he called into question the purported benefits of personalisation, suggesting that a lot of the things that research has shown to be effective get lost in the process:

People argue against that and they say 'but it is not tailored to the needs of the specific individuals', but it is a cost benefit analysis. The more you tailor it to individuals you then lose other aspects. ... You think we have got this big gain because we are personalising the learning, we are moving kids through individual progressions, although actually we are fooling ourselves, we are not really doing that. We are personalising the learning, but actually you have lost an awful lot in the process. You have lost a lot of this whole class, interactive, explicit teaching, which is pretty clear from the evidence is effective.²²

- 1.27** Mr Ashman also characterised explicit teaching as an effective method of teaching, allowing teachers to teach a lot more content than other instructional 'mechanisms' such as project-based and problem-based learning.²³

¹⁸ Department of Education and Training, *High impact teaching strategies: Excellence in teaching and learning*, Government of Victoria, June 2017, p 14. Accessed online: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/management/highimpactteachingstrat.pdf>

¹⁹ Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, NSW Department of Education, *Summary of what works best: 2020 update*, (24 April 2020), <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/what-works-best-2020-update>.

²⁰ Evidence, Mr Ashman, 4 November 2020, p 8; Submission 12, Mr Greg Ashman, p 2.

²¹ Evidence, Mr Ashman, 4 November 2020, p 4.

²² Evidence, Mr Ashman, 4 November 2020, p 4.

²³ Evidence, Mr Ashman, 4 November 2020, p 5.

- 1.28** By contrast, when questioned by the committee about the potential benefits of explicit teaching, Professor Masters expressed the view that it is 'very resource intensive' and erroneously assumes that all students are at the same levels of attainment:

That is what we do currently in a sense. We assume that all students are equally ready for the same year level curriculum and we teach them the curriculum using explicit, direct instruction, if you like, and hold them accountable for learning it. The problem with that is that students are so varied in their levels of attainment that the most advanced students are six or seven years of learning ahead of the least advanced students. To pretend that they are all equally ready for the same experience and learning opportunities is actually naïve.²⁴

- 1.29** Other research and approaches of particular interest to the committee included Professor Hattie's research on Collective Teacher Efficacy. According to the Victorian Department of Education and Training, this approach refers to a 'shared belief that the school's staff can have a positive impact on student achievement – despite other influences in the students' lives that challenge their success.'²⁵
- 1.30** The Chair's discussion paper noted that Collective Teacher Efficacy 'requires a standardised teacher and student experience inside schools, from class-to-class and year-to-year', and the strong evidence for the effectiveness of this approach. It observed that creating consistent syllabus material, with clearly sequenced learning steps, enables students to develop deep knowledge and understanding as they progress through school. Conversely, too much flexibility diminishes this opportunity, and also hinders the ability to scale up best practice to bring about system reform.²⁶

Committee comment

- 1.31** It appears to the committee that Professor Masters was fascinated by the question of how people learn, but overlooked the bigger issue of the best way for teachers to teach. In our view, this was a significant missed opportunity.
- 1.32** The committee considered evidence about explicit instruction compelling and notes that, as a teaching practice, it is supported in sound research published by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation in its *What works best* resource. The committee is disappointed that Professor Masters did not give more focus to the most effective teaching practices, and strongly recommends that the NSW Government adopt a new focus on the best ways for teachers to teach, based on the best practice, evidence based approaches set out in the *What works best* resource and Professor Hattie's research on Collective Teacher Efficacy. It is imperative that new or reworked syllabuses are grounded in, and consistent with, the New South Wales research governing sound classroom practice. In particular, the Department must actively support

²⁴ Evidence, Prof Masters, 30 November 2020, p 51.

²⁵ Department of Education and Training, *Developing collective efficacy*, Government of Victoria, 22 September 2019, <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/Pages/developing-collective-eficacy.aspx#:~:text=%E2%80%8BCollective%20efficacy%20refers%20to,team%20working%20for%20their%20students.>

²⁶ Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, *Review of the New South Wales school curriculum: Chair's discussion paper*, p 19.

common teacher and student experiences inside schools, from class-to-class and year-to-year, along with explicit teaching practices where the teacher shows children what to do and how to do it, decides on learning intentions and success criteria, makes them clear to students, demonstrates them via modelling, checks for understanding, and at the end of the lesson, revisits and ties the content together.

- 1.33** In the committee's view, establishing a standardised experience, from class-to-class and year-to-year, also benefits peer-to-peer professional learning and collaboration, as it ensures all teachers are using common practices and methodologies in the classroom. How can teachers compare notes and learn from each other's classroom experiences if they are all doing different things?
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Finding 3

That the Masters review overlooked the critical issue of the best way for teachers to teach, especially the importance of explicit instruction in the classroom.

Recommendation 1

That, in addressing a significant gap in Professor Geoff Masters' analysis, the NSW Government give greater priority to the most effective ways for teachers to teach, and reiterate its commitment to best practice, evidence based approaches set out in the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation's *What works best* resource and Professor John Hattie's research on Collective Teacher Efficacy. In particular, it must actively support explicit teaching practices and common teacher and student experiences inside schools, from class-to-class and year-to-year.

Methodology

- 1.34** A number of perceived deficits in the methodology for the Masters review emerged during the inquiry.
- 1.35** Several inquiry participants drew the committee's attention to what they considered to be a paucity of evidence in the Masters report to support some of his conclusions and recommendations. Especially for the more radical reforms foreshadowed, some suggested that Professor Masters' analysis did not make a sufficiently cogent case by reference to relevant research or examples and case studies (within Australia and internationally) in order to provide 'proof-of-concept'. This led some inquiry participants to conclude that Professor Masters was too influenced by his own personal views and opinions and deviated too far from the principles of evidence-based policy development.
- 1.36** For example, concerns about the robustness of Professor Masters' policy proposals were central to Dr Mueller's evidence to the committee. Dr Mueller highlighted a tendency in past education policy to impose 'untested experiments' on school practice and policies, with deleterious consequences for the quality of teaching and learning outcomes in Australia. As an example, she cited the past experiment with whole-of-language English literacy teaching for which, she

submitted, students are now 'paying a very heavy price.'²⁷ Dr Mueller saw potential for the present reform agenda to repeat the mistakes of past education policies, advising the committee that '[M]y concern is that with particular reference to the latest proposals by Geoff Masters for New South Wales, those [untested experiments] will continue.'²⁸

1.37 More generally, Dr Mueller argued that one of the major limitations of Professor Masters' final report concerned the 'quality and quantity of evidence provided in support of the recommendations.' Correspondingly, she concluded that the review 'fails to make the case for change on the basis of sound research.'²⁹

1.38 The Masters proposal that arguably attracted the most criticism for lacking an evidence base was that of untimed syllabuses or progression points:

- Mr Greg Ashman submitted there was no 'research evidence' to support this proposal and, in fact, attempts in the United States to fully personalise learning pathways have met with little success so far.³⁰
- The Centre for Independent Studies stated that 'the review cannot point to any high-achieving school system, anywhere in the world, that has an "untimed" curriculum. This would appear to indicate that the proposal may be impractical and is in fact an education experiment unsupported by evidence.'³¹

1.39 Sounding a similar note, Mr Ben Jensen of Learning First observed that education policy is all too often developed in isolation of what is actually happening in schools and classrooms. According to Mr Jensen, this results in policy that has very limited positive impact in the classroom and on educational outcomes:

We have done a lot of different things over the years but we have actually been pretty poor at moving the needle.

Very little policy in Australia is developed based on a comprehensive analysis of what is happening in schools and classrooms, so policy recommendations in general are immediately disconnected from the challenges that school teachers face.³²

1.40 Additionally, Ms Vicki Steer submitted that the Masters review was selective in which evidence it used to justify its recommendations in so far as it 'only considers evidence that confirms their chosen curriculum design.'³³

1.41 The Chair's discussion paper advanced a similar view, charging Professor Masters with being 'out of step' with the Department-sanctioned research evidence on what works best in terms of classroom practice. In an indictment of Professor Masters' methodology, Mr Latham wrote:

²⁷ Evidence, Dr Mueller, 4 November 2020, pp 2 and 7.

²⁸ Evidence, Dr Mueller, 4 November 2020, p 2.

²⁹ Submission 54, Dr Fiona Mueller, pp 2-3.

³⁰ Submission 12, Mr Greg Ashman, pp 2-3.

³¹ Submission 39, The Centre for Independent Studies, p 2.

³² Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 58.

³³ Submission 38, Ms Vicki Steer, p 1.

Masters is out of step with the NSW evidence-base for effective classroom teaching. For instance, the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) has released its 'What works best: 2020 update' for teachers, detailing eight positive-impact strategies ... Remarkably, Masters does not mention this evidence. He proposes syllabuses disconnected from the NSW research governing sound classroom practice. In some cases, the final report pulls in the opposite direction.³⁴

1.42 *What works best* is a professional learning resource which sets out the research for the most effective practices in teaching – one of which is explicit teaching as detailed above. Both the original publication of 2014 and the 2020 update are aimed ultimately at improving the quality of teaching and enhancing learning outcomes within New South Wales schools.³⁵ The eight positive impact strategies endorsed in *What works best: 2020 update* are:

- a culture of high expectations for students
- explicit teaching of student goals, instruction and understanding
- constant high quality feedback to students
- intense use of data to inform classroom practice
- rigorously constructed assessment tasks, teacher collaboration and marking
- classroom management that minimises distractions and maximises learning time
- ensuring student wellbeing fosters classroom concentration and effort
- a common school direction that maximises teacher collaboration and improvement.³⁶

1.43 Not all inquiry participants, however, felt that the Masters proposals were devoid of an appropriate evidence base. For example, the NSW Department of Education, the Mathematical Association of NSW and the Institute of Technology Education were united in their contention that many of the key recommendations align with the CESE research referred to in the Chair's discussion paper.³⁷

1.44 Advancing a similar view, the Society and Culture Association stated that 'aspects of research within the review are underpinned by evidence. Many of the recommendations are well considered and evidence based, and elements of these recommendations can be linked to CESE findings.'³⁸

1.45 Linked to the broad issue of the evidence base of the Masters report, another perceived methodological shortcoming was its failure to look at international examples of best practice as

³⁴ Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, *Review of the New South Wales school curriculum: Chair's discussion paper*, p 10.

³⁵ NSW Department of Education, *What works best: 2020 update*, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, April 2020, p 5. Accessed online: <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au//images/stories/PDF/What-works-best-2020-update.pdf>

³⁶ <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/what-works-best-2020-update>; Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, *Review of the New South Wales school curriculum: Chair's discussion paper*, p 10.

³⁷ Submission 64, NSW Department of Education, p 2; Submission 45, Mathematical Association of NSW, p 1; Submission 48, Institute of Technology Education p 2.

³⁸ Submission 62, Society and Culture Association, p 6.

a way of 'scaling up' and leveraging proven success in teaching practice, syllabus reform and educational resources.

- 1.46** For example, in calling for an end to 'untested experiments' in education policy, Dr Mueller argued that decisions about NSW curriculum reform need to be grounded in international best practice and 'what we know works.' To this end, Dr Mueller suggested that there are examples of high performing systems which have made changes to their curriculum that are now delivering positive results – and that decision makers should look at these models as a study in how to implement successful reforms:

The situation is dire and very genuine evidence-based decisions have to be made based on what we know what works and based on international best practice. And we have some excellent models to follow among high performing systems who have all of the evidence of what works and who have implemented changes to curriculum over time that clearly are producing results. I think my concern would be that that is not the way we have approached things.³⁹

- 1.47** Adding further weight to this perspective was Dr Jensen of Learning First, whom the committee questioned about the potential advantages and risks of being the 'first mover' – meaning a system that implements a reform before any other system or jurisdiction has trialed that same reform. This line of questioning made specific reference to the Masters proposal for progression points for which the committee sought to identify international examples of successful implementation. In response, Dr Jensen suggested that being the 'first mover' comes with potential risks and costs, and that it is better to wait for others to trial or implement a reform and learn from them:

A senior Singapore policymaker once said to me, with regard more to the technology side, "I do not really understand what the first mover advantage is for innovation and reform in education." If you look all over the world there are people trying things everywhere and people with different approaches. There are potential risks and costs of being the first mover or, as you say, the canary in the coalmine. You can wait until the rest of the world makes some moves and learn from them.⁴⁰

- 1.48** With respect to specific examples of international best practice, Dr Jensen formed the view that 'there are aspects we can learn from various systems', referring to reforms in places such as Louisiana in the United States and British Columbia in Canada (among others) which have resulted in improved learning outcomes.⁴¹ Central to these international examples was a focus on high-quality standards-aligned teaching resources, including textbooks, an area examined in further detail in chapter 4.

- 1.49** By contrast, Dr Mueller's evidence suggested that the United States may not be the best place to turn to for evidence on what works, and that the Masters review was misguided in relying on research out of that country as well as the United Kingdom in formulating its proposals. Dr Mueller explained:

The concerns identified in the review are far from new – particularly in relation to academic standards and practices. These concerns have much in common with those

³⁹ Evidence, Dr Mueller, 4 November 2020, p 5.

⁴⁰ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 59.

⁴¹ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 59.

raised in other English-speaking nations, meaning that there is a wealth of material that could explain policy failures and ensure more effective, evidence-based decision-making. Australia's adoption of educational trends and practices originating in the United Kingdom and United States – frequently leading to poor outcomes – make it logical to question the review's heavy reliance on research undertaken in those countries.⁴²

- 1.50** Closer to home, when asked whether NESA will look at innovations in operation at Lindfield Learning Village and Anzac Park Public School when implementing the recommendation for untimed syllabuses (now abandoned, as discussed in chapter 3), the Authority stated that it will use 'practical examples of where similar reforms have been rolled out'.⁴³
- 1.51** Several inquiry participants urged caution when looking to international examples of best practice, highlighting cultural and demographic factors and local specificities which may influence why a particular approach or strategy has been successful. For example, Mr Paul Martin of NESA emphasised that '[p]art of the problem with learning from what works overseas is that cultural and other contexts have a great part to play in that. What is working in Quebec or in Ontario is potentially very different to that working in Shanghai, China or Hong Kong.'⁴⁴
- 1.52** Advancing a similar argument, Mr Ashman cautioned against looking to countries that perform well on PISA and blindly adopting what those countries are doing. In Mr Ashman's view, the PISA data needs to be interrogated in a more sophisticated way as it is not always easy to establish, with a high degree of certainty, what caused a country to perform well on those scores. He explained:

You cannot just look at an education system that does really well and say, "Well, they do better than us in PISA; therefore, whatever they are doing we should do." There are a lot of ways that different education systems differ from each other. ... The other thing that people do – and the review does this as well—is look to places like Singapore and say, "Well, they are now doing this. They are decluttering their curriculum." But what they are doing now cannot possibly be the cause of their previous past performance. If they did not do that before, then the fact that they are doing it now is neither here nor there.

People make this mistake a lot with Finland as well. ... Finland introduced something equivalent to project-based learning, phenomenon-based learning, in 2017. But Finland's PISA scores have been declining significantly since about 2006. We have to be careful of just looking at these countries and saying, "Oh, well, they are doing this. They are higher up the rankings than us so we should do that." When you do look at the data in a slightly more sophisticated way—and it is only correlation so we cannot be absolutely sure that the factors we are investigating caused the performance.⁴⁵

- 1.53** Towards the end of the inquiry, in March 2021, the NSW Government released a draft Kindergarten to Year 2 curriculum, to be implemented from 2022 (discussed in more detail in the following section). Announcing the release, the Premier and Minister Mitchell emphasised that the revised curriculum is more evidence based, with a new focus on the core subjects of

⁴² Submission 54, Dr Fiona Mueller, p 4.

⁴³ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 40.

⁴⁴ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 43.

⁴⁵ Evidence, Mr Ashman, 4 November 2020, p 6.

English, mathematics and science. In addition, Minister Mitchell advised that the curriculum is more explicit in directing what K-2 students need to be taught and does not leave room for teachers' interpretation, with clearer examples and less ambiguity.⁴⁶

Committee comment

- 1.54** In a damning omission, the Masters report did not examine in detail examples of overseas syllabus reform that have improved academic outcomes.
- 1.55** In the committee's view, there was insufficient evidence to justify key conclusions and recommendations of the Masters review. As a matter of principle, all curriculum changes should be evaluated for high-effect impacts on student learning. This process should not be subject to fads and hunches. It must be guided by evidence prior to reform and rigorous evaluation and measurement thereafter. Parameters for what success looks like must be clearly defined. Unfortunately, the Masters review did not follow this process. The worldview of a single curriculum reviewer has been used, in place of hard evidence and comparative analysis.
- 1.56** In addition, the committee is disappointed that Professor Masters did not visit a single New South Wales school during school hours and report on best practice use of syllabuses. While the New South Wales schools system has struggled overall, there are still outstanding schools doing great work (such as Hoxton Park High School's vocational programs). These schools should have been reported on, with recommendations for scaling up best practice.
- 1.57** The committee considers that scaling up curriculum best practice in schools is the most effective way of narrowing the gap between what is intended with the syllabus and what is actually being taught in classrooms. This is vital for achieving the benefits of John Hattie's Collective Teacher Efficacy in schools, most significantly, the development of deep knowledge and understanding as students' progress through their education. The committee is encouraged by the evidence based shift reflected in the draft Kindergarten to Year 2 curriculum released in March 2021 for implementation in 2022, and underscores that this shift must take place across the entire curriculum. The reforms in their entirety must be founded on the research base documented by CESE, and in particular the research findings for *What works best*.

Finding 4

That there was insufficient evidence to justify key conclusions and recommendations of the Masters review. The worldview of a single curriculum reviewer was used, in place of hard evidence and comparative analysis.

Finding 5

That the Masters review overlooked examples of schools in New South Wales making best practice use of the curriculum, thereby missing the opportunity to scale up this success.

⁴⁶ NSW Department of Education, *News: New K-2 English and maths curriculum released*, (23 March 2021), <https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/latest-news/new-k-2-english-and-maths-curriculum-released>; Jordan Baker, 'New early primary school syllabus to focus on phonics and mathematical reasoning', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 2021.

Recommendation 2

That the NSW Government build and promote best practice curriculum use in NSW schools, narrowing the gap between syllabus intentions and what is actually taught in classrooms. Among other things, this is an important way to realise the benefits of Collective Teacher Efficacy within schools and across the NSW education system.

Recommendation 3

That, in reforming the curriculum, the NSW Government must:

- be guided by sound evidence and research on what works best
- leverage and 'scale up' proven models of success where possible
- evaluate all changes for high-effect impacts on student learning
- implement rigorous evaluation and measurement of any future reforms.

Recommendation 4

That, as a crucial evidence-based issue, the NSW Government ensure that the curriculum reform process is consistent with the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation's evidence base – particularly its research findings for *What works best*.

Missed opportunities

1.58 The foregoing paragraphs detail some of the key concerns raised by inquiry participants about the focus, depth, priorities and methodology of the Masters review. Evidence on these perceived deficiencies served to highlight not only questions about the overall merits of the review, but also the opportunity cost to the education sector. As noted in Appendix 1 of this report, the Masters review was the first major review of the New South Wales curriculum in more than 30 years, a rare opportunity to make lasting and meaningful changes. In this context, as the Masters review did not delve into the detail of the syllabuses that will make up the reformed curriculum, a number of missed opportunities were highlighted in evidence to the committee, including issues surrounding how history and reading are taught. It is to these issues that the committee now turns.

Teaching of history

1.59 In its submission to the inquiry, the Institute for Public Affairs voiced its objection to the way Australian history is currently being taught in the New South Wales curriculum and outlined its case for reforming the secondary schools history syllabus.

1.60 In particular, the Institute submitted that, as a result of its structure and focus on broad themes such as colonisation, migration, identity, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the history syllabus gives scant attention to Australia's significant social, political and economic inheritance from the values and institutions of Western civilisation:

... the debt that modern Australia owes to the values and institutions of Western Civilisation is not part of the current NSW syllabus. ... Themes such as the history of

ideas, the development of Liberalism, political history or economic history receive virtually no mention at all. The NSW curriculum fails to treat the rich, complex, and essential legacy of Western Civilisation on which Australia's society and political system, and large swathes of our culture and history, have been built.⁴⁷

- 1.61** Accordingly, it was suggested to the committee that students are leaving secondary school with little to no understanding of the very foundations upon which Australia's society and political system were built. Dr Bella d'Abrera, Director of the Institute's Foundations of Western Civilisation Program, observed that 'it is very easy for a student to get through most of their secondary schooling without knowing anything about western civilisation or Australia's debt to 2,000 years of history that came before 1788 in terms of European and ancient Greece and ancient Rome and everything else.'⁴⁸
- 1.62** Dr d'Abrera noted that, while there are electives that do cover some of these foundations, if Australian students do not take these electives, they receive only 'glimpses into history but they are not getting the full, expansive "why we live in this country that we live in today and where our rights and freedoms come from."⁴⁹
- 1.63** Contextualising this trend internationally, Dr d'Abrera spoke of a shift away from a linear approach to teaching history – previously considered 'unfashionable' – in a favor of a thematic framework, but noted that the United Kingdom is returning to a more linear approach because:
- ... students just have no idea what is going on. They do not know that the Renaissance came before the scientific revolution or that the Enlightenment came after the Reformation. What has happened to history is that it has become a study of society and a study of contemporary issues, rather than things that happened 100 years ago or 200 years ago or 1,000 years ago.⁵⁰
- 1.64** The Chair's discussion paper to this inquiry set out a critique of the history curriculum, based on these principles. This critique is reproduced below.

Post-modernism in History⁵¹

The facts of history are well established. No amount of politically motivated revisionism can recast them. Yet the NSW history curriculum encourages this foolhardy process. The K-10 syllabus starts by declaring: 'There are many differing perspectives within a nation's history and historians may interpret events differently, depending on their point of view and the sources they have used.'

Thus students are forced to spend vast amounts of time on 'source verification'. Instead of learning about the joy and wonder of historical events, they are required to question how our knowledge of history has been 'socially constructed'. As if the causes of World War I are unknown or China's

⁴⁷ Submission 36, Institute for Public Affairs, p 7.

⁴⁸ Evidence, Dr Bella d'Abrera, Director, Foundations of Western Civilisation Program, Institute of Public Affairs, 30 November 2020, p 26.

⁴⁹ Evidence, Dr d'Abrera, 30 November 2020, p 27.

⁵⁰ Evidence, Dr d'Abrera, 30 November 2020, p 26.

⁵¹ Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, *Review of the New South Wales school curriculum: Chair's discussion paper*, pp 26-27.

objection to 19th century colonisation remain a mystery.

This is an insult to historians and the diligence and records of the academy. It's part of the postmodernist pedagogy of promoting doubt and confusion ahead of deep knowledge. Source verification involves asking how history was recorded, rather than the key question of how and why it happened. Many students find this process torturous and drop out of senior-year courses such as Modern History, which has over-dosed on verification techniques better suited to university-level history.

A constant theme in history teaching is distrust in history itself. Year 7 students are introduced to high school history with Napoleon's apocryphal quote that, 'History is a set of lies agreed upon'. How does this build enthusiasm for learning the wonders and detail of history? To have students thinking they are wasting their time studying a pack of lies?

By taking this approach, the history curriculum is confusing students rather than educating them. The priorities are also wrong, with too many fad political subjects entering the syllabus. For instance, when Aung San Suu Kyi was a darling of the Left, a 'Pro-democracy Movement in Burma 1945–2010' course entered the Year 12 History curriculum. But then Suu Kyi was accused of genocide, losing political favour. In the 2019 HSC, less than one per cent of students attempted the exam question on this topic – another lesson in the folly of constructing courses around transient political trends.⁵²

In the teaching of history, school resources are spread too thinly. The syllabus deals with many cultures and peoples across the world, without developing a clear, deep knowledge of Western history. If we don't properly understand ourselves, the history of our nation and culture, how can we understand that of others?

In Stage 4 (Years 7-8) it is possible to study 'The Ancient World' without the history of Rome or Greece being taught – the birthplace of democracy, humanism, architecture, arts and legal codes. Again, in studying 'Ancient to the Modern World', it is possible to not learn European history, to overlook the Renaissance, Enlightenment and rise of classical liberalism. A combination of the Ottoman Empire, Khmer Empire and Mongol Expansion can be studied instead.

In 'Modern World' classwork, there's nothing mandatory about courses on the rise and fall of communism, the Cold War and post-September 11 war-on-terror. Rather, the emphasis is on 'rights and freedom', 'popular culture', 'the environmental movement' and 'migration experience'. In senior-year Modern History, there are case studies on the West, but mostly from a negative perspective. Several courses are trivial and quite strange, such as 'Tibet in the Modern World' and 'The 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing, its impact on environmental awareness and the impact on Earth Day 1970'.

These problems are clear to students and parents, indeed anyone scanning through the NSW syllabuses. Yet Masters is silent on them. So too, Premier Berejiklian has publicised the importance of the 'basics' without clearing away the dross in the curriculum that makes the classroom teaching of basic history (and other subjects) more difficult.

⁵² Answers to questions on notice, Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority, 17 April 2020, p 93.

1.65 Looking ahead, the Institute outlined its agenda for reforming the secondary history syllabus, re-calibrating its focus and priorities from social issues such as Indigenous rights and environmentalism to a linear version of history which emphasises historical facts. In particular, it recommended a reformed secondary syllabus which:

... starts in ancient Rome and it goes through the ages and ... ends up in modern Australia. There is a time line. There is a linear aspect to it that will educate the children about where it began, what happened in the middle, where we are now and where we are going.⁵³

1.66 This proposed syllabus should be taught in a way that makes explicit the links between the attributes and values of modern Australia – such as democratic government, the rule of law and freedom of thought, religion and association – and their pedigree in Western civilisation. Its aim is to provide Australian students with an understanding of the nature and influence of Western civilisation in their civic lives today and an appreciation of how where their rights and freedoms come from.⁵⁴

1.67 The Institute's call for a greater focus in the curriculum on the civic values, rights and responsibilities at the heart of Australian society was amplified in evidence from Ms Daniela Giorgi and Ms Jeanne Douglass of the Parliament of New South Wales' Parliamentary Education and Engagement Team. Their central contention was that civics and citizenship – which is currently in the curriculum as an optional module for year 10 history – should be made mandatory in the year 9 and year 10 history syllabuses.⁵⁵ Their submission stated:

... in the NSW 7-10 History syllabus, although the teaching and learning about civic history is adequate, the role of civic institutions is not given the core emphasis that we believe it requires. For example, the topic Making a Nation is not mandatory yet it discusses European settlement in Australia; how and why Federation was achieved; state and federal responsibilities under the Australian Constitution; and key events and ideas in the development of Australian self-government and democracy. This topic should be a mandatory in Years 9-10 History, allowing students to revisit, and teachers to build upon, the foundational knowledge and values about parliamentary democracy that were learnt in primary school and therefore preparing students for their future lives as voting citizens.⁵⁶

1.68 According to the Parliamentary Education and Engagement Team, knowledge of our Westminster parliamentary democracy and how decisions are made within this system is essential as it 'underpins the learning that will help students become informed and responsible individuals who see participation in their democratic society as part of their lifelong learning.'⁵⁷

Committee comment

1.69 The committee supports a return to the linear (or chronological) teaching of history, with an enhanced focus on the heritage of Western civilisation and the development of modern

⁵³ Evidence, Dr d'Abrera, 30 November 2020, p 27.

⁵⁴ Evidence, Dr d'Abrera, 30 November 2020, p 27; Submission 36, Institute for Public Affairs, p 8.

⁵⁵ Evidence, Ms Jeanne Douglass, Senior Manager, Parliamentary Education and Engagement, Parliament of New South Wales, 30 November 2020, p 22.

⁵⁶ Submission 24, Parliamentary Education Engagement Unit, NSW Parliament, p 3.

⁵⁷ Submission 24, Parliamentary Education Engagement Unit, NSW Parliament, p 4.

Australia. While our schools must always teach important aspects of other civilisations, the core starting point must be with our own. If we do not understand our own history and culture, how can we truly appreciate that of other nations?

- 1.70** The committee considers that, like other subject areas, the teaching of Australian history has become fertile ground for promoting social and political issues – including priorities which reflect an ideological bias – at the expense of core facts and rich, linear knowledge about the world we live in and its historical antecedents. While the committee notes the importance of understanding contemporary issues in Australian society, this should not be prioritised at the expense of learning about Australia's social, political and economic genealogy in the achievements, institutions and historical narratives of European civilisation.
- 1.71** In the committee's view, as the Masters review did not examine the content of the NSW curriculum, opportunities were missed for refocusing class learning time on neglected subject areas, such as the virtues of Western civilisation, the importance of Australian history and civics and citizenship education. While the subject 'Rights and Freedoms 1945-Present' is mandatory in Years 9-10 History, the topic 'Making a Nation' (studying key aspects of Australian governmental history) is not. The committee supports the submission of the NSW Parliamentary Education and Engagement Unit for 'Making a Nation' to be a mandatory subject in Years 9-10 History, and we recognise the importance of civics and citizenship education in nurturing and shaping informed and responsible citizens who value participation in our democratic decision making processes.
- 1.72** The committee notes with concern the 40 percent decline in ancient history elective enrolments since 2010.⁵⁸ This points to the need for a reassessment of ways of engaging students in the study of history. As evidenced in the boxed analysis on pages 15 and 16, the study of history has become overly focused on subjectivity and source verification at the expense of facts and deep knowledge. Instead, all history subject must be content-rich, with less tedious 'source verification' and more engagement with the pivotal, amazing events of human history.

Finding 6

That the teaching of history has become cluttered with educationally questionable source verification, postmodernist theory and political messaging, taking significant focus from engagement with the pivotal achievements of human history discovered through deep knowledge and historical fact.

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government prioritise the re-engagement of students in the study of history by designing syllabuses that are content-rich, include less 'source verification' and more engagement with the pivotal, fascinating events of human history.

⁵⁸ Natassia Chrysanthos, 'The HSC subjects with plummeting enrolments revealed', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 2020. Accessed online: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-hsc-subjects-with-plummeting-enrolments-revealed-20200930-p560m1.html>

Recommendation 6

That, as a priority, the NSW Government returns to linear (or chronological) teaching of history, with an enhanced focus on the heritage of Western civilisation and the development of modern Australia.

Recommendation 7

That the NSW Government mandate the study of civics and citizenship for students in years 9 and 10 by making it compulsory for all students to take 'Making a Nation' as part of this cohort's history syllabus.

Importance of core literacy skills: *The reading wars*

- 1.73** In an opinion piece for the *Sydney Morning Herald* coinciding with the committee's inquiry, Minister Mitchell called time on so-called 'reading wars' between those who advocate for phonics and those who advocate for a 'whole of language' approach. In her opinion, the evidence indicates overwhelmingly that phonics must be explicitly and systematically taught within a broader literacy program:

Study after study shows that if phonics is not taught properly, student outcomes suffer across the board. Students with additional learning needs – particularly dyslexia – are further disadvantaged. Study after study highlights the ineffectiveness of whole-of-language programs such as Reading Recovery – which is why it is no longer supported by the NSW Government.⁵⁹

- 1.74** The NSW Department of Education defines phonics as the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between the sounds of spoken language (*phonemes*) and the letters that represent them in written language (*graphemes*).⁶⁰ According to Dr Deslea Konza, Association Professor of Language and Literacy, phonics teaching is about relating sounds to a letter (or letters) in order to decode the written part of our language.⁶¹
- 1.75** In setting out his proposals for the early years of a student's education, Professor Masters emphasised the importance of reading as one of the basic, foundational skills to prepare students for subsequent learning. To this end, he proposed that 'a more detailed and explicit curriculum in reading should be developed as part of the subject English. This curriculum should be grounded in research into how young children learn to read.' As an example of relevant research,

⁵⁹ Sarah Mitchell, 'The reading wars are over – and phonics has won', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 2020, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-reading-wars-are-over-and-phonics-has-won-20201127-p56ioj.html>.

⁶⁰ NSW Department of Education, *Literacy and numeracy: Phonics* (6 April 2020), <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/teaching-and-learning-resources/literacy/effective-reading-in-the-early-years-of-school/phonics>.

⁶¹ Deslea Konza cited in: NSW Department of Education, *Literacy and numeracy: Phonics* (6 April 2020), <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/teaching-and-learning-resources/literacy/effective-reading-in-the-early-years-of-school/phonics>.

Professor Masters cited 2018 research by Anne Castles, Kathleen Rastle and Kate Nation entitled *Ending the reading wars: reading acquisition from novice to expert*.⁶²

1.76 Noting this passing mention, the committee considered whether there was an opportunity through the Masters review to assign greater priority to how teachers teach basic literacy – especially reading in the early years – and unequivocally confirm the policy direction for any future changes to the English syllabus for early learners, in line with Minister Mitchell's publicly articulated position.

1.77 When asked whether this should have been a more substantial part of his report, Professor Masters conceded that it could have been made more explicit, but reiterated there was never any intention to get into the details of specific subject areas. Professor Masters remarked:

It is a question of how much detail one goes into. My general point there was that, in looking at how we best develop reading and early numeracy skills and so on, we need to draw heavily on the research evidence. We need to be clear about the nature of what increasing confidence in reading and mathematics looks like. ... It could have been made more explicit, but my report was always going to be a fairly high-level analysis and not get into the details of syllabuses or specific subject areas.⁶³

1.78 This is one of several examples of sound policy recommendations that are alluded to in Professor Masters' analysis only to be all but erased or relegated to a footnote in his final report.

1.79 One of the strategies the NSW Government is implementing as part of its drive towards phonics is the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check, a mandatory assessment that helps identify student progress in developing foundational literacy skills. This assessment was trialed in 2020 and was made mandatory for Year 1 students in 2021. It assesses how students blend sounds together to read a word, and student responses are mapped to the National Literacy Learning Progression indicators.⁶⁴

1.80 Towards the end of the inquiry, in March 2021 and as part of its curriculum reform agenda, in the NSW Government released the consultation draft of a new 'more explicit' English syllabus for kindergarten to year 2. The new syllabus features a clear focus on synthetic phonics, based on the research evidence.⁶⁵

Committee comment

1.81 The committee is disappointed the Masters report gave only passing mention to best practice ways of teaching literacy (a footnote on page 99, referencing Macquarie University research),

⁶² NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum* (April 2020), p 4.

⁶³ Evidence, Prof Masters, 30 November 2020, pp 50-51.

⁶⁴ NSW Department of Education, *Literacy and numeracy: Year 1 phonics screening check*, (5 March 2021), <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/assessment-resources/phonics-screening-check#What0>.

⁶⁵ NSW Department of Education, *News: New K-2 English and maths curriculum released*, (23 March 2021), <https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/latest-news/new-k-2-english-and-maths-curriculum-released>; Jordan Baker, 'New early primary school syllabus to focus on phonics and mathematical reasoning', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 2021.

when this should have been a primary focus in support of Minister Mitchell's drive to end the 'reading wars' in favour of synthetic phonics.

- 1.82** The committee commends Minister Mitchell's resolute emphasis on synthetic phonics – thereby putting an end to the so called 'reading wars' – and is encouraged by the introduction of the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check and now the revised K-2 English curriculum to be implemented from 2022. In the committee's view, these are very positive steps in getting back to what matters most in teaching basic literacy in the early years, in recognition of the importance of foundational literacy skills to academic success in later years. It is critically important that the NSW Government actively build synthetic phonics as the bedrock of literacy teaching, and that any future education reforms are consistent with this policy priority. Learn-to-read programs must be based on the explicit teaching of phonics.

Finding 7

That the Masters review missed a critical opportunity to explicitly reinforce the NSW Government's policy on synthetic phonics as the most effective approach to teaching basic literacy skills. The committee endorses and congratulates the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, for ending the 'reading wars' in favour of phonics, especially with the introduction of the mandatory Year 1 Phonics Screening Check.

Recommendation 8

That the NSW Government continue its drive towards synthetic phonics in literacy teaching, and that any future education reforms are consistent with this policy priority. Learn-to-read programs must be based on the explicit teaching of phonics.

What should schools be responsible for?

- 1.83** The inquiry considered one of the assumptions of the Masters review that, over time, there has been significant widening in the functions, roles and responsibilities of schools, a phenomenon Professor Masters attributed to the demise in social institutions which once played a primary role in a child's social, moral and emotional development.
- 1.84** Reflecting on the changing social and cultural world and its implications for teaching, Professor Masters wrote:
- With the decline of other institutions – sometimes including families – that once played a lead role in inculcating values and developing character, schools have found it increasingly necessary to give priority to students' social and emotional development, and often to their physical and mental safety, health and wellbeing.⁶⁶
- 1.85** According to Professor Masters, this expansion in the remit of schools poses a number of challenges for the school curriculum and often results in further demands on already stretched resources, including teaching time:

⁶⁶ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p 4.

Ongoing changes in Australian society are requiring schools to take on broader roles and responsibilities than the implementation of a set of syllabuses. Schools are increasingly focused on students' social and emotional development, physical and mental health and wellbeing, and a range of personal skills and attributes, including resilience, optimism, and the ability to communicate and collaborate with others. School-wide priorities of these kinds are not adequately addressed as syllabuses and 'outcomes', but nevertheless need to be recognised as part of the total curriculum of today's schools. A challenge is to provide the time and support in schools to address these broader priorities.⁶⁷

- 1.86** Professor Masters' account of the changing social and cultural milieu in which teachers are now required to teach resonated with some inquiry participants. For example, Mrs Sharryn Brownlee, President, Central Coast Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, spoke of schools increasingly being seen as the delivery mechanism for all things that society agrees are important to a child's development, and not merely tuition in conventional disciplinary knowledge. She argued that this has occurred at the expense of the curriculum:

The solution to every problem in the community over time has been to teach it in schools ... everyone believes that anything that is happening within the community can be delivered by schools. Whether it is bike riding or whether it is hygiene, whether it is learning or whether it is breakfast—all of the things that society deems to be needed for families and children falls to a school. I think that is when they lose track of the curriculum and the teaching and learning because their welfare needs have become very high.⁶⁸

- 1.87** Similarly, Mr Stephen Kinsella, Executive Director of the Anglican Education Commission, observed that schools are increasingly being used as vehicles to deal with 'societal issues', citing nutrition programs in schools as a case in point. He also highlighted the concomitant burden placed on teachers:

What has happened over time is more and more is being shifted to the expectation that schools will deal with these things. Schools are populated by teachers who basically love the students and want to do the best for them, so more and more is being passed to them. ... the expectation is that schools will fill the void that is being created by dysfunction in what were some of the pillars of our society.⁶⁹

- 1.88** Mr Kinsella further noted that the funding for schools has not kept up with the growing expectations of what they should provide. Referring to programs such as breakfast for students and morning exercise, he commented:

I am not saying they should be optional, but what I am saying is that those expectations are being placed on schools and teachers, but still the same building formulas, staffing formulas remain the same, all the funding formulas remain the same as if we live in a world back when I started teaching. These are things that have come into the

⁶⁷ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p 11.

⁶⁸ Evidence, Mrs Sharryn Brownlee, President, Central Coast Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, 4 November 2020, p 20.

⁶⁹ Evidence, Mr Stephen Kinsella, Executive Director, Anglican Education Commission, 30 November 2020, p 7.

expectations for schools. They have to be properly resourced or, as I just said, the pressure point is on teachers and their workloads.⁷⁰

- 1.89** When pressed further on whether wellbeing programs compete with or complement the curriculum, Mr Kinsella remarked that '[t]eachers who are doing these things are not preparing their lessons because they are doing these other important things' and that the funding needed to run these programs 'comes from the very limited budgets that schools have.'⁷¹
- 1.90** Understanding these challenges – including the proper delineation of roles and responsibilities between schools and other social institutions – formed a significant line of inquiry for the committee. Two particular areas emerged in the discussion: social support and student wellbeing programs in schools; and values in teaching, as discussed below.

Social support and student wellbeing programs in schools

- 1.91** The increasingly complex needs of students – primarily concerning mental health and wellbeing – were detailed in evidence from the NSW Primary Principals' Association (PPA), which represents over 1,800 primary public school principals in New South Wales. The Association reported an increase in the number of students in the public primary school system presenting with mental health and trauma issues and explained that such needs must be addressed before learning can occur. This evidence also highlighted the additional time and support that teachers are seeking to fulfill this role:

What we are finding as a profession, and I am sure the Catholic sector would be finding this too, is more and more kids are coming into the system with very complex needs, and needs that we have not previously seen in primary schools, especially around mental health issues and trauma.

That impacts on our teaching and learning, because we need to deal with that and address that before we can get kids to learn. It is providing teachers with support and time, not only to deal with how to teach the curriculum effectively, but also to deal with the complexities that are now coming to us, so that kids are ready to learn.⁷²

- 1.92** Evidence about the prevalence of mental health issues among students raised broader questions about whether teachers are best placed and adequately equipped to deal with these issues. In response to questioning by the committee, Mrs Fran Bonanno, Vice President, Association of Catholic School Principals and Principal of St Fleix Primary School Bankstown, conceded that teachers are 'not always' able to deal with circumstances involving distressed and traumatised students.⁷³

⁷⁰ Evidence, Mr Kinsella, 30 November 2020, p 10.

⁷¹ Evidence, Mr Kinsella, 30 November 2020, pp 7 and 8.

⁷² Evidence, Ms Norma Petrocco, Vice President, NSW Primary Principals' Association, 4 November 2020, p 14.

⁷³ Evidence, Mrs Fran Bonanno, Vice President, Association of Catholic School Principals and Principal, St Felix Primary School Bankstown, 4 November 2020, p 17. See also: Evidence, Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education, Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, Budget Estimates 2020-2021, 3 March 2021, p 36.

- 1.93** While this evidence highlighted the increasing wellbeing needs of students, the committee sought to explore how well schools are responding to those needs. When pressed on whether there is a firm evidence base for the effectiveness of wellbeing programs such as the *Grow Your Mind Program* – consisting of 'shark versus dolphin thinking', 'gratitude meditation' and 'animal yoga' – it was suggested to the committee that 'there are schools that would say that they have evidence for the effectiveness of some of those.'⁷⁴ The need for a better evidence base for these programs was highlighted by inquiry participants such as Dr John, Chair of the Anglican Education Commission and Headmaster of St Andrew's Catholic School. He observed that there is insufficient clinical data to determine the effectiveness of some wellbeing programs in schools and that 'some programs may not be effective while others may prove to be effective and we need good information on which are which.'⁷⁵
- 1.94** Lending weight to Dr Collier's cautionary note about the effectiveness of wellbeing programs is research commissioned by the NSW Department of Education into behavioral and wellbeing interventions in New South Wales schools. In 2018, the department commissioned the Telethon Kids Institute to synthesise evidence on what works best in addressing student's behavioral and wellbeing needs in school settings.⁷⁶
- 1.95** Aggregating the results of studies from a range of different interventions – such as social and emotional wellbeing programs, programs targeting truancy and/or risk-taking behaviors – the Telethon Kids Institute reported mixed findings with respect to the ability of wellbeing programs to positively affect student behavior. Some interventions were reported to have small positive impacts on student behavior, while others, such as mindfulness interventions that target low-level disruptive behavior, were found to have no behavioral effect whatsoever.⁷⁷
- 1.96** As part of the committee's Budget Estimates hearing on 3 March 2021, the committee questioned Minister Mitchell and departmental witnesses about the key insights and lessons from the Telethon Kids Institute report – in particular, whether some level of skepticism about the effectiveness of wellbeing programs in schools might indeed be justified. In response to the committee's questions, Ms Georgina Harrison, Group Deputy Secretary, School Improvement and Education Reform Group, NSW Department of Education remarked that this research does indeed look at 'the international evidence and international policies around those issues' and added that '[w]here the evidence base is not strong enough, we also need to make sure we continue to build an evidence base.'⁷⁸
- 1.97** During the same hearing, the committee raised concerns about the qualifications of external mental health providers being used to run awareness programs in the state's schools – such as

⁷⁴ Evidence, Mr Bob Willets, Principal of Berry Public School, 4 November 2020, p 18.

⁷⁵ Evidence, Dr John Collier, Chair of the Anglican Education Commission and Headmaster of St Andrew's Catholic School, 30 November 2020, p 9.

⁷⁶ Telethon Kids Institute, *Strengthening school and system capacity to implement effective interventions to support student behavior and wellbeing: An evidence review*, August 2019.

⁷⁷ Telethon Kids Institute, *Strengthening school and system capacity to implement effective interventions to support student behavior and wellbeing: An evidence review*, August 2019, p 93.

⁷⁸ Evidence, Ms Georgina Harrison, Group Deputy Secretary, School Improvement and Education Reform Group, Department of Education, Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, Budget Estimates 2020-2021, 3 March 2021, p 25.

mental health and domestic violence awareness – and sought to understand the accreditation process for these providers.⁷⁹

Committee comment

- 1.98** The mental health issues facing the state's schools are clearly complex and intractable, with equally complex and varied contributing factors. In the committee's view, the Masters review was wrong in suggesting that the peak effectiveness of the family unit in society has passed, that increasingly, schools need to assume functions traditionally performed by the nuclear family. While schools need to provide additional support for some students, to assume schools must play this role for all students is an insult to millions of families in New South Wales providing loving and effective support for their children. Instead of adopting Masters' view, the NSW Government must, as a first principle in defining the responsibilities of schools, pay due respect to the family as the foundation for children's social, emotional and moral development, and the primacy of parents in educating their children.
- 1.99** While we accept the changing needs of students in today's society, the committee notes that teachers are generally not qualified mental health care professionals and are therefore not properly equipped to administer the right care for traumatised and vulnerable students. If a student has a serious *physical* illness, few would entrust that child's care to individuals who are not properly qualified to treat that illness. The same principle should apply to psychological care. Moreover, it is vitally important that this role not be allowed to subsume the core role of teachers, which is to educate.
- 1.100** The committee acknowledges that, in the allocation of scarce time and resources in schools, student wellbeing is an important consideration. There was committee consensus, however, that while not the primary purpose of schools, student wellbeing should be complementary to the core functions of student achievement, both academic and vocational.
- 1.101** In the committee's opinion, the Telethon Kids Institute research was a less-than-glowing report card on the effectiveness of social and emotional wellbeing programs in schools, and should signal to educators and policymakers that much of what masquerades as promoting 'student wellbeing' may actually be of limited value.
- 1.102** The committee is concerned about the proliferation of wellbeing programs in schools – absorbing limited school funding and already scarce teacher resources – when the evidence commissioned by the Department itself presents an inconclusive picture of what works best in responding to the emotional and social needs of students. The department must establish what, if anything, does improve wellbeing and use that to determine what, if anything, it funds.
- 1.103** In the committee's view, a more robust evidence base is needed to guide decision making and investment in wellbeing programs.

⁷⁹ Questions about the accreditation process, qualifications and evaluation of awareness programs run by external providers were taken on notice at the committee's hearing on 3 March 2021. Answers were not available to the committee at the time of writing, but have since been published on the committee's website: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2633#tab-otherdocuments>.

Finding 8

That, while some students will require additional support from their schools, the Masters review was wrong in suggesting that the peak effectiveness of the family unit in society has passed and that, increasingly, schools need to assume functions traditionally performed by the nuclear family.

Finding 9

That student wellbeing, while not the primary purpose of schools, should be complementary to the core functions of student achievement, both academic and vocational.

Recommendation 9

That – as a first principle in defining the responsibilities of schools – the NSW Government pay due respect to the family as the foundation for children's social, emotional and moral development, and the primacy of parents in educating their children.

Recommendation 10

That the NSW Government ensure that all external providers at government schools be formally accredited, based on proven professional qualifications, a positive evidence base and feedback loop of evaluation for success.

Recommendation 11

That the NSW Government ensure that a robust evidence base guides decisions about interventions to improve student wellbeing. The effectiveness of wellbeing programs should be subject to continuous monitoring and evaluation to measure outcomes and determine investment.

Values in teaching

- 1.104** Whether there is a legitimate place for values-based instruction in the curriculum formed another discussion thread within the committee's broader consideration of the proper functions, responsibilities and remit of schools and how these have changed over time.
- 1.105** The committee heard evidence that education – including curriculum content *and* teaching practice – do not exist in a values vacuum and is never values-free.⁸⁰ The significance of this evidence was thrown into sharp relief as an important consideration for the future work of NESAs when composing the detail of each new syllabus to come under the new curriculum. As previously noted in this report, the Authority has been tasked with this undertaking in consultation with expert stakeholders.

⁸⁰ See for example: Evidence, Dr Collier, 30 November 2020, p 8; Evidence, Mr Kinsella, 30 November 2020, p 7; Evidence, Ms Maura Manning, Director Learning, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, 30 November 2020, p 16.

1.106 Accepting that curricula are never value free, inquiry participants turned their attention to two seemingly obvious questions: what should the appropriate values framework for the new curriculum be, and whose values should it reflect?

1.107 This was of particular interest to the Anglican Education Commission in its submission to the inquiry, which stated:

Defining the attitudes and values framework of the new curriculum is a fundamental challenge for the writers of the new curriculum documents:

- Who will be seconded to the curriculum writing process?
 - What will be the ‘attitudes and values’ they bring to the process?
 - Will they be representative of the make-up of Australian society?
- Will there be a commonly held definition of the attitudes and values that are embedded in the curriculum?
- ...
- Will parents continue to have the choice to:
 - Send their children to a school that reflects their own values, eg a faith-based school?
 - Send their children to Special Religious Education (SRE) classes or Special Education in Ethics (SEE) classes?

If these issues are not discussed and resolved then the attitudes and values that underpin the new curriculum will be defined, by default, by the personnel chosen to write the new curriculum. These attitudes and values may take the curriculum in a direction different to the attitudes and values expected by parents.⁸¹

1.108 The Commission's Executive Director, Mr Stephen Kinsella, emphasised to the committee that parents expect the curriculum to reflect what they see as important, rather than the entrenched values of individual interest groups.⁸²

1.109 In a similar vein, when he spoke to the committee, Professor Masters identified the need for appropriate mechanisms to ensure the values promoted in schools enjoy broad support across the community:

To the extent that the curriculum is designed to promote particular values, it is important that there is a mechanism for ensuring that those values are supported and shared across the community. Promoting values in schools is not a new idea at all. Schools have always done that, in some ways—shared values that we commonly hold. I think if we are going to think about how you promote values and attitudes in schools then there needs to be a process for reaching agreement, to the extent that we can, on what it is that we value as a society and what values and attitudes we want to develop and promote.⁸³

1.110 In a recent opinion piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Minster Mitchell drew a line around where she sees the limits of schools' role in teaching values:

⁸¹ Submission 55, The Anglican Education Commission, p 6.

⁸² Evidence, Mr Kinsella, 30 November 2020, p 8.

⁸³ Evidence, Prof Masters, 30 November 2020, p 53.

The reality is that instilling values sets and encouraging positions on social and political issues is not the job of schools. It is the job of parents. A school's job is to equip kids with the knowledge needed to successfully engage with the world as independent thinkers.⁸⁴

Committee comment

- 1.111** The committee fundamentally believes that schools should teach classroom material in a manner consistent with the values of parents. The focus of New South Wales schools must be on academic attainment and vocational qualifications, avoiding attempts to engineer the political, social and emotional development of the child. Teachers are not parents, and should not seek to assume this role for their students.
- 1.112** As the Masters review did not examine the content of the NSW curriculum, opportunities were missed for meeting Minister Mitchell's goal of removing overtly political content from NSW schools.
- 1.113** Another aspect of the values discussion relates to the post-modernist approach that pervades many subjects. Perhaps due to the Masters review itself giving scant attention to curriculum content, submissions to the committee's inquiry did not focus heavily on what is actually in the syllabus. The committee Chair, however, raised a number of concerns in his discussion paper about post-modernist content in the English, history and science syllabuses. The committee regards these as valid concerns that run contrary to the NSW Government's stated goal of going 'back-to-basics' in student learning. The committee explores this important issue in more detail in the following chapter.
- 1.114** The committee considers that, given the deficiencies in the Masters review, in hindsight, the NSW Government should not have relied on a one-person process. A larger committee of review, with wider and more diverse expertise, would have produced a superior result.
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Finding 10

That the post-modernist approach to education, which currently features in many courses and subjects, runs contrary to the NSW Government's stated goal of 'back-to-basics' in the curriculum. Post-modernism is an irrational, unproven political theory arguing that everything we know about ourselves, personal identity, scientific know-how and human history has been 'socially constructed'.

Finding 11

That as the Masters review did not examine the content of the NSW curriculum, opportunities were missed for meeting Minister Mitchell's goal of removing overtly political content. In the committee's view, this goal is most valid.

⁸⁴ Sarah Mitchell, 'For 20 years our students have been slipping – but money is not the answer', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 2019.

Recommendation 12

That the NSW Government return the focus of schools to academic attainment and vocational qualifications, ending attempts to engineer the 'social development' of students. As much as possible, schools must teach classroom material in a manner consistent with the values of parents.

Can curriculum reform improve academic results?

- 1.115** Given the NSW Government is now relying on curriculum reform as the key driver for improving results, the committee sought to elicit expert evidence on whether overhauling the curriculum can indeed boost the state's academic results and reverse the worrying decline in student achievement.
- 1.116** In considering the future role and potential of a revised curriculum in achieving such a reversal, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, suggested that the Government's emphasis on curriculum reform betrays 'misguided understandings' of the learning process.⁸⁵
- 1.117** When questioned about this in a hearing, Ms Maura Manning, the organisation's Executive Director, impressed upon the committee that the curriculum is only 'one piece of what we do in schools' and regardless of decisions about the revised curriculum content, due attention needs to be paid to equipping teachers to teach well:
- [W]e need to make sure that our teachers are equipped to be able to know their students deeply and to respond to the needs in front of them. The professional learning that we do with our teachers is really important so that they have enough in their toolkit to respond to whatever it is that presents with the students and their needs.⁸⁶
- 1.118** In summing up this position, Ms Manning agreed with the proposition that more needs to be done beyond the curriculum to improve educational outcomes.⁸⁷
- 1.119** This view was shared by Dr Ben Jensen of Learning First who cautioned against thinking of reform in terms of one 'silver bullet' solution that will turn things around for the state's schools. Dr Jensen observed that 'curriculum is not the answer but obviously if it is not part of the answer then I think we are kidding ourselves.'⁸⁸
- 1.120** Consistent with this, in evidence to the committee, there was at least some degree of consensus that curriculum reform in and of itself is not enough to drive improvements in academic results, but it is an essential precondition. A chief proponent of this view was Mr Paul Martin of NESA. For Mr Martin, curriculum reform is necessary because the existing syllabuses are impeding quality teaching:

⁸⁵ Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 5.

⁸⁶ Evidence, Ms Manning, 30 November 2020, p 13.

⁸⁷ Evidence, Ms Manning, 30 November 2020, p 16.

⁸⁸ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, pp 58 and 63.

So if I take the question as "Is the syllabuses or the curriculum in and of itself enough to ensure that all students are well educated and with the most appropriate pedagogy?" no, it is not—of course not. But it is necessary for the right teaching, the appropriate teaching and the high-quality teaching that we need to occur. We cannot let the syllabuses as they currently stand—and they have for a while—get in the way of quality teaching by having too much material or having material that less experienced teachers are unsure of how to prioritise and identify. So my answer to your question is that the syllabuses are an important plank, almost a foundation stone, in improving student learning outcomes but of themselves, no, because the teachers need to interpret, program and apply syllabuses in classrooms. So the instructional models that they use are necessary but they need to be based on the appropriate sequencing of knowledge and content in a syllabus document.⁸⁹

1.121 Mr Martin continued that although curriculum reform 'may not answer every question in relation to falling standards or student performance, it is a necessary precondition for improvement to make sure that we have a solid, agreed set of syllabuses that teachers can teach from, that parents understand and that students are assessed against.'⁹⁰

1.122 Adding her support for this view, Ms Jenny Allum told the committee that issues in education are rarely caused by one single factor, and that addressing the curriculum is one important step:

I do not think in education there is much that is caused it just by one single factor. I think [the curriculum] is an important factor but I think there are lots of other factors which interact to ensure that I think there needs to be some changes to curriculum.⁹¹

1.123 The Mathematical Association of NSW suggested that curriculum reform is 'only a very small piece of the puzzle' and pointed to several other factors as contributing to the decline in academic results, including: the relaxing of admission standards and prerequisites for individuals wishing to study teaching; and the lack of time and reward for teachers who undertake professional development.⁹²

1.124 Looking beyond the curriculum itself, there was significant discussion during the inquiry about other measures that will assist greatly in reversing the decline in academic standards. In particular, participants highlighted teacher training and accreditation, as well as quality teaching resources including textbooks, as very important areas for investment. The committee explores the evidence we received about these measures in chapter 4 on implementation of the Masters review reforms.

Committee comment

1.125 The Masters review set itself a goal of improved student engagement with learning. But it did not address the chief problem in NSW schools in this regard: early teenagers (mainly boys) disengaging from the academic curriculum and, in many cases, giving up on education and becoming disruptive in classrooms. Until this issue is addressed, our schools will continue to under-perform, diminishing the life opportunities of hundreds of thousands of young people.

⁸⁹ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 36.

⁹⁰ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 37.

⁹¹ Evidence, Ms Allum, 30 November 2020, p3.

⁹² Submission 45a, Mathematical Association of NSW, p 1.

- 1.126** It is clear to the committee, as to many inquiry participants, that curriculum reform is only one essential component of many required to address the significant problems of student disengagement and declining academic results in New South Wales schools, as explored in chapter 4.

Finding 12

That the Masters review did not address the critical issue of early teenagers (mainly boys) disengaging from the academic curriculum and, in many cases, giving up on education and becoming disruptive in classrooms.

Finding 13

That curriculum reform in and of itself is not enough to address declining academic performance and student disengagement, but is one of several important evidence-based strategies, that, taken together, will improve the learning outcomes for students in New South Wales.

Chapter 2 Genuine decluttering

Having established that the Masters review missed a number of critical opportunities for the curriculum reforms that New South Wales schools so badly need, this chapter takes a closer look at the ways that genuine decluttering of the curriculum should occur.

The chapter begins by summarising the views of inquiry participants on the existing curriculum, especially the critical issues of rebalancing breadth and depth of content, and the need to achieve real and lasting change. It then explores a number of actions required to return the curriculum to a focus on core learning: ignoring fads and experimental material; abandoning the cross-curriculum priorities; and reducing the number and breadth of courses. In concluding, the chapter documents the committee's views on how genuine decluttering can be achieved, then underscoring the need to ensure that, once decluttered, syllabuses do not become re-cluttered with inappropriate material that detracts from the teaching of rich knowledge.

The overcrowded curriculum

2.1 In summarising stakeholder feedback to his review, Professor Masters highlighted 'widespread concerns' about the volume of content in most New South Wales syllabuses. According to his final report, one of the key messages repeated in consultations and written submissions to the review was that the amount of content teachers are expected to cover is unreasonable, with syllabuses frequently being characterised as 'overcrowded', 'overly prescriptive' and 'cluttered'.⁹³

2.2 This was echoed in submissions to the present inquiry.

2.3 The Australian Catholic University, for example, referred to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data to illustrate the overcrowded nature of the Australian curriculum:

Australian students have the heaviest workload, in terms of statutory requirements for instruction, than any other country in the OECD ... [however, Australian students'] hours on reading, writing, literature and mathematics [are] just below the OECD average, [which] suggests that Australia's curriculum has been significantly expanded by other content, making it "overcrowded".⁹⁴

2.4 This was a recurring theme throughout much of the evidence gathered by the committee, with the curriculum being described as:

- 'overloaded with content and too explicitly prescribed'⁹⁵
- 'content driven', 'with too many dot points to cover'⁹⁶

2.5 Dr Fiona Mueller, Adjunct Scholar with the Centre for Independent Studies and former Director of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority

⁹³ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum* (April 2020), p 24.

⁹⁴ Submission 25, Australian Catholic University, p 2.

⁹⁵ Submission 35, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, p 4.

⁹⁶ Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 4.

(ACARA) advised the committee that in her view, the existing English curriculum is a priority candidate for decluttering:

The English curriculum is where we should start. ... When we talk about decluttering the curriculum, that is absolutely needed in that area. There is way too much waffle and long generic lists of skills that students are supposed to practice and acquire. There is nothing that really reflects a rigorous approach to the acquisition of English language and, of course, encourages reading and all of those things.⁹⁷

Breadth versus depth and lack of time

2.6 Another key theme was concern with the current emphasis on breadth of content at the expense of depth, and the implications for effective use of classroom time. According to the Mathematical Association of New South Wales, syllabuses that are content-heavy with a large number of dot point requirements lead to 'surface' teaching and learning:

... because of the large number of syllabus dot points, teachers feel they have to teach every dot point leading to surface teaching and learning ... which often means that children do not have enough time to process what they have been taught.⁹⁸

2.7 Similarly, in expressing his support for the Masters review, Dr John Collier, Chair of the Anglican Education Commission and Headmaster of St Andrew's Cathedral School, advised the committee that the existing curriculum pursues breadth of content at the expense of depth and, in his view, thus is a significant contributor to poorer international rankings:

Where Australia is caught out in results such as the Program for International Student Assessment [PISA] is our inability in our current curriculum to pursue depth. So we need the opportunity to go into that depth and the only way that can be done is to abbreviate the amount of content that needs to be covered. We cannot have both breadth and depth simultaneously in the same block of time.⁹⁹

2.8 Closely related to the issue of breadth versus depth were concerns about lack of teaching time, be it as a result of the amount of content in the curriculum or what some identified as increasing compliance and reporting requirements on teachers:

- Adding her voice to calls for a leaner curriculum, Mrs Fran Bonanno, Vice President of the Association of Catholic School Principals and Principal of St Felix Primary School in Bankstown, told the committee that the acquisition of early literacy skills takes time and when there are too many 'competing agendas', teachers do not have sufficient time in the classroom to give early literacy the attention it deserves.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Evidence, Dr Fiona Mueller, Adjunct Scholar, Centre for Independent Studies and former Director of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 4 November 2020, p 7.

⁹⁸ Submission 45, Mathematical Association of New South Wales, p 1.

⁹⁹ Evidence, Dr John Collier, Chair, Anglican Education Commission and Headmaster, St Andrew's Cathedral School, 30 November 2020, pp 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ Evidence, Mrs Fran Bonanno, Vice President, Association of Catholic School Principals and Principal, St Felix Primary School, Bankstown, 4 November 2020, p 13.

- According to the Independent Education Union, one of the benefits of a less crowded curriculum would be to provide teachers with more time to explore content in greater depth.¹⁰¹
- The Federation of Parents and Citizens Association of NSW informed the committee that 'due to overcrowding there has been progressively less time to teach core concepts in depth' and that this is exacerbated by 'ever-increasing red tape.'¹⁰²
- Also pointing to reporting and compliance requirements, the Professional Teachers' Council NSW observed that 'Deep learning requires time. Many current syllabuses are overly content heavy. Compliance regimes impact on classroom practice to the extent that in many cases the Year 11-12 courses are a quick trip through the syllabus ticking off 'dot-points' as you go!¹⁰³

2.9 In his discussion paper, the Chair expressed concern that some of Professor Masters' recommendations were actually counterproductive to the stated aim of decluttering in so far as they advocated for extra syllabus content (not less) in some learning areas. The Chair's analysis is reproduced below.

Is Masters really decluttering the curriculum?¹⁰⁴

The major concern about the syllabus within schools is its breadth. There are too many 'nice to knows' in the curriculum, as schools call them – the bits that would be taught if they had time. If teachers are spreading their class-time too thinly, students are denied opportunities for deep knowledge and conceptual understanding, the type of depth that sparks their learning interests and engagement.

De-cluttering the curriculum has also been the Government's mantra: a back-to-basics approach for literacy and numeracy in particular. Unfortunately, the Masters Report fails to advance detailed recommendations in this regard. In some cases, Masters heads in the opposite direction, advocating extra syllabus content in the following areas:

- a theory component in vocational education;
- a practical component in academic subjects;
- more identity politics via proposals for an 'Inclusive Curriculum' and 'Recognition of Diversity';
- every student being required to learn more of 'Aboriginal cultures and histories', incorporated into Human Society and its Environment (without a critique of why current syllabuses are inadequate);
- Year 12 students undertaking a Major Investigative Project, without any evidence of benefits flowing from such a commitment, especially from other state systems that have tried this approach;
- legitimising the 'social development' role of schools, taking up teaching time and resources in various forms of health and pastoral care; and

¹⁰¹ Submission 34, Independent Education Union, p 5.

¹⁰² Submission 58, Federation of Parents and Citizens Association of NSW, pp 2 and 9.

¹⁰³ Submission 72, Professional Teachers' Council NSW, p 3.

¹⁰⁴ Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, NSW Legislative Council, *Review of the New South Wales school curriculum: Chair's discussion paper* (2020), pp 17-18.

- requiring every student to commence a second language during the primary years (Noted, but not supported by Cabinet).

Then there are the transitional costs in redesigning every NSW school syllabus, plus implementing experimental ideas like Progression Points. This is not de-cluttering but a laborious exercise in taking NSW schools down an unproven curriculum pathway. None of the Masters proposals listed above are needed. His task was to take things out of the syllabus, not add items devoid of an evidence base. This is how the system got into trouble in the first place.

Making it genuine this time

2.10 Numerous inquiry participants pointed to less than satisfactory experiences of curriculum reform. Some cast doubt on the idea that curriculum decluttering, as it is presented in the context of the Masters review, is a novel reform, suggesting instead that syllabuses are constantly being reworked and updated by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), often impacting on teachers' workloads.¹⁰⁵

2.11 Expressing a similar view, Mrs Margaret Shepherd, President of the Science Teachers Association of NSW highlighted that, as recently as 2018, a new, ostensibly 'less cluttered' stage 6 science syllabus was released for implementation but it actually contained 'too much' content, largely because of pressure from the university sector:

[O]ver the years we have had the same argument about too much being in the syllabus, too much content in the syllabus. In science we got our new stage 6 syllabuses to be implemented in 2018, year 11, so 2020 is our second HSC group, for example. Now there is too much in these syllabuses, although we were told that they were less cluttered than before. It comes down to the pressure that NESA gets put under by external providers. Universities all decide that no, this has to be taught at school, and therefore it comes down to us eventually.¹⁰⁶

2.12 The impact on teachers of this 'constant cycling' of syllabus updates was highlighted in evidence by Ms Karen McDaid, President of the Mathematical Association of NSW. Ms McDaid told the committee that since 2009, various syllabuses, including mathematics had been undergoing continual changes – and noted concerns about teacher burnout as a result:

That has been a constant process right up to today. There are concerns about teachers being burnt out, and about them throwing their hands in the air and saying, "Tell me what I have got to do and let me go and do it." I do not know that that is the most effective way. We need to engage our educators. We need to engage the students.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ See for example evidence, Mr Bob Willets, Principal, Berry Public School, 4 November 2020, p 12.

¹⁰⁶ Evidence, Mrs Margaret Shepherd, President, Science Teachers Association of NSW, 30 November 2020, p 35.

¹⁰⁷ Evidence, Ms Karen McDaid, President, Mathematical Association of NSW, 30 November 2020, p 39.

- 2.13** Sounding a similar note, another participant argued that because of the frequent updates and revisions over the last five years, teachers have not been able to develop a deep understanding of each syllabus due to a lack of time or professional learning and support.¹⁰⁸
- 2.14** Mr Grant Byrne, President of the Institute of Technology Education, told the committee that past changes to the technology curriculum have received a mixed reception among teachers, and that the streamlining process resulted in the loss of certain things that, in the opinion of some, should have been retained.¹⁰⁹

Committee comment

- 2.15** In the committee's view, as the Masters review did not examine the content of the New South Wales curriculum, opportunities were missed for abandoning unnecessary, inappropriate and superfluous content as part of the 'decluttering' process.
- 2.16** If past experience is any guide, in its net impact on the syllabus, it is unlikely the Masters recommendations will achieve their stated goal of decluttering the curriculum. In the work that NESA is now undertaking in rewriting syllabuses, it will need to find other ways of achieving this objective.
- 2.17** The committee concurs with evidence about the crowded nature of the existing curriculum and notes with concern its impact on teaching practice. As it stands, the NSW school curriculum works against in-depth teaching of rich knowledge and key concepts, to the detriment of students. The committee heard evidence that this is the case in terms of early literacy learning, right through to the specialised subjects of later high school.
- 2.18** It is clear to the committee that syllabus reform attempted in the recent past has been without success. In order to truly make a difference, the present decluttering reforms must learn from previous attempts, clearly define what success looks like and maintain an uncompromising focus on core facts, rich knowledge and deep comprehension within a 'back-to-basics' framework. Material that detracts from the teaching of rich knowledge and deep comprehension of academic skills should be forensically examined for its value and removed.

Finding 14

That the Masters review missed a critical opportunity to abandon unnecessary, inappropriate and superfluous content as part of the 'decluttering' process.

Finding 15

That the Masters recommendations are unlikely to achieve their stated goal of decluttering the curriculum. In the work that the NSW Education Standards Authority is now undertaking to rewrite syllabuses, it will need to find other ways of achieving this objective, as per the recommendations of this report.

¹⁰⁸ Submission 32, name suppressed, p 10.

¹⁰⁹ Evidence, Mr Grant Byrne, President, Institute of Technology Education, 30 November 2020, pp 37-38.

Finding 16

That, owing to its structure and crowded nature, the existing curriculum does not allow for in-depth teaching of rich knowledge and key concepts. Material that detracts from the teaching of rich knowledge and deep comprehension of academic skills must be removed.

Recommendation 13

That the NSW Government ensure that the present decluttering reforms learn from previous attempts, clearly define what success looks like and maintain an uncompromising focus on core facts, rich knowledge and deep comprehension within a 'back-to-basics' framework. Material that detracts from the teaching of rich knowledge and deep comprehension of academic skills should be forensically examined for its value and removed.

Returning to core learning

2.19 Stakeholders identified a number of priorities for how the curriculum should be better focused to return to core learning. Numerous participants considered that schooling has become too focused on the social needs of students, for example.

2.20 When asked about existing obstacles to deep teaching and learning in the curriculum, Dr John Collier suggested that the expanding role of schools in addressing social issues (as noted in chapter 1) competes with the priority of teaching core academic skills:

That comes to a debate about the whole purpose of education and we have a difficulty with that partly because on the one hand we want schools to be able to focus, I think, on teaching and learning and excellence in that area. On the other hand, as Mr Kinsella has said, if students are starving, then they are not in a position to learn so schools, because of their care for individual children, give time to ameliorating those concerns. But a relevant question is: Should schools be doing bike education, for instance? I do not want to particularly pick on bike education. It is just an example. Should schools be taking up time to do that instead of teaching literacy, numeracy and other cognate areas? That is an area where there needs to be debate and discussion, I think.¹¹⁰

2.21 According to Dr Collier, this is essentially a debate about to what extent schools are about teaching and learning and to what extent are they about 'ameliorating social issues and covering grounds that used to be held by other institutions that are now in decline.'¹¹¹

2.22 Referring to the void that schools have been expected to fill as the traditional pillars of society have become less stable, the Anglican Education Commission gave evidence that the 'broader curriculum of schools and the limited resources available in schools have been diverted to address these broader social issues.' The Commission cited breakfast programs, morning

¹¹⁰ Evidence, Dr Collier, 30 November 2020, p 10.

¹¹¹ Evidence, Dr Collier, 30 November 2020, p 10.

exercise programs, student wellbeing, gender identity and financial literacy (among other things) as examples of 'crowding' from a whole-of-curriculum perspective.¹¹²

- 2.23** On the other hand, the suggestion that initiatives like breakfast programs in schools are 'clutter' in so far as they compete with or take resources away from academic learning, was challenged by other inquiry participants. Ms Maura Manning expressed the view that breakfast programs before school are 'essential', 'not something you can simply declutter' and not something that competes with learning, but actually complements it.¹¹³ The issue of the proper responsibilities of schools towards students is discussed in detail in chapter 1.
- 2.24** With respect to programs such as financial literacy, Ms Manning was of the opinion that '...that is all considered and it needs to be embedded in our curriculum areas and not seen as extra things, but we do have to make choices about what is taught.'¹¹⁴
- 2.25** In evidence to the committee, Mrs Bonanno distinguished between what she considered to be, on one hand, core content in syllabus and, on the other, 'the extras' that have been added over time. She observed that, with some syllabus documents, the extras have become the syllabus such that teachers 'lose sight of what the main outcome was.'¹¹⁵ Mrs Bonanno advocated for a greater focus on core content as the driver for more effective teaching and learning:

So being able to strip away a lot of the clutter, make it more explicit, will enable teachers and I think schools and systems to develop and design professional learning for teachers that will better enable them to deliver content that is more focused on a narrower, neater curriculum.¹¹⁶

Ignoring fads

- 2.26** Mr Ashman suggested that passing fascination with high profile news, current affairs or world events can sometimes result in calls for 'big news stories' to be added to the school curriculum. Referring to a process where 'some things are parachuted into the curriculum', he informed the committee that '[a]s teachers, we often roll our eyes, if there has been a big news story, all of a sudden people argue that it should be on the school curriculum.'¹¹⁷
- 2.27** This concern about the curriculum content being too susceptible to ephemera or fads in world events was highlighted in the Chair's discussion paper for the present inquiry, with particular reference to a 'Pro-democracy Movement in Burma 1945–2010' course which entered the year 12 history curriculum when this movement and its leader were politically *en vogue*.¹¹⁸ In so far as this content detracts from core knowledge and critical concepts, it may be considered yet another source of 'clutter' in the curriculum.

¹¹² Submission 55, Anglican Education Commission, p 3.

¹¹³ Evidence, Ms Manning, 30 November 2020, p 13.

¹¹⁴ Evidence, Ms Manning, 30 November 2020, p 13.

¹¹⁵ Evidence, Mrs Bonanno, 4 November 2020, p 13.

¹¹⁶ Evidence, Mrs Bonanno, 4 November 2020, p 13.

¹¹⁷ Evidence, Mr Greg Ashman, private citizen, 4 November 2020, p 5.

¹¹⁸ Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, *Review of the New South Wales school curriculum: Chair's discussion paper*, p 27.

Abandoning the cross curriculum priorities

- 2.28** In chapter 3 the committee examines the value of the cross curriculum priorities dictated by the Australian curriculum and recommends that they be abandoned.
- 2.29** The Institute of Public Affairs singled out cross-curriculum priorities as contributing to overcrowding in the curriculum, arguing that they have an ideological agenda and are actually counterproductive, and therefore, should be abolished:

Not only are the cross-curriculum priorities ideologically driven, but they also serve no other purpose than to overcrowd an already crowded curriculum. The syllabus reveals that they are shoe-horned into every learning area with complete disregard for the actual subject matter.¹¹⁹

- 2.30** Reflecting on the course descriptions for K-10 mathematics, the Institute characterised the integration of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priority into that curriculum as 'a tokenistic and artificial shoehorning' of Indigenous content into the syllabus which actually undermines the acquisition of skills, and explicitly linked the priorities to declining school performance:

The addition of an extra element into the lesson detracts from the acquisition of real skills, such as literacy and numeracy, which are the fundamental building blocks of education. This has been proven over the last 18 years, during which time standards in reading, science, and mathematics across every socio-economic quartile— and in government, Catholic and independent schools—have been falling across Australia.¹²⁰

Reducing the number of courses

- 2.31** In seeking to understand what other content might be deemed 'clutter', the committee considered whether some or any of the 255 School Developed Board Endorsed Courses in New South Wales – such as electives in leather, puppetry and wearable art – might be contributing to overcrowding in the curriculum and competing for already stretched school resources and teacher time.
- 2.32** In particular, the committee noted the NSW Government's commitment to reduce the number of these courses in recognition of the fact that they divert valuable teaching time away from core learning areas. In response to questions in the Upper House in July 2020, Minister Mitchell noted that only three schools were offering leather, puppetry and wearable art and advised the House of the NSW Government's target for reducing the number of these courses on offer:

In 2020, the number of New South Wales high schools which are endorsed to offer elective course options in Puppetry, Leather and Wearable Art are:

- (a) Puppetry - 1 school
- (b) Leather - 1 school
- (c) Wearable art - 1 school

In responding to the NSW Curriculum Review, the NSW Government has decided that many [School Developed Board Endorsed Courses] divert valuable teaching time away

¹¹⁹ Submission 36, Institute of Public Affairs, p 4.

¹²⁰ Submission 36, Institute of Public Affairs, p 5.

from core learning areas. Consequently, the government has committed to reducing the number of SDBECs by 20% by 2021.¹²¹

Committee comment

- 2.33** While the committee welcomes the reduction of School Developed Board Endorsed Courses, in light of Minister Mitchell's answers in the House, we consider that reducing their number will be largely ineffective in achieving the NSW Government's stated objective of decluttering the curriculum. Given the small number of schools offering the courses in question, this will be of negligible benefit. The NSW Department of Education and NESAs need to go much further in their drive to declutter.

Finding 17

That reducing the number of School Developed Board Endorsed Courses, as pledged by the NSW Government, while welcome, will nonetheless do little to achieve genuine decluttering of the New South Wales curriculum.

Getting rid of the 'fluff'

- 2.34** Mr Ashman highlighted the 'fluff' present in the curriculum, which he considers to be of far less educational value than rich foundational knowledge,¹²² similarly, Ms Mueller pointed to 'waffle'.¹²³ The former noted the onerous detail in the syllabus documents themselves, which may not bear out in the classroom:

There is a lot of stuff that you have to wade through in these curriculum documents—the difference between the curriculum as written in something like the Australian curriculum or the New South Wales version of that and what is actually enacted in the classroom. Essentially, we need to make some firm decisions about what content we want in there.¹²⁴

- 2.35** Focusing on the national science curriculum as a case in point, Mr Ashman highlighted 'vacuous and meaningless' content that, in his view, should be abandoned:

At first viewing, the Australian Curriculum, on which all state curriculums are meant to be based, does not appear to be brimming over with knowledge. Examine, for instance, the science curriculum. One third of this is what we might traditionally call 'science'. Another third is about the methods scientists use for testing their ideas – the scientific method. This has some value and students should learn about it, but should it really occupy a third of the curriculum focus? The final third is waffly stuff on, 'Science as a human endeavour' which includes such platitudinous truisms as, "Scientific knowledge

¹²¹ Questions and Answers Paper, NSW Legislative Council, 14 July 2020, p 2589.

¹²² Submission 12, Mr Greg Ashman, p 3.

¹²³ Evidence, Dr Mueller, 4 November 2020, p 7.

¹²⁴ Evidence, Mr Ashman, 4 November 2020, p 3.

has changed peoples' understanding of the world" and that seems to have been inserted in a misguided attempt to make science more like the humanities.¹²⁵

- 2.36** Mr Ashman went on to underscore the imperative to replace the waffle with rich scientific knowledge. He did, however, highlight the danger that in the current environment, it may be the waffle that is retained:

So, if by decluttering, we mean stripping away fluff, returning to well-defined subjects and ensuring a rich well of knowledge within each subject, then this would be a good thing. If we mean further degrading the already degraded knowledge component of the curriculum, then we will only make matters worse.¹²⁶

- 2.37** Behind much of the 'fluff' is the more malignant issue of political content. In his discussion paper to this inquiry, the Chair noted that in 2019 the then Chair of NESA stated that the Masters report would tackle the problem of post-modernist, political content in NSW syllabuses, but that this had not actually occurred. The Chair went on to present an analysis of the content of the English, history and science curricula, and in classroom practice, noting that the clutter and ideology present there failed to be addressed by the Masters review. In the box below, the committee presents an analysis of some of the content of the science curriculum, consistent with Mr Ashman's views and drawing on the Chair's discussion paper. The Chair's analysis of the English is reproduced later in the chapter, while the history syllabus was addressed in the previous chapter.

Science

The national requirements of the science curriculum overegg the social context of science. This plays out in a disproportionate focus on 'society' in the NSW Science curriculum, as reflected in the examples below, at the expense of real science and scientific method:

As students actively engage in the processes of Working Scientifically, they gain an increased appreciation and understanding of the importance of science in their own lives and society, locally and globally.¹²⁷

By the end of Stage 5 students describe how the values and needs of contemporary society can influence the focus of scientific research and technological development in a variety of areas, including efficiency of use of electricity and non-renewable energy sources, the development of new materials, biotechnology, and plant, animal and human health.¹²⁸

The science syllabus is an excellent example of the contrived insertion of the national cross curriculum priorities into the curriculum that distorts the application of core learning, and erodes the learning that students really need. Neither Indigenous histories and cultures nor Australia's engagement with Asia have much relevance for school science; while sustainability has more, its presence is overinflated. Each wastes valuable curriculum space and class time.

¹²⁵ Submission 12, Mr Greg Ashman, p 3.

¹²⁶ Submission 12, Mr Greg Ashman, pp 3-4; see also Evidence, Mr Ashman, 4 November 2020, p 3.

¹²⁷ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Science Years 7-10 Syllabus*, p 10.

¹²⁸ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Science Years 7-10 Syllabus*, p 21.

The goal of developing intercultural understanding is also a long stretch for the school laboratories across the state:

This involves students valuing their own cultures and those of others, and engaging with people of diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections and cultivate respect. The *Science Years 7–10 Syllabus* provides opportunities for students to appreciate the contribution that diverse cultural perspectives have made to the development, breadth and diversity of scientific and technological knowledge and applications. Students learn about and engage with issues requiring cultural sensitivity, and learn that scientists work in culturally diverse teams to address issues and solve problems of national and international importance.¹²⁹

Too much of the curriculum has become an exercise in virtue signalling. In 2018, for example, ACARA published 95 ways in which science teachers can incorporate Indigenous culture in their lessons. While Aboriginal fire techniques, knowledge of celestial bodies and spear throwing have a valid place in subjects such as Aboriginal studies, these are not core to the learning of science.

- 2.38** Dr John Collier of the Anglican Education Commission spoke of the risk that through a detailed consultation process on what is to be decluttered, the outcome will be the 'lowest common denominator' that actually results in a poorer outcome:

There is the danger with the Masters review that it will go through a great deal of stakeholder consultation which, in effect, dilutes the impact of the review. I think we have seen this with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA] curriculum where multiple stakeholder groups assert their own propositions as to what must be retained. Usually the outcome of that is a somewhat lowest common denominator, where instead of diminishing the content we maintain a very wide sweep of content to satisfy all stakeholder groups, and therefore we actually end up in a position that is the opposite of what Masters has argued.¹³⁰

- 2.39** Evidence from the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales suggested that some interest groups have in the past exerted undue or excessive influence over the curriculum, and that a robust decluttering methodology will be necessary to ensure this does not happen again:

Like most stakeholders, we agree that the curriculum has become overcrowded, and we agree with the NSW Curriculum Review's recommendations to address this as far as they go. However, any reduction in syllabus content should be measured and made based on a solid well thought out methodology that will help remove some of the excessive influence of interest groups.¹³¹

¹²⁹ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Science Years 7-10 Syllabus*, p 30.

¹³⁰ Evidence, Dr Collier, 30 November 2020, p 4.

¹³¹ Submission 58, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, p 8.

English¹³²

The English curriculum has become more like a tutorial in identity politics than the development of comprehension and writing skills. Studying the great works of English literature has also become optional. If students choose to study politics at university, good luck to them. But it shouldn't be compulsory during their school years under the fraudulent banner of 'English'.

Large parts of the NSW high school English syllabus now focus on identity issues, promoting gender theory and the politics of 'diversity'. The curriculum stresses how, 'Students experience and value difference and diversity in their everyday lives. Age, beliefs, gender, language and race are some of the factors that comprise difference and diversity. English provides students with opportunities to deal with difference and diversity in a positive and informed manner, showing awareness, understanding and acceptance.'

Students are asked to 'Identify the ways in which cultural assumption is presented in texts, for example, gender, religion, disability and culture.' The 'conventions of speech' are said to 'influence community identity' while language 'embodies assumptions about issues such as gender, ethnicity and class.'

Multimedia, film, animation and speech studies have been introduced, usually with intensely political content, such as the actress Emma Watson's address to the United Nations promoting Left-feminism. The class time allocated for studying the classics of prose, plays and poetry has been substantially reduced. For Years 7-10 students, the NSW syllabus contains no requirement for reading novels, let alone the great works. What a tragedy for our society: teenagers who will never experience the mastery of a Dickens, Orwell or George Johnston.

For the few classics that remain in the classroom, they have been recast through the prism of Leftist politics. Even the meaning of Emily Bronte's work has been rewritten. In the NSW curriculum, 'Wuthering Heights is traditionally read as a novel about intense human relationships but contemporary alternative readings include a political reading, seeing it as a novel of social class and bourgeois exploitation in Victorian England and a gendered reading, with gender stereotypes.' Little did Cathy realise she was coming home to a tutorial in cultural Marxism.

In Year 10 English, students have to answer the question, 'Is This Who We Really Are?' as part of a unit on 'Media Gender Representations'. The course aims to 'make young people aware that besides media representations, gender stereotypes also exist and are perpetuated by many factors, such as peer pressure, family upbringing, culture and tradition.' This is not education, but an attempt to push young people away from observable truths in their lives, in favour of post-modernist propaganda.

Like the discredited Safe Schools program, it seeks to pressure students into disregarding the things they have learnt in the family home. The unit presents students with a list of so-called gendered adjectives, including 'clever', 'decisive', 'responsible', 'hardworking', 'leader' and even 'frigid' – a bizarre English exercise in sex education. There is no evidence of words such as these being 'gendered' (even if that mattered in the teaching of English).

In Years 11 and 12, post-modernist texts have become common, such as Alain de Botton's ridiculous 'The Art of Travel'. The author constantly complains of how the things he is witnessing as a tourist

are not real. Yet if there is one thing in our lives that is practically self-apparent it's the act of travelling and witnessing firsthand famous places. No one pays good money for tourism to believe that nothing is real.

This is typical of the post-modernist agenda: encouraging students to believe that all they know and feel about themselves and society is inherently fluid, that there is no valid reality in their young lives. This is not the study of English, but a weird attempt at indoctrination.

Committee comment

- 2.40** In the committee's view there is much to be done, beyond that recognised and recommended in the Masters review, to achieve the decluttering in the NSW school curriculum that is so necessary. Consistent with the many strong messages in the previous chapter and the views documented in this, the government must embrace a return to core learning, especially by ignoring fads, getting rid of the 'fluff' and excising the post-modern political content that pervades the curriculum.
- 2.41** The committee recommends as a first step that the NSW Government explicitly acknowledge that the greatest gains in decluttering will be made from detailed, rigorous analysis of the syllabus, in other words, a back to basics approach to teaching facts, skills and deep knowledge, and matched with this, removing superfluous material. The committee further recommends that the Government instruct NESA to undertake curriculum decluttering in this manner, with priority afforded to learning facts, deep knowledge and areas that are foundational to learning, such as numeracy, literacy and comprehension skills.
- 2.42** Specifically, these recommendations call for the excision of the following from the curriculum: the cross curriculum priorities; material said to be a 'socially constructed' form of knowledge, science and history; overtly political content; identity politics, with its divisive impact on society; a post-modernist emphasis on 'language as power' and 'the art of meaning' in English; the over-emphasis on source analysis in History; and subjects constantly needing to position themselves 'in society', such as 'Science in Society'.
- 2.43** In the committee's view, Minister Mitchell's concerns about the excessive use of overtly political content in New South Wales schools are valid. In high school English, for instance, political material is often introduced masquerading as 'stimulus' and 'comprehension' items. We used to have one of the best secondary English curricula in the world. But now in many schools, English has become a tutorial in gender studies and other forms of identity politics.
- 2.44** With regard to returning to core learning, as we noted in the previous chapter, the committee is encouraged by the evidence based shift reflected in the draft Kindergarten to Year 2 curriculum released in March 2021 for implementation in 2022, and the Minister's statement that it reflects a new evidence based focus on core learning. The committee again underscores that this must occur across the entire curriculum.

¹³² Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, *Review of the New South Wales school curriculum: Chair's discussion paper*, pp 30-31.

- 2.45** In the committee's view, knowledge and curriculum content must be factual and evidence-based, drawing on the best work of the academies over centuries. It must not reflect post-modernist theories of knowledge being 'socially constructed'. This is, in fact, an anti-educational doctrine: telling students that everything we know about ourselves, our history and our society has in some way been fabricated; that it cannot be trusted. It causes confusion and distrust among school students.
- 2.46** As a priority, post-modernism and identity politics must be removed from the NSW English curriculum. Primacy must be given to literacy, comprehension and writing skills. Secondary students need to study the great works of our civilisation, the literacy classics that tell us who we are and the creative ways that our culture expresses itself.
- 2.47** Our recommendations highlight the imperative to guard against re-cluttering the curriculum by allowing non-academic and non-vocational courses to work their way into the school syllabus and be taught in class time. This is a very real danger. When we finally get back to basics and focus on core learning and deep knowledge, we must be vigilant in preventing the 'fluff' and fads, as well as the political content, from re-entering. In the committee's view, the best guard against this will be a requirement for any potential new content to be judged against an evidence base. To this end, we recommend that the NSW Government adopt a clear policy statement which identifies 'big news stories' and topical current affairs, as well as the tendency to see schools as a repository for addressing social issues, as key areas of risk for clutter to find its way back into the curriculum. As part of this policy statement, the NSW Government and NESA should ensure that any proposals for new syllabus material are assessed against a proven evidence base, testing the fundamental proposition: will the proposed change enhance student academic and vocational outcomes?

Finding 18

That knowledge and curriculum content must be factual and evidence-based, drawing on the best work of the academies over centuries. It must not reflect post-modernist theories of knowledge being 'socially constructed'. This is an anti-educational doctrine causing confusion and distrust among school students.

Recommendation 14

That the NSW Government explicitly acknowledge the greatest gains in decluttering the curriculum will come from detailed, rigorous syllabus analysis (unfortunately ignored by the Masters review) – that is, a ‘back to basics’ approach teaching facts, skills and deep knowledge to students, and removing superfluous material, especially:

- cross-curriculum priorities (especially with the creation of a new stand-alone Indigenous course)
- material said to be a ‘socially constructed’ form of knowledge, science and history
- overtly political content
- identity politics, with its divisive impact on society
- a post-modernist emphasis on ‘language as power’ and ‘the art of meaning’ in English
- over-emphasis on source analysis in history
- subjects constantly needing to position themselves ‘in society’, such as ‘science in society’ (thereby introducing unnecessary political content)
- substantially reducing the long list of syllabus dot points and generic skill requirements.

Recommendation 15

That the NSW Government instruct the NSW Education Standards Authority to undertake curriculum decluttering in a manner consistent with the recommendations of this report. The NSW Government and NSW Education Standards Authority must also ensure there is no re-cluttering of the curriculum, the incremental process whereby new subjects and courses are loaded into syllabuses. The committee recommends that the NSW Government adopt a clear policy statement in this regard, prohibiting future re-cluttering by identifying two main culprits:

- a) caving into knee-jerk political and media pressure points about the latest 'big news story' by announcing that schools will now study this subject area
- b) using schools as a repository for addressing miscellaneous social issues (usually in health, law and order, fad ideological campaigns and social engineering) through the introduction of non-academic and non-vocational courses and content.

Further, as part of this policy statement, that the NSW Government and NSW Education Standards Authority ensure that any proposals for new syllabus material are assessed against a proven evidence base, testing the fundamental proposition: will the proposed change enhance student academic and vocational outcomes?

Recommendation 16

That Minister Mitchell’s stated goal of removing overtly political content from New South Wales schools apply, first and foremost, to the English syllabus and its learning materials, so that political material is not allowed to masquerade as ‘stimulus’ and ‘comprehension’ items.

Chapter 3 Key recommendations of the Masters review

Chapter 1 outlined the key recommendations from the Masters review and the NSW Government's response to them. This chapter examines some of the review's key recommendations in more detail, including for untimed syllabuses, integration of knowledge and skills, mandatory study of a second language, the cross-curriculum priorities, mandatory undertaking of a major project and the future of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). In respect of each of the recommendations, the chapter first notes the rationale and policy objective and then explores stakeholder and committee commentary in response.

Untimed syllabuses

- 3.1** One of the most significant recommendations of the Masters review was progression based on attainment. As detailed in the committee's discussion paper, the review determined that the current process of New South Wales students progressing to the next syllabus, based on the end of a school year, could hinder their learning by either under or over challenging them.
- 3.2** The review determined that a limitation of the current practice was that many students are required to move up to the next year's syllabus without mastering the current syllabus. It said, 'These students often fall increasingly far behind with each year of school and fail to make the progress they otherwise could'.¹³³
- 3.3** The review thus made the following recommendation about untimed syllabuses:
- 3.1** Make new syllabuses untimed, with students progressing to the next syllabus once they have mastered the prior syllabus. Students who require more time should have it; students ready to advance should be able to do so.
- 3.4** The review proposed an 'untimed syllabus' which would require teachers to 'determine when students have achieved a syllabus and are ready to move to the next'¹³⁴ and that teachers' ability to differentiate and personalise learning to each student was key to success.¹³⁵
- 3.5** A consequence of this new system would be that students in the same year of school may not all be studying the same syllabus at the same time. The review explained that the underlying principle was to maximise learning where students were presented with appropriately challenging material.¹³⁶

¹³³ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion – Designs for a new school curriculum* (April 2020), p xv.

¹³⁴ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xv.

¹³⁵ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p 21.

¹³⁶ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xv.

3.6 In its response, the NSW Government initially supported this recommendation in principle and advised that it would seek further advice from the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).¹³⁷

3.7 However in February 2021, media reported that whilst the NSW Government saw 'merit' in the idea, the recommendation would not be implemented but trialled on a small-scale basis instead.¹³⁸

3.8 Following this, the Minister for Education, the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, explained in Question Time that the NSW Government's decision was based on NESA's research:

We asked [NESA] to investigate how the model is used in other jurisdictions and provide advice on its advantages and disadvantages compared to alternative ways of addressing the problems it aims to solve. The research found that although there is wide variation in student attainment levels in classrooms, and this variation can create challenges for teachers, there is insufficient evidence that the untimed syllabus model as proposed will have a positive impact.¹³⁹

3.9 The Minister confirmed that the NSW Government would 'still be delivering on the intent of Masters' recommendation [by] ensuring that learning is differentiated to support students where they are at'¹⁴⁰ but not through untimed syllabuses:

We can achieve this outcome within year levels and a stage-based syllabus through a reduction of content and an explicit outline of the core learning expected for each stage, ensuring prioritised knowledge and skills are not just taught once; making learning progressions more useful to teachers by aligning curriculum; personalising learning programs and support materials to provide teaching strategies to help target students where they are at; appropriate sequencing of learning with clear links across outcomes and stages; and support for teachers to identify and support students' progress in that sequence.¹⁴¹

3.10 At a Budget Estimates hearing in March 2021, the Minister reiterated that whilst a 'small trial' had been agreed to, untimed syllabuses 'is not something that we are doing as part of the rollout of the curriculum review over the next four years'.¹⁴²

3.11 In addition, Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive Officer of NESA, described untimed syllabuses as 'reform that was unnecessary', but advised that the trial would be carried out to conduct and gather further research on the issue:

However, there were also some arguments that untimed syllabuses, having not had a significant amount of evidence behind it—there were a number of schools and students

¹³⁷ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review final report* (June 2020), p 17.

¹³⁸ Natassia Chrysanthos, 'Radical syllabus shake-up significantly wound back', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 February 2021, p 6.

¹³⁹ *Hansard*, NSW Legislative Council, 17 February 2021, p 22 (Sarah Mitchell).

¹⁴⁰ *Hansard*, NSW Legislative Council, 17 February 2021, p 21 (Sarah Mitchell).

¹⁴¹ *Hansard*, NSW Legislative Council, 17 February 2021, p 22 (Sarah Mitchell).

¹⁴² Evidence, Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education, Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, Budget Estimates 2020-2021, 3 March 2021, pp 43-44.

and teachers, and perhaps around the board, who thought that some pilots might be undertaken, voluntary and on a small scale, to see whether anything could be gleaned from that information.¹⁴³

- 3.12** The department was not able to address the practicalities of the untimed syllabus model in any clear detail. For example, the committee asked representatives in March 2021 what would happen to a child if they had been educated at the Lindfield Learning Village, but then had to move to a school which didn't have untimed syllabuses or the progression points model. The Secretary of the Department of Education's response to the serious possibility of disruption to the child's learning was:

I think what the advice would be, and I think the real test is for any student leaving school, that good information on that child's level of attainment is being passed on from the school they are leaving—in this case Lindfield—to the new school they are going to.¹⁴⁴

Stakeholder views

- 3.13** The majority of inquiry participants agreed that children learn at different rates and in different ways, with some very supportive of the introduction of untimed syllabuses. For example, Dr John Collier, Chair of the Anglican Education Commission and Headmaster of St Andrew's Cathedral School, described the idea as 'educationally excellent'¹⁴⁵ and Ms Jenny Allum, Chair of the NSW Association of Independent Schools' Curriculum Review Working Group, saw it as an opportunity to 'explore a whole range of different models, and different schools could do different things'.¹⁴⁶
- 3.14** However, Dr Collier and other stakeholders raised that any change to the current methods of learning would require adequate resources and time for implementation. Issues identified included increased teacher workloads, the need for additional teaching resources and for education of children and their families about the change itself, as well as adequate time to meaningfully roll out the scheme. Dr Collier highlighted that a 'good deal of thinking' and time would be required because of the 'considerable difficulties for schools organisationally and structurally' in adapting to this reform.¹⁴⁷
- 3.15** The significance of systemic change required to enable the reform was highlighted by Mr Stephen Kinsella, Executive Director of the Anglican Education Commission, who explained that the recommendation proposed a whole new school structure and that it required an 'unified approach' from all participants to achieve the desired outcome:

¹⁴³ Evidence, Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority, Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, Budget Estimates 2020-2021, 3 March 2021, p 43.

¹⁴⁴ Evidence, Mr Mark Scott, Secretary, Department of Education, Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, Budget Estimates 2020-2021, 3 March 2021, p 43.

¹⁴⁵ Evidence, Dr John Collier, Chair of the Anglican Education Commission and Headmaster of St Andrew's Cathedral School, 30 November 2020, p 5.

¹⁴⁶ Evidence, Ms Jenny Allum, Chair, Curriculum Review Working Group, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, 30 November 2020, p 4.

¹⁴⁷ Evidence, Dr Collier, 30 November 2020, p 5.

If we are going to say students need to learn at the pace that is appropriate for them—be it quicker or slower—then we have to rethink how our schools are built, we have to rethink how our timetables are constructed, we need to rethink how our teachers are upskilled in this new world and we need to understand that there will be a lot of work to be done with, for example, families. Families might say, "That is a great idea but I don't want my child to be held back or advanced." It is not just one concept, there is a whole lot of things that need to be done around it to achieve the outcome.¹⁴⁸

- 3.16** According to Mr Kinsella, untimed syllabuses and a new approach to teaching and learning would also require a new funding structure, specifically additional funds for teachers' salaries, training and resources.¹⁴⁹ The Mathematical Association of New South Wales also raised this concern about increased teacher workloads:

... there is concern that differentiating for every student based on the numerous progression points in every lesson, will be problematic from an organisational and workload perspective. Concerns are around the amount of planning, preparation, assessment, and programming required to support students, even for very experienced teachers.¹⁵⁰

- 3.17** The Society and Culture Association of NSW suggested that students' learning might be compromised when their teachers' time was overstretched as a result of having to deliver a tailored syllabus for individual students.¹⁵¹

- 3.18** Teacher groups argued that whilst not currently prescribed in the curriculum, teachers already cater to students who are progressing at differing levels, creating pathways for them. Ms Maura Manning, Executive Director of Catholic Education in the Diocese of Parramatta gave an example of teachers tailoring their methods depending on the students:

So we know that there are kids in year groups who are not at that level of the curriculum, and what the teacher does is tailors the response for those children—or child—in that class to ensure the kids can meaningfully engage at the level that helps build their esteem and helps to build them as learners.¹⁵²

- 3.19** Another issue raised by educational organisations was how levels of attainment would be determined, which they noted is missing from the review. For example, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta questioned whether levels of attainment-based progression would be based on a complete mastery of the syllabus, whether 80 per cent would be sufficient, or whether attainment levels be based on 'knowledge or skills or understanding or application of understanding or all of these?'¹⁵³ This issue has also been explored in the committee's discussion paper.

¹⁴⁸ Evidence, Mr Stephen Kinsella, Executive Director of the Anglican Education Commission, 30 November 2020, p 4.

¹⁴⁹ Evidence, Mr Kinsella, 30 November 2020, p 10.

¹⁵⁰ Submission 45, Mathematical Association of New South Wales, p 1.

¹⁵¹ Submission 62, Society and Culture Association of NSW, p 6.

¹⁵² Evidence, Ms Maura Manning, Executive Director of Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, 30 November 2020, p 14.

¹⁵³ Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 3.

- 3.20** Stakeholders were further concerned that the review lacked detail on the definitions and structure of the reform, as well as the implementation timeline.¹⁵⁴ As noted in chapter 2, Dr Ben Jensen, Chief Executive Officer of Learning First, highlighted the lack of research conducted on this topic and of the limited international examples where this model has succeeded.¹⁵⁵
- 3.21** When questioned on how untimed syllabuses could be rolled out in New South Wales schools, Professor Geoff Masters did not provide a practical example but explained in more abstract terms – that he envisaged a system of a 'sequence of levels' across both primary and secondary schools.¹⁵⁶ When pressed by the committee, Professor Masters agreed that '[t]here are practical questions that will need to be addressed' and a need to move 'cautiously'.¹⁵⁷
- 3.22** As distinct from streaming, Professor Masters suggested that the untimed syllabus model represented an 'inclusive curriculum' because every student would be working through the same sequence of levels, but would not be required to move in 'lock step' with their peers.¹⁵⁸
- 3.23** On the other hand, some inquiry participants raised alarm about the potential effects that this could have on students' self-esteem. The Anglican Education Commission suggested that students may wrongly be interpreted as 'slow' or having learning difficulties, noting, 'Delaying a student's progression in their learning may be right from an educational perspective but without the support of their social network ... the wellbeing of students could be significantly harmed.'¹⁵⁹
- 3.24** Professor Masters acknowledged to the committee that the adoption of untimed syllabuses would require careful planning, but warned against sticking with the status quo:

It is challenging. That is why I suggest it be done cautiously and that the concept be demonstrated in one or two areas of learning before it is generalised. But, if we do not do something like this, I think we are going to continue to have a situation where many students are not being well served by the curriculum because they are being forced to move on not having established what they need to deal with the next stage of the curriculum.¹⁶⁰

- 3.25** Furthermore, Professor Masters did not consider that the untimed syllabuses model would pose significant staffing implications. He explained:

Firstly, I do not think any teacher would be able to handle more than two or three levels within a class. If you have students who are spread across many levels that would require a school-level response to think about how you deal with that much variability. ... But often I think it will be possible to teach the same topics or to have students engaged in

¹⁵⁴ Evidence, Mr Grant Byrne, President, Institute of Technology Education, 30 November 2020, p 32; Evidence, Mrs Margaret Shepherd, President, Science Teachers Association of NSW, 30 November 2020, p 31.

¹⁵⁵ Evidence, Dr Ben Jensen, Chief Executive Officer, Learning First, 30 November 2020, p 59.

¹⁵⁶ Evidence, Professor Geoff Masters, Lead of the NSW Curriculum Review, 30 November 2020, p 52.

¹⁵⁷ Evidence, Professor Masters, 30 November 2020, p 54.

¹⁵⁸ Evidence, Professor Masters, 30 November 2020, pp 51-54.

¹⁵⁹ Submission 55, Anglican Education Commission – Anglican EdComm, p 9. See also Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 3.

¹⁶⁰ Evidence, Professor Masters, 30 November 2020, p 51.

the same broad activities, even if they are at different points in their long-term progress.¹⁶¹

- 3.26** At the time of giving evidence to the committee, NESA could not give specific details around the structure of implementation of an untimed syllabus program because it was still in the process of reviewing the details and conducting research before providing final advice to the NSW Government. Its Chief Executive Officer noted that the recommendation required 'further analysis' regarding its practical effects:

It is a question of how well you can implement something so wide-ranging, whether teachers are in a position now to move students across an untimed syllabus process. For example, if they have a range of primary school students with different abilities across all of the KLAs or the subjects.¹⁶²

- 3.27** Mr Martin told the committee that NESA had commissioned Dr Ben Jensen from Learning First to conduct the research and to review practical examples of where similar reforms have been rolled out.¹⁶³

- 3.28** In relation to the concern raised by committee members about struggling students or those from disadvantaged backgrounds being 'left behind' by the untimed syllabus system, Mr Martin responded that decluttering the curriculum (as explored in chapter 2) would resolve this issue and that the intention is that additional support be provided to such students as early as possible in their learning years. He explained:

In terms of the Masters review recommendations over a long period of time, over the period of time where we are talking about kindergarten, year 1 and year 2 in 2022, there be less students, significantly less students who hit year 7 or later years with the deficits we are talking about. All the way through though, every student needs to have their needs identified and met, including the year 10 student who is going to go into year 11 subjects.¹⁶⁴

- 3.29** Mr Martin continued that by intervening at an earlier stage of a struggling child's education, it would alleviate some of these issues relating to the unresolved practicalities of untimed syllabuses:

The intent is to make sure that they do not keep progressing without meeting the appropriate standards and that the attention should go in, in terms of additional support, earlier, so that there is not x number of thousand at year 7, there are only a very few who need significant additional support. The point of that process is to identify it and address it earlier.¹⁶⁵

- 3.30** Mr Martin reiterated that the NESA board would consider 'untimed syllabuses and their consequences' as well as the 'ways in which it will be manifest in classrooms'.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Evidence, Professor Masters, 30 November 2020, p 53.

¹⁶² Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 37.

¹⁶³ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 37.

¹⁶⁴ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 42.

¹⁶⁵ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 41.

¹⁶⁶ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 42.

- 3.31** Other stakeholders agreed that if individual learning needs were identified early on in a student's schooling, this could prevent them becoming academically delayed relative to their year group or peers. Dr Collier explained that this had been carried out successfully in overseas examples:

Also in Finland and Estonia – good systems in place – What they have managed is to identify such children very early and target significant resources in order to remediate the issues before they become entrenched.¹⁶⁷

Progression Points

Progression Points are a radical, experimental idea for a NSW system already sliding down international league tables of school success. Untimed syllabuses haven't been implemented successfully anywhere in the world. Why should NSW be a guinea pig for this unproven theory of student progress? Especially when it's a reform associated with weaker standards and less academic rigour: ending grades, rankings and year-level assessments and tests.

If every student is to move through syllabuses in an untimed manner, they will need to be taught their own individual material with their own individual assessment for progressing to the next stage. In practice, a class of 30 students will be 30 different classes in one. We have enough problems with teacher quality and effectiveness now, without increasing exponentially the degree of difficulty in classroom practice. The challenge in NSW is to return the schools system to a proven evidence-base, not to impose upon students a new, unproven sociological theory.

Masters' only reference point for untimed syllabuses is the Welsh school system, which he writes about at pages 54-55 of the Report. But no mention is made of two key facts. First, implementation of the Welsh Progression Points system won't start until 2022. If it becomes problematic, say in 2024, NSW will have spent four years going down this path, a wasted venture. Even assuming this is a valid reform, a prudent government would wait for the Welsh evidence to unfold and be verified, before turning our school students into guinea pigs.

Second, the Welsh system is not a free-for-all, with each school and student doing their own thing. In introducing her curriculum reform legislation to the Welsh Assembly on 8 July 2020, the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams, said:

... the Bill requires Ministers to issue a progression code setting out the way in which progression must be reflected within a school's curriculum. Issuing a progression code with mandatory elements will ensure that there is consistency in an approach to progression across the country ... We have to have assurance that children will be moving forward and the expectations of what children can do are the same, across a national basis.¹⁶⁸

One assumes the Welsh code will have mandatory intervention and accountability measures for schools that do not meet nationwide expectations for their students. Quality education systems have zero tolerance of failure. In Asian systems, for instance, there are intense efforts to lift up the weakest

¹⁶⁷ Evidence, Dr Collier, 30 November 2020, p 6.

¹⁶⁸ *Record of Proceedings*, Welsh Parliament, 8 July 2020, paras 354 and 416.

students, often going outside of school hours with additional tutoring. There is no detail in the Masters Report of how this might work in NSW.

Masters assumes that struggling students will feel better about school because their report card will no longer record a series of Ds. It's not clear how this will help them get through their work at a faster rate. Most likely, these students will gravitate to the easiest option – an example of 'moral hazard', whereby if the system allows students to do the thing most convenient for them (with no consequences) that's exactly what they will do.

The Report also assumes these students are stupid and naïve – that by doing easier work than others in their year, they won't actually know they have fallen behind. In the realities of playground culture, the entire year-group will know the students doing the 'dummy work' and those top-of-class. Replacing A-E grades with Progression Points will fool no one.

NSW Cabinet decision 3.1 on the Masters recommendations, unlike the Welsh system, has no mandatory elements, no assurances and no progression code. It simply allows for: 'Students who require more time should have it; students ready to advance should be able to do so' – a free-for-all, devoid of Statewide consistency and mandatory standards. Did Cabinet actually know what it was doing in supporting this change?

Moreover, Masters makes it clear that Progression Points are synonymous not just with the abolition of A-to-E grading, but also the end of ATAR testing and ranking.¹⁶⁹ He proposes a HSC where the highest syllabus achieved in a subject is recorded on a student's certificate, even for subjects that weren't studied in the senior years. ATAR competition will be replaced by a bland record of curriculum partial-completion.

Committee comment

- 3.32** The committee welcomes the NSW Government's decision as of February 2021 to not support Professor Masters' recommendation for untimed progression but to trial it instead. Not only was the recommendation made without any evidence base, the proposal also lacks the prerequisite detail and information regarding how it could practically be implemented across New South Wales classrooms.
- 3.33** In terms of its implementation, the original plan for 'untimed syllabuses' or 'progression points' was clearly impractical. Given that Professor Masters himself could not answer how students who have fallen behind at the beginning or middle of high school could finish their HSC, the committee believes that New South Wales school students must not be guinea pigs for an untested experiment, which is yet to succeed in any other country.
- 3.34** The committee also believes that progression points are likely to lower expectations for what students can achieve. Schools will have a new alibi for poor performance, arguing that students are not very bright and should be allowed to move through the syllabus at their own, slower rate. Student comparisons and competition through rankings, grades and testing will also become redundant, as the only benchmark is for students against themselves.

¹⁶⁹ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, pp 92-93.

- 3.35** Furthermore, in our view, so-called progression points are likely to entrench socioeconomic disadvantage, rather than break it. Rigorous school competition and testing are a poor child's passport to success in life. Without them, how can a student from a disadvantaged background show society how good they are, matching the advantages of those born into better circumstances? The review is notably silent on this subject. The committee believes that it is irresponsible, indeed reckless, to introduce untimed syllabuses without a workable plan for assisting the bottom cohort of students. At the other end, the brightest students will have accelerated their learning and what happens to them once they complete their 13 years' worth of schooling? Do they vegetate at school for the remaining years or trot off to university in short pants?
- 3.36** The committee further believes that the trial should not even take place if, at a minimum, the NSW Government cannot answer the committee's questions on the practicalities around the model. The committee has asked senior bureaucrats in the department and NESA on multiple occasions, as well as Professor Masters, how untimed syllabuses would work in the practical reality of classrooms, but in every case their answers have been ambiguous and lacking detail.
- 3.37** Coupled with the absence of international experience and evidence, this leads us to believe that this model simply cannot work – at least not in New South Wales classrooms at the present time. Indeed, the committee notes that the only international experiment that Professor Masters was able to point to, the Welsh Progression Points system, will not be implemented until 2022. It would only be imprudent to commence such a radical experiment here without waiting the evidence there to unfold and be verified.
- 3.38** If untimed syllabuses are ever to become the new norm in our state, such major reform must be based on research and the examination of international experiences, as well as the acceptance and implementation of the streaming of students, both academically and into vocational programs. In practical terms, this is the only way a new system like this can be managed.
- 3.39** The committee notes that there are current models facilitating individual student learning progression including Lindfield Learning Village, and awaits more data on the efficacy of this new model. We underscore our concerns here, raised during hearings, that if any of the students from Lindfield Learning Village were to move schools, the rest of the schools in the state would not be adequately prepared or resourced to accommodate the different system of learning that that child had been taught under. The committee does not believe that the child's education should be placed at risk due to these systemic discrepancies and believes it is the NSW Government's duty to address these issues before putting young students in jeopardy from what is a very likely scenario. The committee recommends against proceeding with any trials until such time as these practical problems are addressed.
- 3.40** Matched with these concerns is another very significant one: the likely scenario that many children will simply be left behind. This cannot be allowed to occur. Therefore, if individual learning progression is ever to be adopted, it is essential that there are mandatory standards across the state to deliver consistency in student progression and guarantee ways that ensure no student is left behind.

Recommendation 17

That the NSW Government not proceed with any trials of untimed syllabuses until such time as the practical problems identified in this report are addressed.

Recommendation 18

That if untimed syllabuses are ever introduced in New South Wales, the NSW Government ensure that there are state-wide mandatory standards delivering consistency in student progression along with guarantees that no student is left behind.

- 3.41** Leaving aside the highly questionable progression points model, the committee considers that there is a broader need to establish benchmarks for progress to help ensure that all children progress to a minimum standard every year. The committee recommends that there be a New South Wales standard by which each student achieves at least one year's progress through the curriculum for each year of class time. This means extending the best students to their highest level while also ensuring any student falling behind receives intensive, evidence-based interventions and assistance. In accountability and reporting systems, each school must be transparent in its value-adding results. There must be zero-tolerance of failure.
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Recommendation 19

That the NSW Government establish a state-wide standard by which each student must achieve at least one year's progress through the curriculum for each year of class time. In doing so, the best students must be extended to their highest level, while all students at risk of falling behind receive intensive, evidence based intervention and support.

Compulsory study of a second language

- 3.42** As noted in chapter 1, a key recommendation of the Masters review was to make it compulsory for all primary students in New South Wales to study a second language:
- 5.2** Require every student to commence learning a second language during their primary years, making use of technology where possible.
- 3.43** The review noted that the goal was to 'to provide every student with some knowledge of a second language and to lay the foundations for an increased number of students to pursue advanced levels of proficiency, particularly in languages of the region'.¹⁷⁰
- 3.44** The NSW Government has noted this recommendation.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xvi.

¹⁷¹ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review final report* (June 2020), p 18.

Stakeholder views

3.45 Many inquiry participants expressed support for this recommendation and were disappointed that the NSW Government had not expressly supported it.¹⁷² Generally, stakeholders pointed to the vast amount of research that has found that learning another language improved the cognitive skills of students.¹⁷³ For example, Dr Fiona Mueller, Adjunct Scholar with the Centre for Independent Studies and former Director of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) described the 'incontrovertible' benefits of studying another language, noting that decades of research on students in high-performing systems had documented significant improvements in literacy.¹⁷⁴ Professor Anne-Marie Morgan, Executive Officer of the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) also highlighted that the benefits of studying multiple languages were well-documented:

The learning of any language, we know, is beneficial, and even the moving from one language to another language during the course of a student's education is valuable for all of those areas that I was talking about—cognitive, social, people with two languages do better on NAPLAN tests ...¹⁷⁵

3.46 The AFMLTA reported that the study of languages was already included as one of the key eight learning areas for Australian students¹⁷⁶ and that it provided opportunities for young people to become 'global citizens' and engage with other parts of the world.¹⁷⁷

3.47 Looking beyond the benefits of learning another language, several stakeholders asserted that flexibility, planning and adequate resources must be considered when implementing a mandatory language program, particularly in consideration of past failed language programs at both the federal and state level.¹⁷⁸ Consistent with this, the NSW and ACT branch of the Independent Education Union emphasised that 'appropriate, long term planning and funding' was vital for implementation of this recommendation to be successful.¹⁷⁹

3.48 An individual submission author reflected on the importance of sufficient resources and qualified teachers for effective language education:

¹⁷² Submission 16, Name suppressed, p 2; Submission 17, Dr Chiaki Kojima, p 4; Submission 30, Name suppressed, p 1; Submission 35, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, p 5; Submission 42, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), p 1; Submission 63, Northern Sydney and Central Coast District Councils of P&C Associations – Jointly, p 3; Submission 77, Ms Judy Pilch, p 1.

¹⁷³ Evidence, Dr Fiona Mueller, Adjunct Scholar with the Centre for Independent Studies and former Director of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 4 November 2020, pp 7 and 9.

¹⁷⁴ Evidence, Dr Mueller, 4 November 2020, p 7.

¹⁷⁵ Evidence, Professor Anne-Marie Morgan, Executive Officer, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, 30 November 2020, p 45.

¹⁷⁶ Evidence, Mrs Gillian Cordy, Executive Officer, Australian Federation of Modern Languages Teachers Associations, 30 November 2020, p 44.

¹⁷⁷ Evidence, Professor Morgan, 30 November 2020, pp 44-45.

¹⁷⁸ Submission 32, Name suppressed, p 6; Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 3.

¹⁷⁹ Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 5.

Teachers recognise that languages can only be taught effectively in primary schools if there is a qualified teacher available, if adequate time is available, and if the language can be maintained for a period of years, this can be achieved through the embracing of face to face, blended and online teaching and learning.¹⁸⁰

- 3.49** Another submission author, Ms Vicki Steer, noted that the review had not provided adequate information on how the program would be implemented or for how long a student needed to study the language, and stated:

This half-hearted inclusion of languages is further evidenced by the proposal that technology will make up for a potential shortage of language teachers. Furthermore, the Report neither states when the mandatory study of a language would cease nor the level of attainment required of a student.¹⁸¹

- 3.50** Other inquiry participants emphasised that any languages program would need to be adapted to each school community and context and that there would need to be a high level of flexibility in how it is structured.¹⁸²

- 3.51** The issue of equity of access to teachers and resources was also raised during the committee's inquiry. Organisations such as the Independent Education Union (NSW and ACT) and Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta advocated for students in First Nations, rural and remote communities to have adequate or comparable access to language programs to their metropolitan counterparts.¹⁸³ The AFMLTA also recommended that a range of program and pedagogical models and approaches be used, specific to local contexts.¹⁸⁴

- 3.52** In contrast to those supporting the inclusion of a mandatory second language, the Institute of Technology Education argued that this recommendation would add to an overcrowded curriculum. However the Institute suggested that if adopted, coding should also be considered within the remit of a second language.¹⁸⁵

- 3.53** Mr Martin explained that by noting the recommendation, the NSW Government saw it as 'worthwhile' to mandate a second language and build a workforce around it. However he highlighted that other countries which had mandated the study of a second language for their students, limited the choices to one or two options. In contrast, he noted that New South Wales students currently have over one hundred options to choose from. Describing compulsory second language learning as a 'very often put desire' and a 'vexed issue in Australia from both the Commonwealth and State perspective',¹⁸⁶ Mr Martin advised the committee that implementation would largely depend on the availability of teachers and other resources with significant decisions about the languages themselves to be made in the first instance:

¹⁸⁰ Submission 32, Name suppressed, p 6.

¹⁸¹ Submission 38, Ms Vicki Steer, p 2.

¹⁸² Submission 35, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, p 5, Submission 42, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), p 2.

¹⁸³ Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 3; Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 5.

¹⁸⁴ Submission 42, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), p 2.

¹⁸⁵ Submission 48, Institute of Technology Education, p 1.

¹⁸⁶ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 45.

The number of teachers and capacity of the workforce to deal with a recommendation like that is largely a question for the sector. ... The short answer is that you would not know how many teachers you would need until you worked out which of the languages was the mandated language.¹⁸⁷

Committee comment

- 3.54** Notwithstanding the practical challenges for implementation, the committee heard compelling evidence about how developing knowledge and skills in a second language helps students reach attainment in other disciplines. Therefore, the committee recommends that the Masters' proposal for the compulsory study of a second language should be adopted.
- 3.55** The committee acknowledges that in its current form, the NSW Curriculum and the broader school system would face significant challenges should second language learning become compulsory, but we consider that these can be addressed over time. We note the NSW Government's evidence that students currently have over 100 languages to choose from. Whilst we commend the breadth of choice, we also believe that this must be streamlined. We consider that there has been sufficient research substantiating the benefits of this system and that the NSW Government also has international examples to look to where a compulsory second language programs have worked successfully and to the benefit of the students. We consider that the benefits to student learning will well justify the investment required to make this recommendation work.

Recommendation 20

That the NSW Government adopt the Masters' recommendation for the study of a compulsory second language.

Cross-curriculum priorities

- 3.56** The three cross-curriculum priorities identified in the Australian Curriculum are:
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
 - Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia, and
 - Sustainability.
- 3.57** The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) describes their function and aim:

Cross-curriculum priorities are addressed through learning areas and are identified wherever they are developed or applied in content descriptions. Cross-curriculum priorities are also identified where they offer opportunities to add depth and richness to student learning in content elaborations.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 43.

¹⁸⁸ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, <<https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-year-10/cross-curriculum-priorities>>.

3.58 The Masters review did not specifically refer to cross-curriculum priorities in its report, but did recommend the creation of a standalone subject about Indigenous cultures and histories in the new curriculum:

5.3 Develop a curriculum that specifies what every student should know and understand about Aboriginal cultures and histories, and incorporate this curriculum into Human Society and its Environment.

3.59 The review report expressed that 'a common understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal cultures and histories ... are seen as essential foundations for informed adult citizenship in Australia'.¹⁸⁹ Professor Masters differentiated this subject from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures priority:

What I did propose in my review was that an explicit curriculum be developed that makes clear what every student in New South Wales should know and understand about Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal histories, and that that be incorporated into one particular subject: the study of Human Society and its Environment.

That is different to an approach that says, "Let us find ways of addressing Aboriginal content across all the subjects." That may still be something that teachers choose to do, but I was proposing a more explicit curriculum that would be part of a particular subject.¹⁹⁰

3.60 The NSW Government has supported this recommendation.¹⁹¹

Stakeholder views

3.61 As noted in the committee's discussion paper, there was divided opinion about the retention of cross-curriculum priorities in the NSW curriculum. According to the NSW Department of Education the cross-curriculum priorities were 'designed to ensure that the curriculum reflects national, regional and global dimensions of importance to Australia, as determined through the national curriculum'.¹⁹²

3.62 A number of stakeholders including the Independent Education Union (NSW and ACT) and Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, supported the cross-curriculum priorities as beneficial to both the 'learner and society'.¹⁹³ The Society and Culture Association of NSW also described them as 'an essential component of our pedagogy' that play a 'vital role in guiding the development and delivery of classroom content and teaching'.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xvi.

¹⁹⁰ Evidence, Professor Masters, 30 November 2020, p 50.

¹⁹¹ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 18.

¹⁹² Submission 64, NSW Department of Education, p 4.

¹⁹³ Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 5. See also, Submission 32, Name suppressed, p 5; Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 6; Submission 38, Ms Vicki Steer, p 4; Submission 76, Asia Education Teachers' Association, p 2; Submission 77, Ms Judy Pilch, p 1.

¹⁹⁴ Submission 62, Society and Culture Association of NSW, p 13.

- 3.63** In stark contrast, the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) rejected the cross-curriculum priorities as 'ideologically driven' and 'imposing a political agenda on generations of impressionable Australian schoolchildren'.¹⁹⁵
- 3.64** Dr Bella d'Abrera, Director of the IPA's Foundations of Western Civilisation Program argued that not only do the priorities add to overcrowding the curriculum; it also 'does not make sense' to integrate sustainability or Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander histories with a subject like mathematics or learning a language.¹⁹⁶
- 3.65** In a similar vein, the Mathematical Association of NSW suggested that whilst cross-curriculum priorities in theory were an 'excellent way' for students to see the connections between subjects, in a mathematics syllabus, more guidance for teachers is needed on how to 'realistically integrate some of the priorities in the maths classroom'.¹⁹⁷
- 3.66** Other stakeholders acknowledged that it was important for students to have awareness of the cross-curriculum priorities but questioned the efficacy of learning them via a piecemeal approach. For example, Dr Stephen Fyson, an individual submission author, felt that the priorities were 'distracting in terms of valuable teaching time of strong subject knowledge'.¹⁹⁸ The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW also proposed that 'whilst these priorities reflect important areas to be addressed, these areas should only be incorporated where it is relevant within the curriculum'.¹⁹⁹
- 3.67** Professor Masters acknowledged he shared these concerns and that it had formed part of his rationale for creating a standalone subject focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories:
- Another thing that was motivating me, I think, was my concern that too often it is left to chance, teachers are encouraged to think about how they build Aboriginal perspectives into mathematics or how they build Aboriginal perspectives into science. That might be a good thing to try and do and probably is, but my worry is that if that is the limit of our approach, if that is all we are doing, then we are not ensuring that every student meets some minimum standard, if you like, some minimum expectation of what they should know and understand about Aboriginal cultures and mysteries.²⁰⁰
- 3.68** The recommendation for a separate subject on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories was well-received by inquiry participants including the Professional Teachers' Council NSW and the Science Teachers' Association NSW.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁵ Submission 36, Institute of Public Affairs, p 3.

¹⁹⁶ Evidence, Dr Bella d'Abrera, Director, Foundations of Western Civilisation Program, Institute of Public Affairs, 30 November 2020, pp 27 and 28. See also, Evidence, Dr Greg Ashman, Head mathematics teacher and education blogger, 4 November 2020, p 3.

¹⁹⁷ Submission 45, Mathematical Association of NSW, p 4.

¹⁹⁸ Submission 21A, Dr Stephen Fyson, p 3.

¹⁹⁹ Submission 58, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, p 11. See also, Isolated Children's Parents Association of NSW, p 6.

²⁰⁰ Evidence, Professor Masters, p 55.

²⁰¹ Submission 70, Science Teachers Association NSW, p 6, Submission 72, Professional Teachers' Council (PTC) NSW, p 4; Submission 15, Mr Jason van Tol, p 2.

- 3.69** Closely linked to the priorities is the 'general capabilities' framework outlined in the Australian Curriculum and adopted in New South Wales. Inquiry participants were sceptical of their efficacy, including Mr Greg Ashman, a head mathematics teacher and education blogger, who questioned the extent to which general capabilities were being taught in schools and considered that 'they do not really do much'.²⁰²
- 3.70** Professor Masters told the committee that he did not consider that the new curriculum should be structured around the general capabilities framework, but rather focused on disciplines and explained:

What I have argued in the report is that general capabilities like critical thinking, communicating, collaborating and so on need to be developed in the context of the disciplines and be thought of as an integral part of development in the disciplines. As students become more confident in science, they become more confident in thinking critically about science and working in teams to solve problems in science and so on.²⁰³

Committee comment

- 3.71** The review's recommendation for a standalone course on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is supported by the committee. However we note that the review does not explicitly recommend the abandonment of the three cross-curriculum priorities, which would logically follow from the creation of the standalone course. In addition, this key issue was also not addressed in the NSW Government's response to the review.
- 3.72** In light of the rapid deterioration in Australia's relations with China, the cross-curriculum priority for 'Asian engagement' has lost much of its potency and relevance. Considering the need for economic and employment recovery from COVID-19, the cross-curriculum priority for 'Sustainability' has also become questionable. A priority for 'economic growth' or 'productivity improvements' would be in, in the committee's view, no less valid.
- 3.73** In significant respects, the Masters review departs from the national curriculum. The committee does not see any difficulty in New South Wales 'going alone' in justifiable policy decisions, and thus recommends that it abandon all three cross-curriculum priorities in the curriculum, as per the intention of Professor Masters. As documented in the previous chapter, a look at any syllabus reveals how artificial and tenuous some of the links to the priorities are. The point is well made there that the priorities are actually counter to core learning and deep knowledge, occupying too much precious learning time. We strongly believe they must be abandoned.
- 3.74** The Masters review has maintained a focus on traditional subjects in the curriculum and avoids a 'general capabilities' framework. As noted in the Chair's discussion paper, the committee is of the opinion that the best approach for student learning is to concentrate schooling on the foundational skills of literacy, numeracy and deep knowledge – a base which students can then develop more specialised work-related skills. Whilst the committee is disappointed that this approach was not explicitly set out and recommended in the Masters review's final report (and then adopted by Cabinet), we recommend that, as per Professor Masters' intent, the NSW

²⁰² Evidence, Mr Ashman, 4 November 2020, p 3.

²⁰³ Evidence, Professor Masters, 30 November 2020, p 50.

Government avoid a 'general capabilities' framework and maintain a traditional subject focus for the curriculum.

Recommendation 21

That the NSW Government abandon all three cross-curriculum priorities, as per Professor Masters' intent.

Recommendation 22

That the NSW Government avoid a 'general capabilities' framework and maintain a traditional subject focus for the curriculum, as per Professor Masters' intent.

Integration of knowledge and skills

- 3.75** One of the key tenets of the Masters review was its suggestion that the NSW Curriculum needs to provide better integration of theory and skills and 'build students' skills in applying knowledge'.²⁰⁴
- 3.76** This integration of theory and practice is encapsulated in Recommendation 2.1:
- 2.1** Make explicit in new syllabuses for every subject that skills in applying knowledge are part of the intended learning, and show how these skills are to be developed over time. These skills include subject-specific skills, but also skills in using technologies, sourcing and analysing information, critical and creative thinking, collaborating and communicating.²⁰⁵
- 3.77** The review highlighted that skills in applying theory should be developed in parallel with students' advancing knowledge and understanding of each subject and that the 'development and demonstration of skills depend on opportunities for students to put their subject knowledge and understandings to work, for example, through practical applications, problem solving activities or investigative projects'.²⁰⁶
- 3.78** Professor Masters explained to the committee that the purpose of this recommendation was to 'elevat[e] the status of skills and integrating them more deeply into subject learning'.²⁰⁷
- 3.79** The NSW Government supported this recommendation²⁰⁸ and noted in its response, 'Both theoretical knowledge and applied skills are needed to meet the future challenges faced by the NSW economy'.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p v.

²⁰⁵ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xiv.

²⁰⁶ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xiv.

²⁰⁷ Evidence, Professor Masters, 30 November 2020, p 57.

²⁰⁸ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 9.

²⁰⁹ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 12.

- 3.80** In addition, the Masters review identified a clear divide and hierarchy between academic and vocational learning in senior years, with most student and parents preferring the academic pathway over the vocational, which tends to be viewed as more appropriate for 'less able' students.²¹⁰
- 3.81** Specifically in relation to students preparing for post-school destinations, the Masters review recommended that students need more opportunities to pursue personal interests and strengths, including vocational learning:
- 6.1** Eliminate the current bifurcation of learning in the later years by developing over time a new set of HSC subjects, each of which involves rigorous, high-quality learning that integrates knowledge and the practical application of knowledge.²¹¹
- 3.82** The Masters review noted that the new curriculum aims 'to ensure that every student in the later years of school develops advanced knowledge in chosen areas of study, skills in applying that knowledge, and attributes to equip them for life and future careers'.²¹² It highlighted the importance of both theoretical and practical knowledge in subjects:
- Vocational learning is not quarantined to a set of vocational education and training (VET) subjects, but is seen as relevant to every student and area of learning. Skills such as problem solving, working in teams, collaborating, communicating, and thinking critically and creatively are promoted in all subjects and are also developed and demonstrated through a major investigative project that every student undertakes.²¹³
- 3.83** The NSW Government supported this recommendation in principle and that further advice would be sought from NESAs.²¹⁴ It also noted in its response that 'VET' and academic subjects must be supported to attract high-quality students into both.²¹⁵

Stakeholder views

- 3.84** Notwithstanding general stakeholder support for the integration of knowledge with skills and the importance of vocational education, a key theme that emerged was whether all forms of study required both theoretical and practical components, or that this was necessary only when appropriate and relevant. This issue has also been previously examined in the committee's discussion paper.
- 3.85** Key educational stakeholders such as the Association of Independent Schools of NSW and the Institute of Technology Education expressed their strong support for integration, arguing that 'theory and the application of theory must be intertwined'.²¹⁶

²¹⁰ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xvii.

²¹¹ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xviii.

²¹² NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p 85.

²¹³ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xvii.

²¹⁴ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 19.

²¹⁵ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 12.

²¹⁶ Submission 35, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, p 3; Evidence, Mr Byrne, 30 November 2020, p 32.

- 3.86** The committee was told of how specific subjects have already incorporated practical elements of the theory taught into their syllabuses. The Society and Culture Association of NSW for instance, referred to its Personal Interest Projects (PIP) as a 'shining example' of integrated learning. It said, "The PIP allows for students to combine their knowledge of contemporary sociological issues, skills and theory and create an original work."²¹⁷
- 3.87** Significantly, the Mathematical Association of NSW and the Science Teachers' Association of NSW acknowledged that whilst there was already some level of integration within their respective syllabuses, there was scope for further practical and effective application of skills, as long as it was informed by evidence-based research.²¹⁸
- 3.88** The Professional Teachers' Council NSW also 'cautiously supported' the recommendation but was concerned that it could reduce the provision of 'appropriate foundational knowledge and skills that prepare more able students for tertiary study'. It further drew a distinction for high-achieving students in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), who do not integrate vocational education with mainstream schooling.²¹⁹
- 3.89** Other inquiry participants expressed strong opposition to the mandatory component of the recommendation, arguing that integration should only apply to subjects where relevant or appropriate. For example, the Visual Arts and Design Educators Association NSW advised that its students 'utilise the specific discipline and conceptual understanding of the subject' and 'transfer and apply their knowledge through making ... and writing about art'.²²⁰ It went on to assert that practical application of theory should only be expected when it is a 'natural fit' or 'reflects the discipline' of a subject. The Association argued that by inserting applications of knowledge with little connection to the subject, the quality and depth of knowledge of these subjects would 'inevitably' decrease.²²¹
- 3.90** In a similar vein, Dr Kevin Donnelly, a Research Fellow at the Australian Catholic University, stated:
- The argument that each new senior school subject “integrates theory and the application of theory” is also misplaced and reflects a superficial understanding ... Studying poetry, learning about the past or mastering complex algorithms often has no immediate practical utility or application but such studies are still inherently beneficial and worthwhile.²²²
- 3.91** As explored in the committee's discussion paper, submissions from organisations representing teachers also reflected on the challenges of creating practical experiences for students in an overcrowded curriculum and the need for professional development in this area. These submissions indicated that pursuing better integration of knowledge and skills would require dedicated time and resources.²²³

²¹⁷ Submission 62, Society and Culture Association of NSW, p 4.

²¹⁸ Supplementary Submission No 45a, Mathematical Association of NSW, pp 2-3; Submission 70, Science Teachers Association of NSW, p 6.

²¹⁹ Submission 72, Professional Teachers' Council (PTC) NSW, p 5.

²²⁰ Submission 81, Visual Arts and Design Educators Association NSW, pp 3-4.

²²¹ Submission 81, Visual Arts and Design Educators Association NSW, pp 3-4.

²²² Submission 91, Dr Kevin Donnelly AM, p 2.

²²³ Submission 45, Mathematical Association of NSW, p 2.

Committee comment

- 3.92** The committee recognises the importance of close integration between theoretical knowledge of a subject and the practical skills to apply that knowledge. However, we are of the opinion that integrating theory and practice in all subjects can be unnecessary and impractical. In addition, it threatens to undermine student engagement with vocational training, and also the integrity of highly theoretical subjects. In courses such as Ancient History for example, it is difficult to conceive of how a practical component can be usefully incorporated. Therefore, the committee recommends that the NSW Government does not mandate Masters' recommendation for integrating theory and practice in all subjects.
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Recommendation 23

That the NSW Government not mandate Masters' recommendation to integrate theory and practice in all subjects.

- 3.93** The committee shares the NSW Government's concerns about student disengagement levels among senior students and believes it is important for students to have a broad range of options, both academic and vocational, following their formal schooling. In relation to the Masters recommendation to incorporate more theory in vocational courses, we believe that Professor Masters should have examined the strong vocational outcomes that some high schools in New South Wales are achieving, against the odds. As referenced in the Chair's discussion paper, Hoxton Park High School in southwest Sydney is a best practice example of how clear career pathways can be developed for academically-disinclined students. Students who wish to leave school after year 10 attend a separate class with their own home-room and a single teacher. In addition, these students' curriculum is modified to help ensure they become 'job-ready'.
- 3.94** Hoxton Park High School has enjoyed a lot of success with this model, including producing students who are re-engaging with the curriculum and thus more prepared to leave school. It is proof that vocational streaming (or 'bifurcation') of this kind works in practice. Based on this model, additional theory components for these students does not seem to be a practical or necessary answer, and is most likely counter-productive. The committee believes that VET streaming would be beneficial for more students if undertaken similar to the Hoxton Park model.
- 3.95** The committee thus recommends that, in line with its emphasis on student learning engagement, the NSW Government should set a learning engagement goal and expectation whereby every senior student disengaging from the academic curriculum has courses, facilities and opportunities available to them engage with vocational learning and qualifications. Schools should also use their Gonski growth funds to buy in TAFE and other vocational training so that each of their students is engaged with some form of productive learning matching their interests and ambitions.

Recommendation 24

That the NSW Government set a learning engagement goal and expectation whereby every secondary school student disengaging from the academic curriculum has courses, facilities and career paths available to them to engage with vocational learning and qualifications. Schools should use their Gonski growth funds to buy in TAFE and other vocational training so that each of their students is engaged with some form of productive learning matching their interests and ambitions.

- 3.96** In chapter 1, the committee criticised the Masters review for not reporting on local or international examples of best practice use in syllabuses. Following recommendation 24, the committee recommends that the NSW Government conduct further research on best practice vocational programs such as Hoxton Park High School and scale up their successes to all similar schools. In order to be more accountable for preventing and addressing disengagement, schools should also measure and report on their outcomes in student learning engagement and disengagement on an annual basis. The NSW Government should further adopt a state-wide objective at government schools for every student to be actively engaged with learning, whether academic or vocational.
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Recommendation 25

That in implementing Recommendation 24, the NSW Government:

- conduct further research on best practice vocational programs, such as Hoxton Park High School, and scale up their success to all similar schools,
 - require schools to measure and report on their outcomes in student learning engagement on an annual basis, and
 - adopt a state-wide objective at government schools for every student to be actively engaged with learning, whether academic or vocational.
-

Mandatory major project

- 3.97** Related to the specific recommendations around integration of skills with knowledge, the review also recommended that all senior students undertake a major project in their subject of choice:

- 6.3** Require every student to undertake a major investigative project in a subject of their choosing, with common assessment criteria, moderation of teacher assessments, and performances forming part of a student's HSC results.

- 3.98** The review's rationale for introducing a mandatory major project for senior students was 'to provide a context in which every student can apply their subject learning to a meaningful situation or problem and also develop and demonstrate skills in knowledge application.'²²⁴

- 3.99** The review also drew a link between vocational learning and major investigative projects:

²²⁴ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p 102.

Vocational learning is not quarantined to a set of vocational education and training (VET) subjects, but is seen as relevant to every student and area of learning. Skills such as problem solving, working in teams, collaborating, communicating, and thinking critically and creatively are promoted in all subjects and are also developed and demonstrated through a major investigative project that every student undertakes.²²⁵

- 3.100** The NSW Government supported this recommendation in principle, indicating that further advice would be sought from NESA.²²⁶ In its response, the NSW Government noted that 'VET and academic subjects must be supported to attract high-quality students into both. Both theoretical knowledge and applied skills are needed to meet the future challenges faced by the NSW economy'.²²⁷

Stakeholder views

- 3.101** As documented in the committee's discussion paper, the recommendation for a compulsory major project as a means to provide practical opportunities for senior students received mixed responses from stakeholders.
- 3.102** The Legal Studies Association of NSW supported the inclusion of a compulsory major project and commented that it would 'provide opportunities for [Legal Studies] students to investigate issues in a range of contexts, locally, nationally and internationally, and develop strategies for real world change'.²²⁸ Mr Grant Byrne, President of the Institute of Technology Education, also supported students undertaking a major project, emphasising the importance of the practical element of 'creating and making' in applying knowledge.²²⁹
- 3.103** Other stakeholders were more divided. Even those who supported the idea of a compulsory major project did so conditionally, on grounds such as that it must be equitable to all students, should not impact on subjects that already have a major project component and that there be suitable resources for the transition to be made.
- 3.104** In relation to equity and fairness, Catholic Education of the Diocese of Parramatta observed that 'equity in assessment remains a question, particularly at the HSC level where major works are a dominant factor' and that demographic, geographic and socioeconomic factors need to be considered.²³⁰ Similarly, the Independent Education Union noted that regional and remote schools do not have the resources that city schools have and that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be unable to purchase the materials required for projects.²³¹ The Centre for Independent Studies similarly observed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds generally have less access to parental help or tutors for their major projects.²³²

²²⁵ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xvii.

²²⁶ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 19.

²²⁷ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 12.

²²⁸ Submission 78, Legal Studies Association of NSW, p 6.

²²⁹ Evidence, Mr Byrne, 30 November 2020, pp 32 and 41.

²³⁰ Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, pp 4-5.

²³¹ Submission 34, Independent Education Union, p 2.

²³² Submission 39, Centre for Independent Studies, pp 2-3.

- 3.105** Describing the idea as 'flawed and very problematic', the Independent Education Union commented that many subjects already offer a major projects such as Visual Art, Drama, Music, Dance, all the Technologies, Extension Science, Extension History, Extension English, Society and Culture and Aboriginal Studies.²³³
- 3.106** In addition, the Society and Culture Association of NSW expressed concern that the depth and breadth of that subject's current major project, the Personal Interest Project, could be undermined if an additional generic project was mandated.²³⁴ Other organisations such as the Institute of Technology Education and the Visual Arts and Design Educators Association of NSW echoed these concerns.²³⁵
- 3.107** However, the Science Teachers Association found that the use of major investigative projects in the science syllabus had deepened students' knowledge and supported the application of skills in a project context.²³⁶

Committee comment

- 3.108** The committee carefully considered the evidence put to it regarding the introduction of a compulsory major project for senior students. On the balance of the evidence, the committee believes that the proposal should be supported as an exercise in deep knowledge development. The committee is also of the opinion that a major investigative project would serve as preparation for students intending to advance to university or to vocational education and training. We consider that if carefully implemented, other projects required of students would not be undermined.

Recommendation 26

That the NSW Government support Masters' proposal for a compulsory major project for senior students as an exercise in deep knowledge development and as preparation for tertiary or vocational education.

Future of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)

- 3.109** The Masters review was critical of how the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) was calculated and reported, and recommended that the Department:
- 6.4** Establish a taskforce comprising representatives of the higher education sector, the school sector and the Universities Admissions Centre, to investigate the feasibility of not calculating and reporting the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

²³³ Submission 34, Independent Education Union, p 2.

²³⁴ Submission 62, Society and Culture Association of NSW, p 11.

²³⁵ Submission 48, Institute of Technology Education, p 10; Submission 81, Visual Arts and Design Educators Association of NSW, p 4.

²³⁶ Submission 70, Science Teachers Association, p 4.

- 3.110** The review differentiated two types of learning undertaken by senior students, noting that there is currently a 'strong divide' and 'hierarchy' between them:
- academic learning – primarily focused on acquiring knowledge to be tested in final examinations that determine a student's ATAR and thus likelihood of being selected into a university course of choice
 - vocational learning – primarily focused on acquiring skills that must be demonstrated and confirmed in practice, usually determined by the requirements of externally provided vocational qualifications.²³⁷
- 3.111** The review was of the opinion that currently, neither form of learning provided students with adequate preparation for their future and recommended that the new curriculum ensure that 'every student in the later years of school develops advanced knowledge in chosen areas of study, skills in applying that knowledge, and attributes to equip them for life and future careers.'²³⁸
- 3.112** The NSW Government has noted this recommendation, with further advice to be sought from NESA.²³⁹

Stakeholder views

- 3.113** Inquiry participants had markedly different opinions on the value of the ATAR and its future role in New South Wales schools.
- 3.114** As referenced in the committee's discussion paper, the Centre for Independent Studies advocated for the ATAR, believing it necessary as the primary means of university admission, and noting that ATAR scores were closely related to academic achievement and university drop-out rates. It further argued that replacing the ATAR with a 'learner profile' focused on extracurricular activities, would be disadvantageous to high-achieving students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who may have comparatively less opportunities to undertake extracurricular activities.²⁴⁰
- 3.115** Other stakeholders questioned the value of removing the ATAR whilst retaining a ranking system. Ms Vicki Steer, an individual submission author asserted that this 'changes little in the assessment practice for the final years – indeed it maintains in-class competition and mitigates against collaborative learning'.²⁴¹
- 3.116** By contrast, many stakeholders expressed concern about the priority afforded to the ATAR and supported the recommendation to reconsider it. Key education organisations such as the Association of Independent Schools NSW, Anglican Education Commission and Steiner Education argued that the removal of the ATAR would provide more learning opportunities

²³⁷ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xvii.

²³⁸ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xvii.

²³⁹ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 19.

²⁴⁰ Submission 39, Centre for Independent Studies, p 3.

²⁴¹ Submission 38, Ms Vicki Steer, p 6.

for students as it would encourage 'deep learning' of subjects that they are interested in, rather than the choice of subjects that 'rank' or 'scale' well.²⁴²

3.117 In addition, teacher organisations including the Science Teachers Association of NSW²⁴³ supported the recommendation, with the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations expressing an opinion that reliance on the ATAR should be rethought as it does not promote '21st century learning capabilities'.²⁴⁴

3.118 In his discussion paper the Chair commented on ATARs. The paragraphs are replicated in the box below.

ATAR

Masters' recommendation to abolish the ATAR was noted by Cabinet, with 'further advice to be sought from NESA'. In a report to the Federal Government in July, NESA's Chairman, Peter Shergold, also predicted the end of ATARs, outlining their 'slow death over the next five years'. He wants to replace them with a system of 'learning profiles' (a student portfolio outlining achievements both at school and in the community).

'We are saying you don't just learn complex problem solving by studying maths or science or indeed by doing vocational education', Shergold declared, 'You can learn complex problem solving by being captain of the netball team.'²⁴⁵ Not many parents would see netball (or football) as comparable to the importance of maths and science qualifications for their children. They would see it as part of the constant dumbing down of NSW schools.

Committee comment

3.119 It is the committee's opinion that the Masters review failed to answer an obvious outcome-focused question: What is the minimum acceptable standard and outcome for a New South Wales student after 13 years of schooling? And further to that, what is the benchmark that we want our students to achieve as they leave the system? The NSW Government must address this essential benchmarking issue if it is ever to implement such sweeping changes to the current ATAR system.

²⁴² Submission 35, Association of Independent Schools NSW, pp 5 and 6; Submission 55, Anglican Education Commissioner (Anglican EdComm), p 8; Submission 61, Steiner Education, p 9. See also, Submission 32, Name suppressed, p 8.

²⁴³ Submission 70, Science Teachers Association NSW, p 4.

²⁴⁴ Submission 42a, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), p 8.

²⁴⁵ Jordan Baker, 'Call for 'learner profile' of students to end dominance of ATAR', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 July 2020.

Finding 19

That the Masters review failed to answer two obvious outcome-focused questions: What is the minimum acceptable standard and outcome for a New South Wales student after 13 years of schooling? What is the benchmark that we want our students to achieve as they leave the system?

- 3.120** The committee notes that the Masters review was critical of the calculation and reporting of ATARs, and believes that this criticism was misguided. The system of year 12 final exams should be fair, rigorous and competitive, as a vital benchmark of school and student achievement at the end of 13 years of education in New South Wales.
- 3.121** The committee notes that the only way students from a disadvantaged background can compete and fully succeed in society is through a school marking and grading system in which they excel. Without year 12 exams and published results, they have no other effective way of letting society know of their abilities. The committee thus recommends that in any review of the ATAR, the NSW Government support a fair, rigorous and competitive system of year 12 final results, especially in achieving the equity goal of students from a disadvantaged background using their year 12 school marks and exam results to compete successfully in society. The education system needs to acknowledge that without an exam and marking system, disadvantaged students have no effective way of advancing themselves in competition against young people who have other advantages in life.
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Finding 20

That the Masters review was misguided in its criticism of Australian Tertiary Admission Rankings. The system of year 12 final exams in New South Wales should be fair, rigorous and competitive, as a vital benchmark of school and student achievement after 13 years of education. In particular, the only way students from a disadvantaged background can compete and fully succeed in society is through a school marking and grading system in which they excel. Without year 12 exams and published results, they have no other effective way of letting society know of their abilities.

Recommendation 27

That the NSW Government support a fair, rigorous and competitive system of year 12 final results in any review of the Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking, particularly in achieving the equity goal of students from a disadvantaged background using their year 12 school marks and exam results to compete successfully in society. The education system needs to acknowledge that without an exam and marking system, disadvantaged students have no effective way of advancing themselves in competition against young people with other advantages in life.

Chapter 4 Implementing reform

As noted in chapter 1, following release of the Masters review, the NSW Government set itself a timeline of implementing a new English and mathematics curriculum for kindergarten to year 2 by 2022, and for all other years, a new curriculum by 2024.

The chapter begins by exploring inquiry participants' views on conditions that will enable the successful implementation of the new curriculum, focusing on the issues of high-quality and centralised teaching resources, and the provision of training and support for teachers.

The chapter then considers the NSW Government's self-described 'ambitious' timeline for implementation. This leads to a further examination of whether the agency charged with the task, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), is adequately resourced and staffed to carry out this enormous and most critical task.

High-quality, centralised teaching resources

4.1 Within the context of curriculum reform, some inquiry participants emphasised the need for the Department of Education and NESA to mandate a transition towards high-quality, centralised teaching resources, especially textbooks.

4.2 Currently in New South Wales, textbooks are neither mandatory nor standardised across schools. A number of stakeholders raised with the committee that by not having standardised learning materials, unnecessary pressure is placed on teachers in terms of their time, workload and even personal resources. Dr Ben Jensen, Chief Executive Officer of Learning First, who is currently undertaking research for NESA, did not recommend mandating textbooks per se but noted that 'the greater the instructional material that is used, the greater the learning'. He advocated for a centralised approach to developing and utilising learning materials in the classroom.²⁴⁶

4.3 Dr Jensen placed significant weight on quality teaching resources, especially textbooks, as a critical success factor in education systems around the world that have achieved lasting positive results:

... there are aspects that we can learn from various systems. Louisiana is one of the poorest states in the US and we know that is saying something. They were able to actually get some improvement from some really standards-aligned, high quality curriculum resources. British Columbia did a lot of work 20 years ago on significant curriculum reform that actually got teachers together, identifying high quality curriculum resources and assessment resources and providing really practical resources that can be used in schools. It is the same in Singapore and the same in Hong Kong. The functions are slightly different but all of them have in common a lot greater clarity on what are high quality instructional resources.²⁴⁷

4.4 Dr Jensen observed that, in addition to improving the quality of teaching itself, a system-wide focus on quality teaching resources also has the potential to reduce the amount of work teachers

²⁴⁶ Evidence, Dr Ben Jensen, Chief Executive Officer, Learning First, 30 November 2020, p 65.

²⁴⁷ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 59.

have to do, thereby freeing up their time to deal with some of the other student needs identified by Professor Masters.²⁴⁸

- 4.5** Highlighting the importance of including teachers in the process, Dr Jensen reflected that 'almost without exception' all of these systems have included teachers in the evaluation, development and implementation stages of developing resources.²⁴⁹ Using the subject of science as an example, he explained, 'You have networks of science teachers working through science material and science resources with evaluation criteria, working through, sharing resources and so on.'²⁵⁰ According to Dr Jensen, using a consultative approach assists greatly in the take-up of this significant change in approach:

Whenever we have done any sort of this work in Australia, or whenever we talk to people overseas in these other systems that have been highlighted, the immediate problems of teachers using [reputable] resources seems to disappear once they realise that these are developed by their peers, evaluated by their peers, and they are easy to use and, more to the point, successful.²⁵¹

- 4.6** Representatives of the Mathematical Association of NSW and the Institute of Technology Education also welcomed the idea of teachers taking the major role in developing quality resources that are closely linked to the syllabus.²⁵²
- 4.7** Stakeholders also told the committee that teachers are looking to reduce or simplify the current burden of their role, such that some seek out and pay for instruction materials out of their own pockets.²⁵³
- 4.8** Mrs Margaret Shepherd, President of the Science Teachers' Association of NSW, described teachers who, wanting to be across the whole syllabus, sought learning materials that are readily available from the internet but declared that the varying quality and proliferation made it a 'disaster zone':

We get universities and we get lots of people coming up with resources all the time. We have teachers burnt out with resources galore on the internet. It is a disaster zone. I teach pre-service teachers and I have to say to them, "Please don't go onto the internet."²⁵⁴

- 4.9** Dr Jensen agreed and noted that teachers require expertise to 'develop, choose [and] adapt quality instructional resources in various subjects'.²⁵⁵ Whilst not wanting to limit teachers in being able to teach certain topics or refer to learning materials, Dr Jensen expressed concern

²⁴⁸ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 59.

²⁴⁹ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 59.

²⁵⁰ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 61.

²⁵¹ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 59.

²⁵² Evidence, Ms Karen McDaid, President, Mathematical Association of NSW, 30 November 2020, p 36; Evidence, Mr Grant Byrne, President, Institute of Technology Education, 30 November 2020, p 36.

²⁵³ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 64.

²⁵⁴ Evidence, Mrs Margaret Shepherd, President, Science Teachers' Association of NSW, 30 November 2020, pp 36-37.

²⁵⁵ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 64.

that 'we have gone so far down the road of autonomy and flexibility without providing the support, resources and expertise that is actually required for what is incredibly complex work'.²⁵⁶

- 4.10** In response, Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive Officer of NESAs, advised that the authority does not support mandating a textbook or specific learning resources and instead considers that a balanced approach between a teacher's expertise, appropriate content in the syllabus and learning materials will alleviate the burden on teachers:

We would not assume that [mandating a textbook] is required in New South Wales but if the syllabuses are, as I said, full of the appropriate content and appropriately sequenced then the professional learning that is provided should do the work of a textbook because each teacher has the expertise rather than it sitting in an external piece of writing.²⁵⁷

- 4.11** Mr Martin explained that this 'balanced' approach is consistent across domestic and international jurisdictions, and that it is the teacher's responsibility to 'interpret, program and apply syllabuses' in the classroom. Whilst acknowledging that 'instructional models' are necessary, he emphasised the role of a teacher in operationalising content for each student:

... if a student is unable to do work that comes out of a textbook the teacher needs to be able to adapt, model and appropriately deliver something that is not just reliant on a set of exercises that sit separate from their own intellectual capital.²⁵⁸

Committee comment

- 4.12** The committee supports Dr Ben Jensen's evidence, based on international research, that high-quality learning materials (especially textbooks) can substantially improve learning outcomes and school academic results. The Learning First and John Hopkins School of Education research project also found that top PISA-performing nations has 'content-rich, standards-aligned curriculum material, particularly textbooks'. The report concluded that by switching from low quality to high-quality textbooks, student achievement was boosted, in comparison with more popular initiatives, such as expanding preschool programs, decreasing class sizes or offering merit pay to teachers. With international examples clearly substantiating the academic benefits of ensuring that their students only learn from high-quality materials, the committee asks, why is New South Wales so reticent to follow suit? The committee is of the firm opinion that the New South Wales schools system has lost sight of this commonsense reality.
- 4.13** As noted in chapter 1, in the discussion regarding Collective Teacher Efficacy, the Chair's discussion paper highlighted the need for consistent syllabus material, with clearly sequenced learning steps that allow students to accumulate deep knowledge and understanding as they progress through school. Too much flexibility diminishes this opportunity and hampers the possibility of scaling up best practice in schools through system-wide reform.
- 4.14** Professor John Hattie's research on Collective Teacher Efficacy indicates that high-quality learning materials and standardised teacher and student experiences have very positive impacts

²⁵⁶ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 62.

²⁵⁷ Evidence, Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority, 4 November 2020, p 36.

²⁵⁸ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 36.

on student outcomes. This cannot be achieved if teachers have too much flexibility in constructing their own syllabuses or content.

- 4.15** Too many schools and teachers currently have a random approach to identifying and using learning materials, with an over-reliance on searching the Internet. At the moment, NESA and the Department of Education are unaware of what particular learning materials a school might use, and that the evidence base for high-quality learning materials is being ignored.
- 4.16** The system needs to return to the mandating of high-quality textbooks in order to deliver a robust and standardised approach to teaching and learning in New South Wales schools. Surely, this is fundamental to addressing student engagement and academic decline.
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Finding 21

That the New South Wales schools system has lost sight of the commonsense reality that high-quality learning materials, especially textbooks, can substantially improve learning outcomes and school academic results.

Finding 22

That too many schools and teachers have a random approach to identifying and using learning materials, with an over-reliance on searching the Internet, and that the NSW Education Standards Authority and the Department of Education are unaware of the particular learning materials used by schools. The evidence base for high-quality learning materials is being ignored.

Recommendation 28

That the NSW Government mandate the use of high-quality textbooks in New South Wales schools and recommend other high-quality learning materials to teachers and schools.

Adequate time and professional learning

- 4.17** A number of stakeholders, especially teacher associations, argued that it is of the utmost importance that schools and systems provide adequate training and time to teachers so that they can adapt to and deliver the new curriculum.²⁵⁹
- 4.18** Dr John Mack AM, a retired academic and with experience in curriculum policy, reported that curriculum change by itself has been found to result in little change to classroom practice or to student learning outcomes unless teachers support the shift and are professionally equipped to implement it.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ See for example, Mrs Fran Bonanno, Vice-President, Association of Catholic School Principals, and Principal, St Felix Primary School, Bankstown, 4 November 2020, p 13.

²⁶⁰ Submission 43a, Dr John Mack AM, p 1.

- 4.19** Mrs Shepherd explained that teachers are already burdened by the constantly evolving syllabuses and having to adapt to them. She also revealed that the constant change and demanding conditions placed on the teaching profession have contributed to a number of good and qualified teachers choosing to leave the system:

The primary teachers have had one change after another after another and science and technology is a massive issue for the primary people because they are trying to blend working scientifically and working technologically together, integrating that with history and English and maths and now we are going to say to them, "Now you've got to have another English and another maths syllabus in two years."

We do not want to lose any more teachers to the profession; we cannot afford to lose our teachers to the profession ... we want them to stay and do the best that they can do without limiting them by syllabus changes again and again.²⁶¹

- 4.20** This concern was echoed by Ms Norma Petrocco, Vice President of the NSW Primary Principals' Association, who advocated that teachers be provided with adequate professional learning and time in preparation for the new curriculum, even if it means delaying stages in implementation. She suggested that in order for teachers to 'effectively' understand and teach new syllabuses, they require expert leadership and time to digest and apply the changes::

Quality professional learning is about providing teachers with expert leaders in curriculum to assist them to implement curriculum in a cohesive manner, ensuring that everyone gets the same message and that the curriculum is delivered to its full extent.

It is also about providing adequate time for teachers to do that and staggering curriculum provision and development so that teachers actually have the time to gain a professional understanding of what is required and how that looks as in teaching and learning in their classroom.²⁶²

- 4.21** Mr Darius Samojlowicz, Executive Officer of the Mathematical Association of NSW, was of the opinion that similar to textbooks and learning materials, teachers' professional learning is an essential resource. He highlighted that a syllabus could be futile, even when teaching a 'great student', if the teacher does not know 'how to manipulate all of those factors in that learning environment'.²⁶³

- 4.22** Consistent with comments in the previous section, others recommended that any development or implementation of the syllabus should be done in close consultation with teachers and 'hand in hand' with the provisions of resources and materials. For example, the Mathematical Association of NSW referred to a current pilot program for mathematics that has been trialled over 100 schools with very positive results. Mr Samojlowicz praised the implementation of the program, and in particular, the extensive resources and professional development being provided for teachers:

²⁶¹ Evidence, Mrs Shepherd, 30 November 2020, p 36.

²⁶² Evidence, Ms Norma Petrocco, Vice President, NSW Primary Principals' Association, 4 November 2020, p 12.

²⁶³ Evidence, Mr Darius Samojlowicz, Executive Officer, Mathematical Association of NSW, 30 November 2020, p 37.

This particular syllabus is quite different and has been constructed and piloted quite differently to previous syllabuses that have gone in place. Along with the development of the syllabus has been the development of resources that have gone hand in hand with it. Teachers then have been provided a starting point of resources to implement this particular syllabus. Not only are they physical resources but they are the resourcing for teachers in their area of professional development.²⁶⁴

- 4.23** However, Mr Bob Willetts, Principal of Berry Public School, raised the issue that rolling out standardised professional training across the state could be a prolonged process, particularly if it is implemented following NESA development and approval:

Then every teacher in the school has to [go] through the process of that professional learning to understand what is the same in the syllabus, what has changed, how that impacts on their teaching and learning programs, how and what is delivered and taught, what is assessed and then reported to parents.²⁶⁵

- 4.24** Representatives of the NSW Government did concede to the committee that the new curriculum would add to teachers' workloads and time in the short term, but insisted on multiple occasions that the department would support teachers throughout the process. Ms Jane Simmons, Acting Deputy Secretary of Learning Improvement, said that the Department of Education was 'doing everything we can to ensure that we reduce the workload here and administration burden here to allow time to assist [teachers] to be able to plan and implement a new curriculum in 2022.'²⁶⁶ She also underscored her belief in teachers and their ability to adjust to the new curriculum, as they already adapt their teaching to syllabuses that are updated on a 'reasonably regular basis'.²⁶⁷

- 4.25** When asked by the committee in November 2020 what specific practical measures were planned to support teachers with these very significant changes, Ms Simmons responded that the NSW Government was looking into ways to reduce the administrative burden on them. In addition, the department was reviewing lessons it had learnt about profession learning and resource sharing from the recent COVID-19 experience. She also advised that work was underway with principals and schools to support them in designing new programming for the syllabus, and how teachers can be supported in differentiation of learning.²⁶⁸

- 4.26** Like Ms Simmons, Mr Martin noted that whilst there will be 'some demands on teachers as you introduce new syllabus material ... it is not as if they are starting from scratch'. He asserted that by simplifying and streamlining the new curriculum, teachers will still be working on content that they have taught before, but actually will have less to cover so that they can 'focus better'.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ Evidence, Mr Samojlowicz, 30 November 2020, p 33.

²⁶⁵ Evidence, Mr Bob Willetts, Principal, Berry Public School, 4 November 2020, p 12.

²⁶⁶ Evidence, Ms Jane Simmons, Acting Deputy Secretary, Learning Improvement, Department of Education, 4 November 2020, p 39.

²⁶⁷ Evidence, Ms Simmons, 4 November 2020, p 38.

²⁶⁸ Evidence, Ms Simmons, 4 November 2020, p 38.

²⁶⁹ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 38.

- 4.27 On the basis that ongoing professional development training is already well established, Mr Martin agreed, when asked, that training on the new syllabus could be incorporated into that existing program.²⁷⁰

Committee comment

- 4.28 The committee supports the conclusions of the Learning First and John Hopkins research project, as explored in the Chair's discussion paper, which highlighted the importance of alignment between core curriculum content and professional learning and training of teachers to the raising of academic outcomes. The report noted that '[t]he large variation in the curriculum used within and between schools hampers systemic school improvement efforts. When systems don't know what is being taught, it is difficult to know how it is being taught and what support teachers and school leaders might need to improve teaching and learning.'²⁷¹
- 4.29 Even with a streamlined and optimally structured curriculum, it is difficult to see the concerning trends in academic results and student engagement being reversed if teachers are not properly trained and equipped to teach it effectively. The NSW Government should ensure that teacher training is aligned to curriculum content – a significant shortcoming in the New South Wales system at the moment. New teachers must be ready to make best use of the syllabus, rather than trial-and-error on the job.

Recommendation 29

That the NSW Government ensure that teacher training is aligned to curriculum content and that new teachers are ready to make best use of the syllabus.

The 'ambitious' timeline

- 4.30 The Masters review estimated that it would take up to ten years to develop and implement the new curriculum for New South Wales. Perhaps surprisingly, the NSW Government committed to a much shorter period and projects that it will be completed by 2024. The proposed implementation timeline can be found in Table 1 at the end of chapter 1 of this report.
- 4.31 Representatives of the NSW Government acknowledged that this is an 'ambitious time frame for reform'.²⁷²
- 4.32 Mr Martin advised that the NSW Government had given the authority 'a reasonably direct set of timelines'.²⁷³ He explained that the NESA board, comprised of leaders from the government and non-government education systems, would oversee the rewriting of the curriculum and that

²⁷⁰ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020, p 45.

²⁷¹ David Steiner, Jacqueline Magee and Ben Jensen, 'What we teach matters: How quality curriculum improves student outcomes', Learning First and Johns Hopkins School of Education, (November 2018), p 15.

²⁷² Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020 p 35.

²⁷³ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020 p 39.

NESA will support the board to then implement the curriculum reform program in line with the NSW Government's response to the review.²⁷⁴

- 4.33** In terms of the department's responsibilities, Ms Simmons told the committee that it is working closely with NESA as the timeline is 'contingent' on when the authority produces the draft syllabuses.²⁷⁵ Ms Simmons also said that the department will ensure there are adequate resources to carry out the first key steps of the reforms:

The department is working with NESA around ensuring that we are sequenced in terms of supporting our system to be able to implement a new curriculum. So, what we are doing is we have a number of people across the system that have various expertise surrounding implementing curriculum. We have recalibrated our current resources to ensure that they are focused on supporting schools to deliver new curriculum from 2022.²⁷⁶

- 4.34** Ms Simmons elucidated that the department's focus for professional learning in 2021 is on working with principals and schools, supporting them in designing and developing new programming to operationalise the syllabus, as well as providing assistance on the accompanying assessment structure. In terms of any additional supports planned by the department, Ms Simmons summarised in general terms:

We are also working with them to assist them to work out how can we support them in differentiation of learning and also ensuring that we support them around reducing administration burden on schools.²⁷⁷

- 4.35** NESA provided the committee with a copy of its implementation plan for the curriculum reforms. In particular, the document outlines how the NSW Government priorities have been broken down into specific workstreams, projects and deliverables, as well as the projected program timeframes up to 2024.²⁷⁸

- 4.36** Inquiry participants expressed strong views on whether the implementation timeframe was too 'ambitious' or not ambitious enough. For example, Mr Gregory Whitby, Director of Learning at Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, advocated that implementation occur 'the sooner the better'.²⁷⁹ Similarly, his colleague Ms Maura Manning, Executive Director, acknowledged that whilst any reform would create extra work for teachers, it is justifiable as urgent when considering the outcomes for students:

So in some ways I feel—even though it will be more work for our teachers, and there will be an element of program rewriting and all of those sorts of things, we are in constant cycles of doing anyway, and we are constantly tailoring the curriculum to meet our students' needs. But if this is urgent, which I think we agree that this is urgent, that

²⁷⁴ Evidence, Mr Martin, 4 November 2020 p 35.

²⁷⁵ Evidence, Ms Simmons, 4 November 2020, p 39.

²⁷⁶ Evidence, Ms Simmons, 4 November 2020, p 38.

²⁷⁷ Evidence, Ms Simmons, p 38.

²⁷⁸ Answers to questions on notice, NSW Education Standards Authority, 3 December 2020.

²⁷⁹ Evidence, Mr Gregory Whitby, Director Learning, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, 30 November 2020, p 15.

we need to do this, why wait 10 years? Because it is a long time—those are kids through our schools in those 10 years.²⁸⁰

4.37 However the majority of stakeholders expressed concern and even alarm that the NSW Government's four-year timeline was insufficient to both rewrite and implement the new curriculum across the state. Teacher organisations denounced the NSW Government's timeline as 'not sufficient',²⁸¹ 'unrealistic',²⁸² 'misplaced',²⁸³ 'de-valuing' the consultation of teachers,²⁸⁴ and downright 'ridiculous'.²⁸⁵

4.38 The NSW and ACT Branch of the Independent Education Union emphasised that '[s]yllabus development needs to be done in a planned, structured and informed fashion, with extensive input from teachers', highlighting that it had 'significant workload, staffing and organisational implications for schools'.²⁸⁶

4.39 In a similar vein, the Primary English Teaching Association of Australia explained the various stages that required adequate time to ensure the success of reform:

Curriculum development requires careful consultation during development to ensure 'buy-in'; i.e. that all stakeholders are given opportunity to have input and that such input can be responded to appropriately. Further time is needed to finesse curricula and to adequately support implementation in schools and classrooms, for example, through professional learning and resource development.²⁸⁷

4.40 Similarly, Ms Jenny Allum, Chair of the Association of Independent Schools of NSW' Curriculum Review Working Group, described the magnitude of work required to practically and successfully implement reform:

There are 191 syllabuses in New South Wales. You cannot expect schools or the NSW Education Standards Authority to develop those, that number of syllabuses, in under four years and you certainly cannot expect teachers and schools to adopt that number right away. If you think about primary schools, for example, there are at least six syllabuses. If you are going to impose six new syllabuses across all of the [primary school] learning areas in, say, two years, teachers will just flounder.²⁸⁸

4.41 Whilst acknowledging that significant changes are required for the current curriculum, organisations warned against rushing implementation and advocated for a 'considered' and long-

²⁸⁰ Evidence, Ms Maura Manning, Executive Director, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, 30 November 2020, p 15.

²⁸¹ Submission 70, Science Teachers Association of NSW, p 8.

²⁸² Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 10.

²⁸³ Evidence, Mrs Shepherd, 30 November 2020, p 31.

²⁸⁴ Submission 72, Professional Teachers' Council (PTC) NSW, p 6.

²⁸⁵ Submission 45a, Mathematical Association of NSW, p 3.

²⁸⁶ Submission 34, Independent Education Union of NSW and ACT, p 10.

²⁸⁷ Submission 49, Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA), p 7.

²⁸⁸ Evidence, Ms Jenny Allum, Chair, Curriculum Review Working Group, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, 30 November 2020, p 3.

term approach.²⁸⁹ As an example, the Professional Teachers' Council of NSW noted, 'Rushed educational reform is unlikely to produce effective change at any time.'²⁹⁰

- 4.42** The Visual Arts and Design Educators Association NSW (VADEA) expressed concern that any benefits from a rushed timeline would be at the opportunity cost of the usual stakeholder engagement and input when there are changes to the syllabus:

VADEA understands from meetings with NESAs that the current Syllabus Development Process will not be followed and Board Curriculum Committees will not be established, which means sector representatives, subject experts and academics will not have the opportunity to consult and feedback in an open forum as has previously occurred during syllabus development. The incredibly compressed timeline suggests meaningful, thorough and timely consultation will not be possible.²⁹¹

- 4.43** Stakeholders such as the Primary English Teaching Association Australia and the Professional Teachers' Council argued that the original ten-year timetable proposed by Professor Masters should be adequate.²⁹²

- 4.44** Dr Jensen of Learning First recommended that the review and implementation of the curriculum should not be a one-off exercise, but an 'ongoing process':

But there is an ongoing process between that of collecting information of what is happening in the classroom and hearing from teachers about their struggles—what is working, what is not working. If we have made changes here, we have got three or four years of data and then we have made a little change here and it feeds into there.²⁹³

- 4.45** When asked by committee members whether the NSW Government's timeframe would be sufficient, Professor Masters responded that the truncated timeline might not be enough time to develop and implement 'deep reform' of the curriculum, which was the key motive for his review:

I guess I come back to what people said to me in New South Wales, and that is that they do want deep reform. They do not just want the tweaking of syllabuses. If that is what people want, and it is what the Government wants, then we know that requires time.

As you know, what I said in my report was that deep reform could take a decade, and my international experience would reinforce that point. Most countries that set out to significantly reform their curricula give themselves a period of eight to 10 years, often, to achieve significant reform. I think if you compress the time line, there is a risk that you do not end up with the kind of reforms that people told me they wanted to see and you do end up with what I have been calling the tweaking of what we currently have.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁹ Evidence, Mrs Shepherd, 30 November 2020, p 31. See also, Evidence, Mr Byrne, 30 November 2020, p 32.

²⁹⁰ Submission 72, Professional Teachers' Council (PTC) NSW, p 6.

²⁹¹ Submission 81, Visual Arts and Design Educators Association NSW, p 3.

²⁹² Sub 49, Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA), p 7; Submission 72, Professional Teachers' Council (PTC) NSW, p 6.

²⁹³ Evidence, Dr Jensen, 30 November 2020, p 62.

²⁹⁴ Evidence, Professor Geoff Masters, Lead of the NSW Curriculum Review, 30 November 2020, p 53.

Rural and regional considerations

- 4.46** As an important dimension of engagement, participants representing rural and remote school communities noted that their needs must be considered in implementation. These stakeholders told the committee that school communities in rural and regional areas do not have the same level of access to resources and professional development opportunities as their metropolitan counterparts.
- 4.47** The Isolated Children's Parents Association of NSW (ICPA) reminded the committee that rural and remote communities experience major issues with internet connectivity and access to online learning. Mrs Deborah Nielsen of its Early Childhood Portfolio, raised that without adequate IT infrastructure and staffing, the benefits of the new curriculum would be limited for rural and remote students:

I think the main aspect to be discussed in the rural and remote context is that with curriculum changes it will make no difference at all unless there are policy changes about the delivery of the curriculum ... to do with the delivery which is staffing and infrastructure and different methods of funding to incentivise quality education being delivered to our students.²⁹⁵

Committee comment

- 4.48** The committee is concerned for regional and remote school communities, and as an important measure in better addressing their needs, considers that primary schools in remote New South Wales should be better utilised as hubs for distance learning for high school students.

Recommendation 30

That primary schools in remote New South Wales be better utilised as hubs for distance learning for high school students.

- 4.49** Based on evidence from inquiry participants, the committee is not convinced that the NSW Government has given itself enough time to implement the new curriculum. The depth of change and sheer scale of tasks at hand is enormous, as befitting the largest shakeup of the NSW curriculum in recent decades. Whereas Professor Masters recommended a process of 10 years, the NSW Government has committed to drafting all of the new syllabuses, conducting stakeholder engagement with teachers, schools and communities, and then implementing a brand new curriculum across the state, complete with teacher training and support – by 2024. We cannot help but feel slightly incredulous as to what the quality of the final result will be should the NSW Government follow through with this self-described 'ambitious' timeline.
- 4.50** Furthermore, whilst the committee received very limited evidence on how implementation will be monitored, we strongly consider that all curriculum changes should be evaluated for high-effect impacts on student learning. This process should not be subject to fads and hunches. It must be guided by evidence prior to reform and rigorous evaluation and measurement

²⁹⁵ Evidence, Mrs Deborah Nielsen, Early Childhood Portfolio, Isolated Children's Parents Association of NSW, 4 November 2020, p 28.

thereafter. Unfortunately, the Masters review has not followed this process. The worldview of a single curriculum reviewer has been used, in place of hard evidence and comparative cost-benefit analysis.

- 4.51** Therefore the NSW Government should clearly define the parameters of success for the new curriculum and ensure that all changes to the curriculum are evaluated for high-effect impacts on student learning.
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Recommendation 31

That the NSW Government clearly define the parameters of success for the new curriculum and ensure that all changes are evaluated for high-effect impacts on student learning. Decisions should be guided by evidence prior to reform and rigorous evaluation and measurement after.

Adequate resourcing of NSW Standards Education Authority (NESA)

- 4.52** Acknowledging that NESA has the critical role of developing and implementing curriculum reform, a number of stakeholders questioned its ability to carry out the requisite tasks, and particularly whether it has sufficient resources or staffing levels to deliver effectively within the government's timeframe for reform.

- 4.53** For example, the Science Teachers' Association of NSW noted that 'for many years' NESA has struggled with mandated 'ineffective timeline[s]'. In light of the ambitious timeframe for these reforms, the Association advocated for 'greater financial support and more autonomy so that the NESA Education Experts have sufficient time to develop the right programs for educators'.²⁹⁶

- 4.54** Similarly, Dr Fiona Mueller, Adjunct Scholar with the Centre for Independent Studies and former Director of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), expressed that she has 'strong reservations' about New South Wales' approach to reform due to it not being based on international best practice. She also expressed concerns about NESA's ability to implement reform:

If NESA has people in place who are confident about their capacity to undertake this work, that is great and ultimately that is the decision of the Minister and the Minister's team. I have strong reservations. I will leave it at that.²⁹⁷

- 4.55** Professor Masters told the committee in November 2020 that he had no further engagement or involvement with the implementation of his recommendations.²⁹⁸ He also observed that the government's timeframe would be 'extremely difficult' for NESA even if the agency were 'adequately resourced':

²⁹⁶ Submission 70, Science Teachers Association of NSW, p 8.

²⁹⁷ Evidence, Dr Fiona Mueller, Adjunct Scholar with the Centre for Independent Studies and former Director of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 4 November 2020, p 5.

²⁹⁸ Evidence, Professor Masters, 30 November 2020, p 57.

These are really quite significant reforms that I have proposed and they will take time, so it is a question of how well resourced NESA is and how much time they are given to do this, as well.²⁹⁹

- 4.56** In response to these concerns, NESA advised the committee in December 2020 that it was in the 'planning phase for the commencement of syllabus writing' and had two full-time staff working on the project. In terms of future recruitment, NESA noted:

The organisation wants the very best writers to develop the syllabuses so is seeking nomination from each of the school sectors. NESA expects to engage between 8-10 syllabus writers for K-2 English and Mathematics and additional consultants will be contracted as needed. Planning is underway for the development of the remaining K-12 syllabuses, including the number of staff required.³⁰⁰

Committee comment

- 4.57** By virtue of the way in which the Masters process unfolded, NESA has been given vast power and responsibility in developing the detail of new syllabuses. In effect, NESA is undertaking the 'deep dive' that Professor Masters neglected. The NSW Government should urgently acknowledge and learn from the deficiencies of the Masters process, and ensure that NESA, in its rewriting of the curriculum, does not repeat these mistakes.
- 4.58** In doing so, it is of the utmost importance that NESA is adequately resourced and staffed to carry out this monumental task.
- 4.59** Finally, in recognition of our commitment to the reforms that this committee has instigated, we recommend that in mid-2022 Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education inquire into and report on progress with our two major initiatives and recommendations for lifting NSW school performance: the reform process for school measurement, accountability and outcome based budgeting (the committee's 2020 report) and second, the curriculum reform implemented by NESA (this 2021 report).

Finding 23

That the NSW Education Standards Authority has been given vast power and responsibility in developing the detail of new syllabuses and, in effect, is undertaking the 'deep dive' that Professor Masters neglected.

Recommendation 32

That the NSW Government urgently acknowledge and learn from the deficiencies of the Masters process, and ensure that the NSW Education Standards Authority does not repeat these mistakes in its rewriting of the curriculum. As a first step, the government must ensure that NESA is adequately resourced and staffed to carry out the required reforms.

²⁹⁹ Evidence, Professor Masters, 30 November 2020, p 54.

³⁰⁰ Answers to questions on notice, NSW Education Standards Authority, 3 December 2020, p 10.

Recommendation 33

That in mid-2022 Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education inquire into and report on progress with its two major initiatives and recommendations for lifting NSW school performance, that is:

- the reform process for school measurement, accountability and outcome based budgeting (the committee's 2020 report)
 - curriculum reform implemented by the NSW Education Standards Authority (the committee's 2021 report).
-

Appendix 1 Background

The NSW Curriculum Review (hereafter the Masters review or the review) was the first major review of the entire New South Wales school curriculum since 1989 and sought to ensure that the curriculum 'equips students to contribute to Australian society in the 21st century'.³⁰¹

This report begins with an overview of the Masters review focusing on the recommendations of the review, the government response and the government's timeline for implementation.

Overview of the NSW Curriculum Review

The NSW Government announced the NSW Curriculum Review in May 2018 and released the terms of reference in September 2018. The review was led by Professor Geoff Masters, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council for Educational Research and a member of its Board.

The aims of the review were to:

- make the NSW curriculum clearer to understand and teach
- examine ways to de-clutter the curriculum so that it allows teachers to focus on the main knowledge and skills that all students should have
- understand the implications for planning, teaching, assessing and reporting
- draw on the expertise of teachers to ensure the review's outcomes continue to support their important work
- provide students with strong foundations of knowledge, capabilities and values to be lifelong learners.³⁰²

The terms of reference for the review are set out at the end of this appendix.

Public consultation for the review took place in late 2018 and again late 2019 following the release of the review's interim report in October 2019.

The final report, entitled *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: NSW Curriculum Review*, was published on 23 June 2020 making 24 recommendations, together with the response from the NSW Government.

The following section provides a summary of these recommendations as well as the government response to the review.

Recommendations and government response

The recommendations center around the introduction of a new curriculum from Kindergarten through to year 12. Summarising the goals and implementation of the new curriculum proposed by the review, the final report states:

³⁰¹ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: designs for a new school curriculum* (April 2020), p ix.

³⁰² NSW Government, Education Standards Authority, *NSW Curriculum Review: About*, <https://nswcurriculumreview.nesa.nsw.edu.au/home/siteAreaContent/264c047c-fbff-4593-9740-b0ce37596b85>.

The syllabuses of this new curriculum (referred to as ‘new syllabuses’) are designed to ensure every student learns with understanding, builds skills in applying knowledge, and makes excellent ongoing progress in their learning. The goal is to provide every student, in each phase of their learning, with strong foundations for what comes next. Detailed planning, piloting and implementation of the new curriculum will be required over an extended period of time, possibly a decade, although some proposed changes should be introduced as a matter of priority.³⁰³

In response to the recommendations, the NSW Government supported 'the overall principles of the reform proposed'.³⁰⁴ It explicitly supported 17 recommendations, supported in principle five recommendations and noted two recommendations. The NSW Education Authority Board (NESA) will take a leading role in providing advice to the NSW Government in relation to implementation of the new curriculum.³⁰⁵

NESA is an independent statutory authority which reports to an independent 12-14 member governing Board and the Minister for Education. Under the *Education Standards Authority Act 2013*, NESA's objectives are to:

- provide strategic leadership in improving standards of school education
- promote an evidence-based approach in improving standards of school education
- ensure that the quality of teaching, school curriculum, forms of assessment and regulatory standards under the NSW education and teaching legislation are developed, applied and monitored in a way that improves student learning while maintaining flexibility across the entire school education and teaching sector.³⁰⁶

Before delving into the recommendations of the review and the government response, it is important to note that the recommendations are set out in the Masters review under four broad themes: 'the new curriculum', 'building strong foundations', 'stakeholder engagement' and 'creating enabling conditions'. The NSW Government provided comment on the recommendations under three broad themes, combining the last two themes in the Masters review into one: 'the new curriculum', 'building strong foundations' and 'making the change'.

The rest of this section provides an overview of the recommendations as they are set out in the government response.

The new curriculum

As part of the new curriculum, the review envisaged the introduction of new syllabuses for all areas of learning. These new syllabuses will have three key features:

- ensuring students **learn with understanding** by emphasising depth over breadth of learning and 'a focus on a smaller set of core factual knowledge, concepts and principles'

³⁰³ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion*, p xi.

³⁰⁴ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review final report* (June 2020), p 7.

³⁰⁵ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 7.

³⁰⁶ NSW Education Standards Authority Charter, <https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/about/who-we-are/our-story/nesa-charter>

- greater attention to **skills in applying knowledge** with theory and the application of theory 'seen as intertwined and essential features of every subject'
- untimed syllabuses to ensure every student makes **excellent ongoing progress** in their learning so that 'students who require more time have it' and 'students ready to advance are able to do so'.³⁰⁷

Masters review recommendations		Government position
Learning with understanding	1. Design new syllabuses for each subject, including subjects of the senior years, to reduce the volume of mandated content where appropriate and to prioritise the learning of core facts, concepts and principles. ³⁰⁸	
	1.1 In each subject of the new curriculum, identify essential facts, concepts and principles, the understanding of which is developed in increasing depth over time, and where required, use this to identify content that is more peripheral and could be removed.	Support
	1.2 Decide how this core content is to be sequenced through new syllabuses, informed by evidence of how increasingly deep knowledge and understandings in a subject commonly unfold and are best developed over time. ³⁰⁹	Support
Skills in applying knowledge	2. Design new syllabuses not only to develop increasingly sophisticated knowledge and deeper understandings of a subject, but also skills in applying that knowledge.	
	2.1 Make explicit in new syllabuses for every subject that skills in applying knowledge are part of the intended learning, and show how these skills are to be developed over time. These skills include subject-specific skills, but also skills in using technologies, sourcing and analysing information, critical and creative thinking, collaborating, and communicating.	Support

³⁰⁷ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: designs for a new school curriculum*, pp xiii-xv.

³⁰⁸ Emphases as per original.

³⁰⁹ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xiv.

Excellent ongoing progress	3. Design new syllabuses that do not specify when every student must commence, or how long they have to learn, the content of each syllabus.	
	3.1 Make new syllabuses untimed, with students progressing to the next syllabus once they have mastered the prior syllabus. Students who require more time should have it; students ready to advance should be able to do so.	Support in principle Further advice will be sought from NESA
	3.2 Specify what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do as a result of being taught each syllabus in a subject and illustrate this standard with samples of student responses and work.	Support

In its response, the NSW Government supported the development of new syllabuses encompassing the features of the new curriculum described by the review:

New syllabuses will be developed describing core learning in each subject area. Syllabuses will clearly identify essential concepts, knowledge, skills and understandings.

Knowing what is core will ensure teachers can prioritise learning and have the flexibility they need to teach to a variety of different student abilities within the one classroom.³¹⁰

Building strong foundations

In addition to the new syllabuses, Professor Masters recommended that the new curriculum will establish priorities for teaching and learning in each phase of school. The primary objective of the new curriculum is to 'provide every student, in each phase of learning, with strong foundations for what comes next'.³¹¹

The review report provides a breakdown of the priorities for each learning phase: the early years, the middle years and the later years.

In the early years, the intended focus of the new curriculum is on 'foundational aspects of children's learning and development: their social and emotional development, oral language skills, early reading skills, and early mathematics knowledge and skills'. These skills are to be prioritised over other parts of the curriculum particularly for students who are less advanced in these aspects of their development. In addition, the new curriculum will recognise that 'teachers require flexibility to respond to children's widely varying levels of development and learning needs'.³¹²

In the middle years, the new curriculum is intended to address the increasing percentage of students who do not attain intended levels of learning in mandatory subjects. To do this, it will set clear standards that

³¹⁰ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 9.

³¹¹ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xv.

³¹² NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, pp xv-xvi.

every student is expected to achieve in mandatory subjects and improve the way in which students' long-term progress is monitored and reported on. It will also require every student to begin learning a second language and to develop a common understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal cultures and histories.³¹³

Finally, in the later years, the intended focus is on a smaller number of HSC subjects achieved by combining and consolidating current subjects. The new subjects integrate theory and the application of theory. In addition, vocational learning is considered relevant to every student and area of learning.³¹⁴

Masters review recommendations	Government position	
The early years	<p>4. In the early years of school, give priority to providing every child with solid foundations in the basics, especially oral language development, early reading and writing skills and early mathematics knowledge and skills.</p>	
	<p>4.1 Make explicit in the curriculum that oral language development, early reading and writing skills and early mathematics skills are top priorities in the early years of school, particularly for children who are less advanced in these areas, and that these take precedence over other aspects of learning.</p>	Support
	<p>4.2 Develop a detailed and explicit curriculum for the teaching of reading as part of new syllabuses for the subject English, structured to assist teachers to establish and diagnose where individual children are in their reading development, and accompanied by evidence-based teaching advice.</p>	Support
	<p>4.3 Structure the early mathematics curriculum to support teachers to establish the points children have reached in their mathematics learning, including by diagnosing conceptual gaps and skills deficits, and provide accompanying evidence-based teaching advice as part of new syllabuses in mathematics.</p>	Support

³¹³ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xvi.

³¹⁴ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xvii.

The middle years	5. In the middle years of school, give priority to providing every student with challenging learning material appropriate to their current level of attainment in the expectation that they meet (and ideally exceed) a minimally acceptable standard in each mandated subject by the completion of school.	
	5.1 Maintain the existing set of mandated subjects; for each subject define the minimum level of attainment every student should achieve by the completion of school; and provide teachers and parents/carers with a way of monitoring whether individuals are on track to achieve that standard.	Support
	5.2 Require every student to commence learning a second language during their primary years, making use of technology where possible.	Noted
	5.3 Develop a curriculum that specifies what every student should know and understand about Aboriginal cultures and histories, and incorporate this into Human Society and its Environment.	Support
The later years	6. In the later years of school, give priority to providing every student with opportunities to pursue personal interests and strengths through rigorous, specialised subjects, each of which builds solid theoretical foundations, provides opportunities to transfer and apply knowledge, and develops skills in the practical application of subject learning.	
	6.1 Eliminate the current bifurcation of learning in the later years by developing over time a new set of HSC subjects, each of which involves rigorous, high-quality learning that integrates knowledge and the practical application of knowledge.	Support in principle Further advice will be sought from NESAs
	6.2 Replace the existing learning areas in the later years with a newly defined set, allocate all future HSC subjects to these areas and promote them as focal points for schools' connections with relevant industries and post-school providers and pathway and career advice.	Support
	6.3 Require every student to undertake a major investigative project in a subject of their choosing, with common assessment criteria, moderation of teacher assessments, and performances forming part of a student's HSC results.	Support in principle Further advice will be sought from NESAs

	6.4 Establish a taskforce comprising representatives of the higher education sector, the school sector and the Universities Admissions Centre, to investigate the feasibility of not calculating and reporting the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).	Noted Further advice will be sought from NESA
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The NSW Government responded to these recommendations in three parts. In relation to the early years, it affirmed the importance of foundational English and mathematics:

The NSW Government recognises the critical importance of ensuring that students develop the foundational basics in English (reading, writing, oral language) and mathematics in the very first years at school.³¹⁵

As set out in the table above, while the NSW Government only noted the recommendation on learning a second language in the middle years,³¹⁶ it supported the other recommendations relating to a minimum level of attainment in mandatory subjects and the monitoring of and reporting on student progress:

The NSW Government supports the introduction of a minimum level of attainment in mandatory subjects by the completion of schooling.

The NSW Government is committed to providing better information to parents and carers about where their child is at in their learning. The current curriculum makes it difficult for teachers, parents and carers, and students to see their growth across the years of schooling.

A priority in the development of new syllabuses is to work with teachers and parents to determine the most appropriate ways to monitor and report on student progress.³¹⁷

The NSW Government noted one other recommendation in the later years for the establishment of a taskforce to investigate the feasibility of not calculating and reporting on the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). In relation to the rest of the recommendations around strengthening pathways for all secondary school students in their final years, the NSW Government was generally supportive:

[Vocational Education and Training (VET)] and academic subjects must be supported to attract high-quality students into both. Both theoretical knowledge and applied skills are needed to meet the future challenges faced by the NSW economy.

Introducing new learning areas will be a first step to strengthening senior secondary pathways, by providing clear information for students about the subjects they study and their options beyond schools. Stronger links are needed between schools, universities and VET providers, employers and industry.

The NSW Government supports the development of a smaller number of rigorous, high-quality HSC [Higher School Certificate] courses. All senior secondary subjects must provide a strong foundation for future learning and life beyond school.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 10.

³¹⁶ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 18.

³¹⁷ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 11.

³¹⁸ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 12.

Implementation: Making the change/Requirements needed to drive change

To ensure the successful implementation and delivery of the new curriculum, the Masters review made a number of recommendations.

The first set of these recommendations centred on stakeholder engagement. The review recommended that relevant stakeholder groups, particularly teachers, should be closely involved in all phases of the implementation of the new curriculum. In addition, it emphasised that the key intentions and urgency for the new curriculum should be clearly communicated.

A second set of recommendations focused on creating a number of 'enabling conditions' for the successful implementation of the new curriculum. These included:

- addressing the time pressures described by teachers due to the current volume of content as well as other requirements such as additional content regarding social and health issues, and dealing with paperwork and compliance requirements
- aligning teaching, assessment and reporting practices with the principles and intentions of the new curriculum
- providing professional capacity building to ensure that teachers understand the new curriculum's intentions and the requisite knowledge and skills for implementation.³¹⁹

Masters review recommendations	Government position	
Stakeholder engagement	7. Involve stakeholder groups, especially teachers, in all implementation phases of the new curriculum.	
	7.1 Consult and actively involve all relevant stakeholder groups in the planning, development and pilot testing of new curriculum arrangements	Support
	7.2 Implement a communications plan to explain the urgency of curriculum reform and the key intentions, guiding principles and underpinning evidence base for the new curriculum, including by clarifying what is not intended.	Support
Creating enabling conditions:	8. Review current external demands on teachers' and school leaders' time in an effort to maximise the time available for teaching, learning and instructional leadership.	

³¹⁹ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, pp xviii-xx.

<p>Time for teaching and learning</p>	<p>8.1 Review recent requests that schools add extra-curricular issues and topics to the school curriculum to determine whether all are still necessary, and review protocols for adding such issues and topics in the future</p>	<p>Support</p>
	<p>8.2 Review current paperwork and compliance requirements of teachers and school leaders with a view to reducing the time currently spent on such activities. This review should be undertaken by NESAs and each school sector.</p>	<p>Support</p>
<p>Creating enabling conditions: An aligned learning 'system'</p>	<p>9. Work to ensure all components of the learning system — including professional capacity building, assessment and reporting processes, and broader improvement efforts — are aligned with the principles and intentions of the new curriculum.</p>	
	<p>9.1 Build a coherent system of support for the new curriculum's goals to promote learning with understanding, to build skills in applying knowledge, and to assist teachers to establish where students are in their learning so that individual needs can be addressed with appropriately targeted, evidence-based teaching.</p>	<p>Support</p>
	<p>9.2 In assessing student learning, give greater priority to students' understanding of core facts, concepts and principles, ability to apply these understandings in relevant settings, and skills in knowledge application.</p>	<p>Support</p>
	<p>9.3 Develop, implement and promote assessment and reporting practices to establish the points individuals have reached in their learning, to provide diagnostic feedback to support further learning, and to monitor students' long-term learning progress.</p>	<p>Support in principle</p>
<p>Creating enabling conditions: Professional capacity building</p>	<p>10. Invest in professional capacity building to support the implementation of the new curriculum.</p>	
	<p>10.1 Promote an understanding of teaching as the process of first establishing where students are in their learning and then providing stretch learning challenges appropriate to individuals' current levels of attainment.</p>	<p>Support in principle</p>

	10.2 Develop and deliver professional learning to build teachers' skills in assessing and diagnosing student learning and their knowledge of effective, evidence-based teaching strategies.	Support
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In its response, the NSW Government acknowledged the need to work closely with relevant stakeholders to successfully implement the new curriculum and to ensure that teachers can access appropriate professional learning. The government also highlighted as a key priority providing teachers with more time for teaching:

The NSW Government has set an ambitious timeframe for reform. We acknowledge the need to work closely with the education sector and other key stakeholder groups to achieve effective change and reform.

The NSW Government will work closely with the sectors to ensure that appropriate professional learning, supported by educational research and evidence, is accessed by teachers.

As a priority, the NSW Government will work with the sector to identify the impact of current extra-curricular issues and topics and compliance demands. Making more time for teaching is key to achieving the curriculum reforms.³²⁰

In terms of practical implementation of the new curriculum, the review estimated that it could take up to a decade to implement the curriculum change.³²¹ The NSW Government made the following commitments to be implemented between 2020 and 2024:

Table 1 Implementation timeframe³²²

By 2021	Review and reduce 20 per cent of school-development elective courses in high school to free up study for core subjects
By 2022	New English and mathematics curriculum available for years Kindergarten to year 2
	Strengthening post-school pathways in senior years by redefining learning areas
	Reduce extra-curricular issues and topics, and compliance requirements
By 2023	Full implementation of new Kindergarten to year 2 curriculum
By 2024	New curriculum available for years 3 to 10
	New syllabuses in key learning areas available to schools for years 11 and 12
	A new curriculum for all students from Kindergarten to year 12

³²⁰ NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, p 13.

³²¹ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xviii.

³²² NSW Government, *NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review*, pp 9-13.

The backdrop of declining academic results and student engagement

The Masters review was initiated against a backdrop of falling academic results in both Australia's and the state's schools – an alarming deterioration in academic standards and achievement that has exercised much policy dialogue and debate.

December 2019 saw the official release of results from the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) – an international measure of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy conducted on a three year cycle since 2000.³²³

The results showed that based on PISA assessments conducted between 2008 and 2018, the proportion of the state's 15-year-olds meeting minimum standards for reading, mathematical and scientific literacy has been in steady decline.³²⁴

Such was the extent of the decline that it led Professor Masters to publicly declare it a clear reversal in the state's academic rankings that is most unusual around the rest of the world. He was quoted in the media as follows:

In the [early 2000s] students in NSW were performing among the highest in the world but over the period since the turn of the century there's been a significant decline... That decline is almost unmatched in the rest of the world, it's very hard to find places that have seen such a steady decline over such a long period" ...³²⁵

The Minister for Education and Early Childhood, the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, also commented on the results, acknowledging that '[f]or 20 years now, we have been on a steady downward trajectory in the international student rankings' and pointing to 'systemic problems' within the education system which need to be addressed in order to arrest and reverse this trajectory.³²⁶

The 2018 PISA results and the concerning picture they paint of the state of play in school education within New South Wales played out in evidence to the committee from frontline teachers, with Dr Fiona Mueller, Adjunct Scholar with the Centre for Independent Studies and former Director of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), telling the committee of the 'decades of decline in the quality of curriculum teaching and learning' that she has observed over 30 years in the sector.³²⁷ The same inquiry participant offered her views on what has contributed to this steady and sustained decline in student performance, suggesting to the committee that 'with regard to PISA results and student performance more broadly, the low levels of competence in English language are what hold our students back.'³²⁸

³²³ Australian Council for Educational Research, *PISA*, <https://www.acer.org/au/pisa>.

³²⁴ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xi; See also NSW Department of Education, *What works best: 2020 update, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation*, April 2020, p 4.

³²⁵ Pallavi Singhal, 'NSW curriculum review aims to halt Australian students' 'significant' decline in results', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 February 2020.

³²⁶ Sarah Mitchell, 'For 20 years our students have been slipping – but money is not the answer', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 2019.

³²⁷ Evidence, Dr Fiona Mueller, Adjunct Scholar with the Centre for Independent Studies and former Director of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 4 November 2020, p 2.

³²⁸ Evidence, Dr Mueller, 4 November 2020, p 6.

Another inquiry participant submitted that, based on actual classroom experience, there has been a 'noticeable significant drop in academic level of students as they start Year 7.'³²⁹

Alongside sliding academic results, student disengagement was identified by inquiry participants as a significant challenge confronting the New South Wales school system. For instance, Mr Gregory Whitby, Executive Director, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, expressed concern about a 'drop-off' in student engagement, telling the committee that the Catholic system is seeing an increasing number of children disengaged from learning for a variety of reasons.³³⁰

Elsewhere in evidence, student disengagement was explained as a symptom or consequence of some of the systemic and structural issues the Masters review has set out to address.³³¹ This cause-and-effect proposition informs Professor Masters' own analysis of what is happening in some of the state's schools and, in his view, justifies why radical reforms – what one stakeholder referred to as 'a paradigm shift'³³² – are now needed.³³³

In a departure from the majority view, Dr John Collier of the Anglican Education Commission and Headmaster of St Andrew's Cathedral School, questioned this narrative of decline, interrogating the idea that the quality of education in New South Wales can be summed up by PISA results alone:

I would in fact like to challenge in any case the notion that education is in some kind of downward spiral. I do not believe that the quality of education in this State can be summed up simply by PISA results, which are fairly light, brief samples of some year 9 students every few years. I want to put it to you that education is a lot richer and a lot more important than simple performance in tests.³³⁴

Notwithstanding this dissenting view, the weight of evidence received by the committee presented a clear picture of a New South Wales school system in a rankings slide on the global stage, with a growing number of students disengaged from learning. There was a near consensus among inquiry participants that maintaining the status quo would mean heading further in the wrong direction. In recommending game-changing reforms, the Masters review of the NSW school curriculum has been positioned as a key step in the NSW Government's agenda to reverse the decline in academic results and set the State on a more positive trajectory.

Against this backdrop, a central question throughout the committee's inquiry was the potential utility of the Masters review and its final recommendations to actually achieve the objectives of reversing the decline in academic results and improving student engagement, as examined in chapter 1 of this report.

³²⁹ Submission 14, name suppressed, p 1.

³³⁰ Evidence, Mr Gregory Whitby, Executive Director, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, 30 November 2020, p 12.

³³¹ See for example: Evidence, Mrs Margaret Shepherd, President, Science Teachers Association of NSW, 30 November 2020, p 36; Submission 58, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, p 5.

³³² Evidence, Ms Jane Powles, Executive Officer, Science Teachers Association of NSW, 30 November 2020, p 35.

³³³ NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xii; Evidence, Prof Geoff Masters, Lead of the NSW Curriculum Review, 30 November 2020, pp 56-57.

³³⁴ Evidence, Dr John Collier, Chair, Anglican Education Commission and Headmaster of St Andrew's Cathedral School, 30 November 2020, p 3.

Masters review terms of reference

The Review will undertake a comprehensive community engagement process to seek the diversity of views in the community, including the views of young people, parents, employers and those involved in the delivery of school education. These Terms of Reference have been developed following targeted stakeholder engagement.

The aim of the Review is to enhance the effectiveness of school education in NSW to:

- provide an education that engages and challenges every child and young person in learning, rewards them for effort and promotes high standards, and
- prepare each student with strong foundations of knowledge, capabilities and values to be lifelong learners, and to flourish in a world in which rapid technological advances are contributing to unprecedented economic and social change in unpredictable ways.

The Review will consider the strengths and weaknesses of the current NSW curriculum, its relationship to the Australian Curriculum and its accessibility to the diverse learners of the NSW community.

The Review, in developing its recommendations, should:

1. articulate the purposes of the school curriculum, including underpinning philosophies and principles
2. identify essential knowledge, skills and attributes as the common entitlement for all learners, ensuring parity of access to learning that is necessary for success, taking account of:
 - a. the evidence on how skills and attributes are acquired through knowledge-based disciplines
 - b. the extent of overcrowding in the curriculum
 - c. the appropriate scope for school community choices about content
3. explain how the curriculum could be redesigned and presented to better support teaching, learning, assessment and reporting, including by considering:
 - a. the desirability of identifying priorities for learning at different stages of schooling
 - b. the appropriate level of detail in curriculum documents
 - c. the breadth and depth of study
 - d. ways of improving every learner's transition into school and across the years of schooling
 - e. ways of enhancing the options and pathways for all students to further education and work
4. identify the implications of any new approach to curriculum design for:
 - a. assessment and reporting (including NAPLAN, the Record of School Achievement and the Higher School Certificate)
 - b. pedagogical practices and teacher workload
 - c. teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning
 - d. school organisation and regulation
 - e. relevant legislation
 - f. measuring the quality and impact of schooling.

The Review will have regard to:

- National policy developments and reports, including:
 - The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015, and the national Closing the Gap strategy
 - Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools. The Review will contribute appropriately to any related national processes
 - Lifting Our Game: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions
 - Australia's Chief Scientist, Dr Alan Finkel's report Optimising STEM industry-school partnerships: inspiring Australia's next generation
 - the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education conducted by Emeritus Professor John Halsey
 - the Review of the Australian Curriculum: Final Report.
 - Obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education 2015
 - The 2016 BOSTES Review (particularly in relation to the crowded curriculum) and the Stronger HSC Reforms introduced from 2017
- Any significant lessons to be drawn from other Australian jurisdictions including in their implementation of the Australian Curriculum, as well as perspectives from international jurisdictions where there have been recent reviews and curriculum revisions
- Corresponding work of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to review and refine the Australian Curriculum, including international research.

Appendix 2 Submissions

No.	Author
1	Mr Bogdan Plag
2	Confidential
3	Mr Stephen Wellings
4	Name suppressed
5	Mr Geoff Leary
6	Mrs Carolyne Edmonds
7	Name suppressed
8	Name suppressed
9	Name suppressed
10	Mrs Gail Jones
11	Professor Frank Pignatelli
12	Mr Greg Ashman
13	Name suppressed
14	Name suppressed
15	Mr Jason van Tol
16	Name suppressed
17	Dr Chiaki Kojima
18	Confidential
19	Mr Mungo Gilchrist
20	Confidential
21	Dr Stephen Fyson
21a	Dr Stephen Fyson
22	Dr Denis Mootz
23	Confidential
24	Parliamentary Education and Engagement Unit - NSW Parliament
25	Australian Catholic University
26	Confidential
26a	Confidential
27	Name suppressed
28	United Taekwondo
29	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)

No.	Author
30	Name suppressed
31	Family Planning NSW
31a	Family Planning NSW
31b	Family Planning NSW
32	Name suppressed
33	Mrs Kelly Pfeiffer
34	Independent Education Union NSW and ACT
34a	Independent Education Union NSW and ACT
35	Association of Independent Schools of NSW
36	Institute of Public Affairs
37	Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (NSW and ACT)
38	Ms Vicki Steer
39	The Centre for Independent Studies
40	Name suppressed
41	Mr Samuel Hague
41a	Mr Samuel Hague
42	Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA)
42a	Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA)
43	Dr John Mack
43a	Dr John Mack
44	Mr Daniel Pehlivan
45	Mathematical Association of NSW
45a	Mathematical Association of NSW
46	Mrs Shirley McHugh
47	The University of Newcastle, Priority Research Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition
47a	The University of Newcastle, Priority Research Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition
48	Institute of Technology Education
49	Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA)
50	Australian Education Union NSW Teachers Federation
50a	Australian Education Union NSW Teachers Federation
51	Inter-Church Commission On Religious Education in Schools (NSW) Inc.
52	Australian Securities and Investments Commission
53	Name suppressed
54	Dr Fiona Mueller

No.	Author
55	Anglican Education Commission (Anglican EdComm)
56	NSW Primary Principal's Association
57	Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta
58	Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW
59	HSC Japanese Committee
60	Ms Carol Barnes
61	Steiner Education Australia
62	Society and Culture Association of NSW
63	Northern Sydney and Central Coast District Councils of P&C Associations - Jointly
64	NSW Department of Education
65	Ms Tracy Anne (Sedman)
66	Confidential
67	Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW Inc.
68	Confidential
69	Australian Literacy Educators' Association
70	Science Teachers Association NSW
71	Country Women's Association of NSW (CWA of NSW)
71a	Country Women's Association of NSW (CWA of NSW)
72	Professional Teachers' Council (PTC) NSW
73	Association of Catholic School Principals (ACSP)
74	Name suppressed
75	Name suppressed
76	Asia Education Teachers' Association
77	Ms Judy Pilch
78	Legal Studies Association of NSW Inc
79	Australian Association of Social Workers
80	ACON
81	Visual Arts and Design Educators Association NSW
82	Engineers Australia
83	Economics and Business Educators NSW
84	NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby
85	Name suppressed
86	Name suppressed
87	Name suppressed
88	Name suppressed

No.	Author
89	Name suppressed
90	Name suppressed
91	Dr Kevin Donnelly
92	Ms Noriko Kojiro-Brown
93	Name suppressed
94	Name suppressed
95	Name suppressed
96	Name suppressed

Appendix 3 Witnesses at hearings

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Wednesday 4 November 2020 Macquarie Room Parliament House, Sydney	Mr Greg Ashman <i>(via videoconference)</i>	Head mathematics teacher and education blogger
	Dr Fiona Mueller	Adjunct Scholar, Centre for Independent Studies
	Ms Norma Petrocco	Vice President, NSW Primary Principals' Association
	Mr Bob Willetts	Principal of Berry Public School
	Mr Michael Egan	President, Association of Catholic School Principals & Principal, La Salle College Bankstown
	Mrs Fran Bonanno	Vice President, Association of Catholic School Principals & Principal St Felix Primary School Bankstown
	Mr David Hope	President, Northern Sydney District Council of Parents and Citizens Associations
	Mrs Sharryn Brownlee	President, Central Coast Council of Parents and Citizens Associations
	Mrs Annabel Strachan <i>(via videoconference)</i>	Rural Schools Portfolio, Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW
	Mrs Deborah Nielsen <i>(via videoconference)</i>	Early Childhood Portfolio, Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW
	Mr Martin Graham	A/Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, Department of Education
	Ms Jane Simmons PSM	A/Deputy Secretary, Learning Improvement, Department Of Education
Mr Paul Martin	Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)	
Ms Andrea Frost	Director, NSW Curriculum Reform Taskforce, NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)	

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Monday 30 November 2020 Macquarie Room Parliament House, Sydney	Ms Jenny Allum, <i>(via videoconference)</i>	Chair, Curriculum Review Working Group, Association of Independent Schools of NSW
	Mr Stephen Kinsella	Executive Director of the Anglican Education Commission
	Dr John Collier	Chair of the Anglican Education Commission and Headmaster of St Andrew's Cathedral School
	Ms Maura Manning	Director Learning, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta
	Mr Gregory Whitby	Executive Director, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta
	Ms Jeannie Douglass	Senior Manager, Parliamentary Education and Engagement
	Ms Daniela Giorgi	Senior Education Officer, Parliamentary Education and Engagement
	Dr Bella d'Abbrera <i>(via videoconference)</i>	Director, Foundations of Western Civilisation Program, Institute of Public Affairs
	Ms Karen McDaid	President, Mathematical Association of NSW
	Mr Darius Samojłowicz	Executive Officer, Mathematical Association of NSW
	Mrs Margaret Shepherd	President, Science Teachers Association of NSW
	Ms Jane Powles	Executive Officer, Science Teachers Association of NSW
	Mr Grant Byrne	President, Institute of Technology Education
	Professor Anne-Marie Morgan <i>(via videoconference)</i>	Executive Officer, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations
Mrs Gillian Cordy <i>(via videoconference)</i>	Executive Officer, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations	

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Mr John Murn	Vice President, HSC Japanese Committee
	Ms Kyoko Hodgkinson	Member, HSC Japanese Committee
	Professor Geoff Masters <i>(via videoconference)</i>	Lead of the NSW Curriculum Review
	Dr Ben Jensen <i>(via videoconference)</i>	Chief Executive Officer, Learning First

Appendix 4 Minutes

Minutes no. 15

Thursday 6 February 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

McKell Room, Parliament House, Sydney at 10.04 am

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair*

Mr D'Adam

Mr Fang

Mr Farlow (from 10.06 am)

Mrs Houssos (until 1.57 pm)

Mr Shoebridge (until 1.00 pm, then from 1.54 pm)

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes nos. 11 and 14 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 15 November 2019 – Letter from the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning to the secretariat, attaching answers to the request for further information regarding certain answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the initial Budget Estimates hearing
- 23 January 2020 – Email from Mr Jerry Bishop, Leader Executive Support, Office of the Deputy Secretary – School Operations and Performance, Department of Education, advising that the Deputy Secretary, Mr Murat Dizdar, has requested material about Auburn North Public School not be published or referred to in the draft report
- 24 January 2020 – Email from Mr Tom Sherlock, Principal Project Officer, Enterprise Program Management Office, Department of Education, providing requested information for inclusion in the draft report.
- 3 February 2020 – Email from Mr John Healey, Director, Enterprise Program Management Office, Department of Education to secretariat asking the Committee to consider a request from the Department to review the draft report before publication
- 4 February 2020 – Email from Mr John Healey, Director, Enterprise Program Management Office, Department of Education to secretariat providing reasons for the Department's request to review the draft report prior to publication
- 4 February 2020 – Email from Mr John Healey, Director, Enterprise Program Management Office, Department of Education to secretariat rescinding the Department's request to view a draft copy of the report.

Sent

- 21 October 2019 – Email from the secretariat to Mr Mitchell Potts, Office of the Hon Geoff Lee MP, Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, advising that Portfolio Committee No. 3 resolved not to hold supplementary hearings for the portfolio of Skills and Tertiary Education
- 21 October 2019 – Email from the secretariat to Ms Shannon Hall, Office of the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, advising that Portfolio Committee No. 3 resolved not to hold supplementary hearings for the portfolio of Education and Early Childhood Learning in the week set aside for supplementary hearings, and that the committee will write to the

Minister seeking further information on certain answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions before considering a supplementary hearing in late November/early December

- 4 November 2019 – Letter from the secretariat, to the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, requesting further information regarding certain answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the initial Budget Estimates hearing
- 17 January 2020 - Email from the secretariat to Mr Tom Sherlock, Principal Project Officer, Enterprise Program Management Office, Department of Education, requesting update on PISA 2018, NAPLAN 2019 and remuneration of DELs
- 22 January 2020 - Email from the secretariat to Mr Jerry Bishop, Leader Executive Support, Office of the Deputy Secretary – School Operations and Performance, Department of Education, seeking permission to publish Auburn North Public School site visit material in draft report
- 4 February 2020 – Secretariat to Mr John Healey, Director, Enterprise Program Management Office, Department of Education, requesting reasons be provided for wanting to review the committee's draft report.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of correspondence received by Mr Tom Sherlock, Principal Project Officer, Enterprise Program Management Office, Department of Education, dated 24 January 2020.

4. Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2019-2020 – procedural resolutions – further hearings

The 2019-2020 Budget Estimates timetable for further hearings was agreed to by the House. Below is a table of Portfolio Committee No. 3 hearings:

Date	Portfolio
Tuesday 3 March 2020	Education and Early Childhood Education (Mitchell)
Wednesday 11 March 2020	Tertiary Education and Skills (Lee)

4.1 Total hearing time

Mr Fang moved: That

- the portfolios of Education and Early Childhood Education be examined concurrently,
- depending on whether questions will be asked by government members, the total hearing time for the portfolios of Education and Early Childhood Education be as follows:

With Government questions <i>(Equal question time allocated to opposition, crossbench and government members)</i>		Without Government questions <i>(Equal question time allocated to opposition and crossbench)</i>	
9.30am–12.30 pm	Minister appearing	9.30am–11.30 am	Minister appearing
		11.30am–11.40am	Break
		11.40am–12.40pm	Departmental staff
12.30pm–2.00pm	Lunch	12.40 pm–1.40 pm	Lunch
2.00pm–5.00pm	Departmental staff	1.40pm–2.40pm	Departmental staff
		2.40pm–2.50pm	Break
		2.50pm–4.20pm	Departmental staff
		4.20pm	Departmental staff
5.00pm–6.00pm	Dinner		
6.00pm–8.00pm	Departmental staff		

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the hearing allocation be amended so that where questions by government members are not asked, an evening session between 6-8pm be held with questions allocated equally between opposition and cross bench members.

Motion of Mr Shoebridge negatived.

Original motion put and passed.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That depending on whether questions will be asked by government members, the total hearing time for the portfolios of Tertiary Education and Skills be as follows:

With Government questions (Equal question time allocated to opposition, crossbench and government members)		Without Government questions (Equal question time allocated to opposition and crossbench)	
9.30am–12.30 pm	Minister	9.30am–11.30 am	Minister
		11.30am-11.40am	Break
		11.40am-12.40pm	Departmental staff
12.30pm-2.00pm	Lunch	12.40 pm-1.40 pm	Lunch
2.00pm-5.00pm	Departmental staff	1.40pm-2.40pm	Departmental staff
		2.40pm-2.50pm	Break
		2.50pm-4.20pm	Departmental staff
5.00pm-6.00pm	Dinner		
6.00pm-8.00pm	Departmental staff		

4.2 Allocation of question time

The committee noted that under the resolution establishing the Portfolio Committees, the sequence of questions at hearings is to alternate between opposition, crossbench and government members, with equal time allocated to each, unless the committee decides otherwise.

4.3 Witness requests

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That committee members email the Secretariat the list of witnesses requested by 5.00 pm, Thursday 6 February 2020.

5. Consideration of terms of reference

The Chair tabled a letter from three committee members, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham and Mr Mason-Cox; proposing the following self-reference:

That NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 3 (Education) inquire into and report on the contents of and proposed changes to the NSW school curriculum, and in particular:

1. The extent to which the Masters Curriculum Review addresses its terms of reference, including:
 - (a) Curriculum content, flexibility and pedagogy
 - (b) Quality and relevance of the evidence-base underpinning the recommendations (compared to CESE findings)
 - (c) Recommendations for student-centred 'progression points' and 'differentiated learning' in schools and whether such initiatives are research-based and proven to be effective
 - (d) Relationship with the national schools curriculum
2. The extent to which the Masters Review meets key Government policy objectives, including:
 - (a) Addressing concerns about the overcrowding of the curriculum
 - (b) Ensuring students' acquisition of excellence in literacy and numeracy, as well as deep knowledge of key subjects
 - (c) Professor Masters' explanation for NSW declining school results and the role a revised curriculum can play in reversing this decline
3. Other matters of public concern and interest in the development of the NSW curriculum:

- (a) To what extent, if any, 'cross-curriculum priorities' are needed to guide classroom content and teaching,
- (b) To what extent, if any, knowledge and the curriculum are 'socially constructed', requiring the teaching of source verification and fluidity principles,
- (c) Whether and to what extent schools should be involved in the 'social and emotional development' of students, as per the Melbourne/Alice Springs Declarations, and growing popularity of 'wellbeing programs' in NSW schools
- (d) Adequacy of the content and depth of teaching of Australian history, pre- and post-1788
- (e) Given the importance of English literacy across the curriculum, adopting the most effective evidence-based approaches to language acquisition, especially for reading and writing
- (f) Role and effectiveness of vocational education syllabuses in NSW schools
- (g) Effectiveness of NESA in curriculum development and supervision

4. Any other related matters.

Mr Fang moved: That the committee adopt the terms of reference.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the motion of Mr Fang be amended by omitting Item 3 from the terms of reference.

Amendment of Mr Shoebridge put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Amendment resolved in the negative.

Original question of Mr Fang put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Original question resolved in the affirmative.

6. Conduct of the inquiry into the review of the NSW School Curriculum

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason-Cox: That the committee:

- Defer opening submissions until publication of the Masters Curriculum Review, and that the closing date for submissions be six weeks after opening
- Circulate a discussion paper following the close of submissions and before holding hearings, drawing out the main issues for further comment by stakeholders
- Report in late 2020.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the committee write to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Education, and the NSW Education Standards Authority, if applicable, to advise them of the new inquiry and to:

- Request that the committee be advised of the likely publication date of the Masters Review
- Request a copy of the NSW curriculum and syllabus
- Request private briefing with Professor Masters on the outcomes of his review
- Advise that when submissions open, the committee will again write to them to request that they contact stakeholders who made submissions to the Masters Review, to inform them that the committee is inviting submissions.

7. Inquiry into measurement and outcome based funding in New South Wales schools

7.1 Public submission

The committee noted that the following submission was published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution establishing the committee: submission 21.

7.2 Answers to questions on notice

The committee noted the following answers to questions on notice were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to questions on notice from the Department of Education, received 20 December 2019
- answers to questions on notice from Professor Kim Beswick, University of New South Wales, received 12 January 2020
- answers to questions on notice from Professor Jim Tognolini, University of Sydney, received 14 January 2020.

Resolved on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee keep confidential Tab A provided by Mr John Healey, Director, Enterprise Program Management Office, Department of Education, dated 20 December 2019, as per the request of the author, as they are the intellectual property of the survey provider and the NSW Department of Education is contractually obliged not to reveal them publicly.

7.3 Site visit report – 25 and 29 October 2019, prepared by secretariat

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise publication of the report prepared by the secretariat regarding visits to schools on 25 and 29 October 2019.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the committee insert as a footnote in the report, the Department of Education's position regarding the publication of graphs and quotes in the committee's report from the presentation given by Auburn North Public School.

7.4 Consideration of Chair's draft report

The Chair submitted his draft report entitled *Measurement and outcome based funding in New South Wales schools*, which, having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the secretariat draft a summary of the evidence from inquiry submissions and transcripts be included as one of the introductory chapters to the report.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee only consider the list of recommendations during today's meeting and defer consideration of the contents of the report until a further meeting to be held at 10am, Thursday 13 February 2020.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 1 be amended by omitting: 'That the Government comply with its own Outcome Budgeting Policy and a true citizens' perspective of the education system by ensuring the 2021/22 Budget features the publication of school-by-school performance targets and appropriate accountability measures for how well these targets have been met (for schools of sufficient size where outcomes can be reliably measured)' before 'That the Government also publish the Department of Education's business plan developed in collaboration with Treasury.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendations 2 and 3 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 4 be amended by omitting: 'That these be based on averaged school results (the best indicator of HSC achievement) ahead of various band level targets. That NAPLAN measures/targets also give priority to averaged results, ahead of band level data' after 'That the Government include Year 12 indicators (retention rates and Higher School Certificate performance) in its targets for high schools'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That Recommendation 6 be amended by inserting: 'and vocational education and training experts, including the TAFE sector' after 'NSW Business Chamber and other industry groups'.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 6 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 7 be amended by omitting 'Department of Education and Treasury (in its oversight role)' and inserting instead 'Government'.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the Recommendation 7, as amended, be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the Recommendation 8 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That:

- a) Recommendation 9 be amended by omitting 'in light of the way in which, at the end of each year, media outlets and private websites publish (either partly or wholly) league-table school rankings for NSW Higher School Certificate results, seemingly without consequences' after 'Education Act 1990'.
- b) reflecting the deleted sentence in the committee comment.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 10 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 11 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 16 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 20 be omitted: 'That the Department of Education require its schools to conduct parents' exit interviews to find out why they left. Currently, dissatisfied families who leave disappear into the system, with no record of the reason for their departure from a certain school. The arrival of a substandard principal at a school usually leads to an exodus of families. Exit interviews would help the Department identify this problem. Conversely, satisfied families (leaving for other reasons) would be a very positive performance indicator for principals', and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'That the Department of Education require its schools to conduct exit interviews of parents when students leave a school. Currently, dissatisfied families who leave disappear into the system, with no record of the reason for their departure from a certain school'.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the motion of Mr D'Adam be amended by:

- a) inserting 'seek to' before 'conduct exit interviews of parents'
- b) omitting 'Currently, dissatisfied families who leave disappear into the system, with no record of the reason for their departure from a certain school' after 'when student leave a school'.

- c) reflecting the deleted sentence in the committee comment. [FOOTNOTE: See Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, NSW Legislative Council, *Students with a disability or special needs in New South Wales schools* (2017)].

Amendment of Mr Shoebridge put and passed.

Original question of Mr D'Adam, as amended, put and passed.

Resolved on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That Recommendation 23 be amended by omitting: 'like Dr Roy' after 'working with experts'.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the Recommendation 23 be amended by:

- a) omitting 'like Dr Roy. The Government needs to place a premium on student safety and teacher accountability, protecting one of the most vulnerable groups in our society' after 'working with experts'.
- b) reflecting the deleted sentence in the committee comment.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That Recommendation 25 be amended by:

- a) omitting 'change' and inserting instead 'review'
- b) inserting 'better' before 'reflect the qualities'.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 26 be omitted: "That the Government place school principals on performance-based contracts with significantly increased salaries. Performance measures should be based on the effective use of evidence and data, and achievement of high-level school results (measured primarily by value adding). Successful principals would receive performance bonuses; failing principals the termination of their contracts. The new system should also be used to meet Minister Mitchell's goal of giving "incentives to our best principals to take up jobs in our most challenging schools", and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'That the Government ensure that school principal's performance agreements include performance measures that are based on the effective use of evidence and data, and achievement of high-level school results (measured primarily by value adding). The Government should urgently establish a scheme to meet Minister Mitchell's goals of giving 'incentives to our best principals to take up jobs in our most challenging schools'.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox, Mr Shoebridge.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 26 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 27 be omitted: "That the Government place Directors of Educational Leadership (DELs) on performance-based contracts, using the combined achievements of their local cluster of 20 schools (measured primarily by value adding) as the main assessment criteria for whether or not to extend their contracts', and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'That the Government ensure that the performance agreements for Directors Educational Leadership include performance measures that are based on ensuring the effective use of evidence and data, and achievement of high-level school results (measured primarily by value adding) for the schools in their local cluster'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 28 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 29 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved:

- a) That Recommendation 30 be amended by omitting: 'with extra resources being provided from Gonski growth money as a new funding support program (given that the Gonski money can be used for any purpose past the school gate). We simply don't have enough of these outstanding school leaders in NSW; so wide networking of the success of Best Practice Schools is a logical way of spreading their influence' after 'less successful schools can also benefit'.
- b) reflecting the deleted sentence in the committee comment.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 30 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That

- a) Recommendation 31 be omitted: 'That the Department of Education require government schools to use direct/explicit instruction as their main classroom teaching practice, without exception. This was supposed to have happened under the Department's 2017 School Excellence Framework but clearly it hasn't' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'That the Government ensure the principle of direct/explicit instruction is the main teaching method in NSW government schools.'

- b) The following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 5.49: 'The committee found that in accordance with the Department of Education's 2017 School Excellence Framework, endorses the use of the principle of direct/explicit instruction as the main classroom teaching practices for NSW Government schools'.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 34 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 34 be amended by inserting ', including deletion of special religious education' after 'to this effect'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge left the meeting.

Mrs Houssos moved: That Recommendation 43 be amended by omitting 'develop a formal Tailored Support Policy' and inserting instead 'investigate developing a formal Tailored Support Policy'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That a new recommendation be inserted after Recommendation 45: 'That once the "CESE menu" is established, the Schools Performance Commission provide classroom teachers with the appropriate support to implement this "menu" into their teaching plans, in a similar model to the support provided by the peak organisation for independent schools.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That recommendation 52 be amended by:

- omitting 'There is no point in Education courses training would-be teachers in failed, low impact programs that have been abandoned by NSW government schools.'

- reflecting the deleted sentence in the committee comment.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That Recommendation 57 be amended by omitting ', whether coming from a traditional teaching background or other professions.'

Mrs Houssos moved: That Recommendation 67 be amended by omitting 'backed by eligibility for a new public funding program)!'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Houssos left the meeting.

Mr Shoebridge joined the meeting.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That Recommendation 41 be amended by:

- omitting 'not part of the 'education establishment', finding excuses for school failure. They need to be'
- omitting 'the main point' and inserting instead 'a point'.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendations 42, 43, 44, 45 and 46 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That Recommendation 47 be amended by:

- omitting 'and other experimental programs developed centrally in school education over the past decade.'
- reflecting in the committee comment that there is no compelling evidence to support open-plan classrooms and co-teaching, including Hattie's finding that it has a low-effect result, and anecdotal evidence of declining NAPLAN results.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendations 49, 50 and 51 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 49 be amended by omitting ', such as the Teach for Australia and Alphacrucis models'.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 53 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 54 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 55 be amended to insert '(where available)' following 'value-added'.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 55, as amended, be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 57, as amended, be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 59 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That Recommendation 61 be amended by omitting 'In particular, the report should outline progress with the implementation of government policy to "support the explicit instruction of phonics in the early years as the best way to teach reading."'

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 63 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 67 be amended by omitting:

- 'adopt in the non-government sectors, as far as possible, the outcome-based budgeting reforms applying to government schools, especially with respect to teacher quality, value-added reporting, ambitious school improvement targets and the CESE best practice menu,
- ensure non-government school sectors have Board representation on the proposed Schools Performance Commission, if they are willing to participate in the reforms recommended above, and
- secure the support of non-government sectors for the Best Practice School Model and widespread school improvement networking (backed by eligibility for a new public funding program).'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 67 be amended by:

- omitting 'That the Government negotiate School Education Accords with the non-government sectors to:' and inserting instead 'That the Government, building on the success and contents of the January 2020 Memoranda of Understanding, take this process a step further and negotiate School Education Accords with the non-government sectors to:'
- Inserting a second sentence to the third dot point: 'To assist parents and ensure consistency across the State, the same set of school-by-school performance outcomes need to be published across the government and non-government sectors.'
- Omitting in the fourth dot point ', if they are willing to participate in the reforms recommended above.'

8. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 2.54 pm until 10am, Thursday 13 February 2020, McKell Room (*Outcome based funding report deliberative*)

Emma Rogerson
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 16

Thursday 13 February 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

McKell Room, Parliament House, 10.03 am

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair*

Mr D'Adam

Mr Fang

Mr Farlow

Mrs Houssos

Mr Shoebridge (from 10.16 am)

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes no. 15 be amended by:

- a) omitting 'Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos' after 'Noes', and instead inserting 'Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos' after 'Ayes' during the deliberation of Mr Shoebridge's motion that Recommendation 26 be omitted.
- b) Omitting 'Mr D'Adam' after 'Noes', and instead inserting 'Mr D'Adam' after 'Ayes' during the deliberation of Mr Shoebridge's motion that Recommendation 34 be amended.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes no. 15, as amended, be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Sent

- 12 February 2020 – Letter from the chair to the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, advising of the new inquiry into the review of the NSW school curriculum, requesting to be informed of the publication of the NSW Curriculum Review, requesting a copy of the NSW curriculum and syllabus, and requesting assistance in contacting submission authors to the review.
- 12 February 2020 – Letter from the chair to Professor Geoff Masters AO, Independent Review Lead, NSW Curriculum Review, advising of the new inquiry into the review of the NSW school curriculum, requesting a private briefing with the committee on the outcomes of the review soon after it is published.

4. Inquiry into measurement and outcome based funding in New South Wales schools

4.1 Consideration of Chair's draft report – continued

The Chair submitted his revised Chair's draft report, entitled '*Measurement and outcome based funding in New South Wales schools*' which, having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendations 13 and 15 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 14 be amended by omitting the words 'and replace' after '(ensuring no school is worse off financially)', and inserting instead 'as it does not require the diagnosis or confirmation of a disability. The committee recommends replacing'.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 14, as amended, be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Houssos moved: That Recommendation 32 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 39 be omitted: 'That the Government make classroom inspections mandatory, rather than by what the Auditor-General's report described as "mutual agreement"; and seek to amend the industrial arrangements for government school teachers to reflect this new arrangement. Teacher should not be able to opt out of inspections of their work', and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'That the Government ensure the new school inspectors have access to all classrooms and the capacity to set improvement goals for teachers (in collaboration with principals, DELs and the teachers themselves), playing a vital monitoring, assessment and feedback role in improving teacher quality'.

Mr Shoebridge joined the meeting.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 47 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 55 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 59 be amended by omitting 'and effects-levels associated with them' after 'on their literacy teaching methods'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 2.20 be amended by omitting 'The Committee welcomes Treasury's involvement as an oversight and accountability agency. But' before 'if the new system is to have a major positive impact on school results, it must be more than minimalist.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 2.48 be amended by omitting 'So too, Year 12 HSC results and targets should be publicly available, school by school, always striving to lift the qualifications of the leaving school cohort.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Chapter 3 be amended by:

- a) omitting the heading 'School funding incentives' and inserting instead 'School funding'
- b) omitting paragraphs 3.1 to 3.20
- c) omitting Recommendations 13, 14, 15 and 16.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That paragraph 4.9 be amended by omitting 'During its deliberations' and inserting instead 'During the inquiry'.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 5.19 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That paragraph 5.24 be amended by inserting 'Wellbeing supports such as breakfast programs, or speech therapy, are provided outside of classroom time, to maximise learning,' after 'They don't see themselves as fixing societal ills across the board.'

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the case study 'Best Practice School Case Study: Canley Vale High School, Fairfield' be amended by omitting '(mostly Asian background)' after 'The school is 96 percent NESB'.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 5.29 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Houssos moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 5.29:

'External, diagnostic testing remains a key part of ensuring schools, especially the most disadvantaged schools and students, get the support they need. Outcome-based budgeting relies on rigorous and consistent data, so any changes to NAPLAN should consider the value of maintaining a consistent data set.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Noes: Mr Shoebridge.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 5.30 be amended by omitting 'While Naplan has many critics, it appears our best schools are not among them.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That paragraph 5.44 be amended by omitting 'Under industrial arrangements, teachers can opt out of direct classroom monitoring of their work. At some schools, it is official policy not to have any monitoring of teacher performance' and inserting instead 'Principals' decisions to accredit proficiency are not being independently checked through classroom inspections. Many capable, deserving teachers are not being accredited to Lead Teacher and Highly Accomplished levels (see Chapter 6(2) below).'

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 5.48 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 5.49 be amended by omitting 'The Committee believes this should change through the introduction of performance-based contracts for principals (in tandem with increased remuneration). Principals should be given responsibility and accountability for a school's effectiveness in achieving specific policy, operational and student outcomes as stipulated in their performance contracts.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraphs 5.50 to 5.52 and Recommendation 23 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 5.54 be amended by omitting 'Yet some schools have developed a range of other, low effect methods as their preferred pedagogy. There appears to be no quality control in the system to bring them back to the evidence base.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 6.24 be amended by omitting 'the school leadership institute and DELs', and inserting instead 'and the School Leadership Institute'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 35 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That footnote 129 be amended by omitting 'Evidence' and instead inserting 'Transcript'.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That paragraph 6.36 be amended by omitting: 'Clearly, the most reliable and efficient system of teacher accreditation is to have direct inspections of classroom practice' before 'Inspectors are needed to independently review'.

Mr Farlow moved: That the following new paragraphs be inserted after paragraph 6.36:

'School inspectors can also play a role in assisting the professional development and performance of teachers. The Auditor-General's report found that "the Department has no central oversight of schools' implementation of the Performance and Development Framework (PDF)" – the key system of appraisal and feedback designed to constantly improve teacher and principal performance. [FOOTNOTE: NSW Auditor-General, *Ensuring Teaching Quality in NSW Public Schools*, 26 September 2019, p 16].

The Auditor-General also reported that, "The Department does not monitor whether teachers have a Performance and Development Plan (PDP), receive feedback from lesson observations or formal feedback on their performance." [FOOTNOTE: NSW Auditor-General, *Ensuring Teaching Quality in NSW Public Schools*, 26 September 2019, p 16]. Further, "The Department does not clearly communicate its expectations for teacher's professional goals or provide any guidance on what effective professional goals look like." [FOOTNOTE: NSW Auditor-General, *Ensuring Teaching Quality in NSW Public Schools*, 26 September 2019, p 17] Again, it is left to the school.

At school level, the Auditor-General concluded that implementation of the PDF relies too heavily on “mutual agreement” with teachers, such that:

Under the Framework, teachers collaborate with their supervisors to establish goals, nominate a colleague to observe their teaching practice and agree on annual written feedback on progress towards their goals. The requirement for teachers to agree with all goals within their PDP limits the ability of the principal or supervisor to set goals to target areas of greatest individual need. Setting appropriate goals is critical as they form the basis of professional learning, observations, self-assessment and annual review. Teachers can select who conducts observations and negotiate what will be observed. This introduces risks that under-performing teachers will choose peers rather than supervisors to conduct the observations and do not receive effective feedback. Teachers must also agree to all written feedback. This limits opportunities for robust supervisor feedback to target areas for improvement. [FOOTNOTE: NSW Auditor-General, *Ensuring Teaching Quality in NSW Public Schools*, 26 September 2019, pp 16-17]

Teachers are supposed to have two of their lessons observed per annum, as part of the PDF “but there is no guidance on effective methods of observation or how to provide effective feedback.” [FOOTNOTE: NSW Auditor-General, *Ensuring Teaching Quality in NSW Public Schools*, 26 September 2019, p 17] The Auditor-General surveyed a random sample of 130 PDPs but found only 10 cases where the two classroom observations had been conducted. [FOOTNOTE: NSW Auditor-General, *Ensuring Teaching Quality in NSW Public Schools*, 26 September 2019, p 17] This is another striking example of a lack of quality control in NSW government schools.

Ultimately, students suffer badly for these failings. As the Auditor-General has noted, “Australian research has suggested that effective systems of teacher appraisal and feedback can increase teacher effectiveness by up to 30 percent.” [FOOTNOTE: NSW Auditor-General, *Ensuring Teaching Quality in NSW Public Schools*, 26 September 2019, p 17] The Committee believes significant gains can be achieved by introducing inspectors into the classroom, fulfilling roles currently missing from the system: mentors, advisors, assessors and quality control experts. The Committee advocates this reform as a logical consequence from the Auditor-General’s findings.’

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the motion of Mr Farlow be amended by omitting:

‘At school level, the Auditor-General concluded that implementation of the PDF relies too heavily on “mutual agreement” with teachers, such that:

Under the Framework, teachers collaborate with their supervisors to establish goals, nominate a colleague to observe their teaching practice and agree on annual written feedback on progress towards their goals. The requirement for teachers to agree with all goals within their PDP limits the ability of the principal or supervisor to set goals to target areas of greatest individual need. Setting appropriate goals is critical as they form the basis of professional learning, observations, self-assessment and annual review. Teachers can select who conducts observations and negotiate what will be observed. This introduces risks that under-performing teachers will choose peers rather than supervisors to conduct the observations and do not receive effective feedback. Teachers must also agree to all written feedback. This limits opportunities for robust supervisor feedback to target areas for improvement. [FOOTNOTE: NSW Auditor-General, *Ensuring Teaching Quality in NSW Public Schools*, 26 September 2019, pp 16-17]’

Amendment of Mr Shoebridge put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D’Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Amendment of Mr Shoebridge resolved in the negative.

Original question of Mr Farlow put and passed.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 6.51 be amended by omitting 'This confirms the need for performance based contracts for principals.' before 'The system also needs...'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraphs 6.60 – 6.79 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That:

- a) Recommendation 43 be amended by omitting 'mandatory' before 'best practice framework'
- b) Recommendation 44 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraphs 6.91 – 6.99 and Recommendations 49 - 51 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 6.102 be amended by omitting 'Instead of instructing undergraduates in pedagogies that maximise student outcomes, they are teaching a wide menu of methods, regardless of proven evidence' after 'practical needs of best-practice schools'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraphs 6.106-6.108 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraphs 6.111 - 6.112 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That:

- a) paragraph 6.113 be amended by omitting 'four' and inserting instead 'two'
- b) Recommendations 55 and 56 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraphs 6.114 - 6.129 be omitted and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

'We support the development by CESE of evidence based teaching methods to be applied in NSW schools. This should be evaluated over time so as not to limit innovation and ensure that it remains consistent with current best practice.

The NSW Government should ensure that this suite of evidence based teaching methods are included in the course content of university teaching degrees.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 48 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative

Mr D'Adam moved: That:

- a) paragraph 6.139 be omitted

- b) paragraph 6.140 be amended by omitting 'No one can deny welfare schools are well intentioned but at the bottom line,' before 'the best way of snapping the poverty cycle...'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 6.150 be amended by omitting 'The influx of Bangladeshi families has been particularly beneficial in terms of work ethic and attitudes to education' after 'a regular working/middle class district'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That paragraph 6.150 be amended by omitting 'Bangladeshi families' and inserting instead 'new families'.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Appendix 2 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendations 37 and 38 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Mason-Cox moved: That the draft report as amended be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Noes: Mr Shoebridge.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow:

- a) That the transcripts of evidence, submissions, tabled documents, answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, material provided during site visits and correspondence relating to the inquiry be tabled in the House with the report;
- b) Upon tabling, all unpublished attachments to submissions be kept confidential by the committee;
- c) Upon tabling, all unpublished transcripts of evidence, submissions, tabled documents, answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, material provided during site visits and correspondence relating to the inquiry, be published by the committee, except for those documents kept confidential by resolution of the committee;
- d) The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling;
- e) The committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect changes to recommendations or new recommendations resolved by the committee;
- f) Dissenting statements be provided to the secretariat within 24 hours after receipt of the draft minutes of the meeting;
- g) That the report be tabled on Tuesday 18 February 2020.
- h) That the Chair hold a press conference at 11am on Wednesday 19 February 2020.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 11.24 am, until Tuesday 3 March 2020, Macquarie Room, Parliament House (Budget Estimates – Education and Early Childhood Learning hearing).

Emma Rogerson
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 19

Monday 11 May 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education

via Webex, at 1.00 pm

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair*

Mr D'Adam

Mr Fang

Mr Farlow

Ms Houssos

Mr Shoebridge

2. Draft minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That draft minutes nos 17 and 18 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received:

- 28 February 2020 - Letter from Professor Geoff Masters AO, Independent Review Lead, NSW Education Standards Authority to the Chair, confirming his interest in conducting a private briefing to the committee after the release of the NSW Curriculum Review Final Report
- 2 March 2020 –Email from Mr John Healey, Director Fraud Prevention and Corporate Reporting, NSW Department of Education, providing a summary from the Department's Business Plan and

Accountability Framework in response to questions during the inquiry into measurement and outcome-based funding in NSW schools

- 18 March 2020 - Letter from the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning to the Chair, requesting for an extension to provide post hearing responses
- 29 April 2020 – Letter from Professor Geoff Masters AO, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Council for Education Research to the Chair, attaching an article on the need to restructure the Australian curriculum
- 8 May 2020 – Email from Ms Catherine Kemp, Executive Assistant to the CEO, Australian Council for Education Research to the Secretariat, requesting the letter and article from Professor Geoff Master AO dated 29 April 2020 to remain confidential until his review of the NSW Curriculum is published by the NSW Government.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That

- the summary of the Department of Education's Business Plan and Accountability Framework, provided to the committee on 2 March 2020, remain confidential, at the request of the Department, and
- the correspondence and article from Professor Masters AO, dated 29 April 2020, remain confidential until the NSW Government releases Professor Masters' review of the NSW Curriculum, at the request of Professor Masters.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the day after the release of the Masters Curriculum Review the secretariat arrange a meeting of the committee to formalise the commencement of the inquiry into the review of the NSW school curriculum and discuss how it will proceed.

Sent:

- 12 February 2020 - Letter from the Chair to the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, informing the Minister of the new inquiry into the review of the NSW School Curriculum
- 12 February 2020 - Letter from the Chair to Professor Geoff Masters AO, Independent Review Lead, NSW Curriculum Review, NSW Education Standards Authority, informing him of the new inquiry into the review of NSW School Curriculum
- 10 March 2020 - Email from secretariat to Ms Shannon Hall, Parliamentary Liaison Officer, Office of the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, attaching transcript of evidence with questions on notice highlighted and supplementary questions
- 18 March 2020 – Email from secretariat to Mr Mitchell Potts, Chief of Staff, Office of the Hon Dr Geoff Lee MP, Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, attaching transcript of evidence with questions on notice highlighted and supplementary questions.

4. Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2019-2020

4.1 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution establishing the Inquiry:

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the Hon Dr Geoff Lee MP, Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, received 8 April 2020
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, received 17 April 2020.

4.2 Extension for the return of post-hearing responses

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the committee grant an extension to the due date for the return of answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions for witnesses appearing at the hearing for the portfolio of Education and Early Childhood Learning to Friday 17 April 2020.

4.3 Corrections to the evidence given on 3 March 2020

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That:

- the second sentence of the evidence given by Mr Anthony Manning, Chief Executive, School Infrastructure NSW, on page 73 of the transcript from Education and Early Childhood Learning hearing on 3 March 2020 be corrected based on the advice from the Department of Education, as the word 'under' was incorrectly transcribed as 'over' in the proof copy of the transcript due to the noise in the background on the hearing day, and
- the corrected evidence be footnoted to reflect the reason for correction.

4.4 Consideration of Chair's draft report

The Chair submitted his draft report entitled *Budget Estimates 2019-2020*, which, having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That:

The draft report be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House;

The transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, and correspondence relating to the inquiry be tabled in the House with the report;

Upon tabling, all unpublished transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, and correspondence relating to the inquiry, be published by the committee, except for those documents kept confidential by resolution of the committee;

The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling;

That the report be tabled on Wednesday 20 May 2020.

5. Large number of supplementary questions

The committee discussed the large number of supplementary questions directed to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood, and noted various options that may be available to the committee for the next inquiry into budget estimates.

6. Potential new inquiries

The Committee noted that Mr D'Adam foreshadowed a potential inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 response on educational equality.

7. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 1.32 pm, *sine die*.

Shu-fang Wei
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 20

Thursday 28 May 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education

via Webex, at 2.01 pm

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair*

Mr D'Adam

Mr Fang

Mr Farlow

Mrs Houssos

Mr Shoebridge

2. Draft minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That draft minutes no. 19 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received:

- 15 May 2020 – Letter from Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning – responding to letter from chair regarding the final report of the NSW Curriculum Review and the current NSW curriculum and syllabuses
- 26 June 2020 – Email from Hon Mark Latham MLC, attaching signed proposed terms of reference for an inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector
- 26 June 2020 – Email from Hon Wes Fang MLC, attaching signed proposed terms of reference for an inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector
- 26 June 2020 – Email from Hon Scott Farlow MLC, attaching signed proposed terms of reference for an inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector.

4. Consideration of terms of reference

The Chair tabled signed letters from three members proposing the following self-reference:

Inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector

1. That Portfolio Committee No.3 – Education inquire into and report on the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector and, in particular, the impact on NSW of:
 - (a) Tertiary education's economic development role, especially university campuses and Country University Centres (CUCs) in regional NSW;
 - (b) The post-pandemic return of foreign student numbers and the financial sustainability and risk management strategies of NSW tertiary education institutions;
 - (c) The quality of university teaching and research;
 - (d) Levels of integration of the tertiary education sector with industry;
 - (e) The quality of campus life and student freedom of expression;
 - (f) Foreign political interference within the NSW tertiary education sector;
 - (g) The recent experience with online learning and lessons for the further development of alternative models of tertiary education service delivery;
 - (h) The appropriateness of current NSW legislation regulating and enabling tertiary education; and
 - (i) Any other related matters.
2. That the Committee report by 30 November 2020.

Mr D'Adam moved: That paragraph 1(a) be amended by inserting:

- 'and regional' after 'economic', and
- 'and Western Sydney' after 'regional NSW'.

Question put and resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 1(a):

- (x) The mission of NSW universities with a particular focus on the role of universities to serve specific geographic communities;

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 1(f):

- (x) The current levels of coordination and/or support provided to NSW universities by the NSW Government;

Mr D'Adam moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 1(h):

- (x) The governance arrangements and the mechanism for ensuring the representation of various stakeholders in the key governance structures';

Question put and resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That paragraph 1(h) be amended by inserting ', overlooking' after 'regulating'.

Mr D'Adam moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 1(h):

- (x) The regulation and financial management of University Colleges constituted by Acts of the Parliament of New South Wales.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That the following new paragraphs be inserted after paragraph 1(h):

- (x) The prevalence and causes of homelessness and housing precarity within the international student population;
- (x) The prevalence and causes of poverty and labour market exploitation within the international student population;
- (x) Constraints placed on the academic performance and wellbeing of university students living below the poverty lines;
- (x) The status and financial viability of private student accommodation providers in light of COVID-19

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That paragraph 1(c) be amended by inserting ', including the extent and impact of insecure employment in the sector' after 'research'.

Mr Farlow moved: That the committee adopt the terms of reference, as amended.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Question resolved in the affirmative.

5. Conduct of the inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector

5.1 Inquiry timeline

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the committee adopt the following timeline for the administration of the inquiry:

- submission closing date – Friday 24 July 2020
- hearing(s) or site visit(s) – dates to be confirmed in August/September.

5.2 Stakeholder list

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the secretariat circulate to members the Chair's proposed list of stakeholders to provide them with the opportunity to amend the list or nominate additional stakeholders, and that the committee agree to the stakeholder list by email, unless a meeting of the committee is required to resolve any disagreement.

5.3 Advertising

The committee noted that all inquiries are advertised via Twitter, Facebook, stakeholder letters and a media release distributed to all media outlets in New South Wales. It is no longer standard practice to advertise in the print media.

6. Request for a briefing from NSW Education on the impact of COVID-19 on educational disadvantage

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That:

- (a) the committee invite officials from the NSW Department of Education to provide a private briefing to the committee on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational disadvantage, in particular:
 1. The impact of the digital divide on the ability of students to access remote learning;
 2. The impact of the disruption of normal teaching and learning on the social and emotional development of students;
 3. The efficacy of the Department of Education's remote learning initiatives;
 4. The adequacy and appropriateness of the Department of Education's remote learning technology platforms;
 5. The adequacy of the Department of Education's managerial systems to ensure a consistent standard of teaching and learning;
 6. The remedial action that may be necessary to correct for any adverse impacts on educational disadvantage caused by the pandemic;
 7. The use of Gonski funding to address educational inequality; and
 8. Any other related matters.
- (b) after the private briefing, the committee consider whether or not to self-refer an inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational disadvantage.

7. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 2.55 pm, *sine die*.

Madeleine Foley
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 21

Monday 22 June 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education

Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, at 9.00 am

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair (via WebEx)*

Mr D'Adam

Mr Fang

Mr Farlow (*via WebEx*) (*left at 10.16 am*)

Mrs Houssos (*via WebEx*) (*left at 9.50 am*)

Mr Shoebridge (*via WebEx*)

2. Draft minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes no. 20 be confirmed.

3. Briefing by NSW Department of Education

The committee was briefed by the following representatives from the NSW Department of Education regarding the impact of COVID-19 on educational disadvantage:

- Mr Mark Scott, Secretary
- Ms Georgina Harrison, Deputy Secretary, People and System Performance, and
- Ms Jane Simmons, Executive Director, Continuity of Education, COVID-19 Taskforce, *via Webex*.

Mrs Houssos left the meeting at 9.50 am.

Mr Scott, Ms Harrison, Ms Simmons and Mr Farlow left the meeting at 10.16 am.

4. Inquiry into the future development of the New South Wales tertiary education sector

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee:

- conduct three hearings and one site visit on 12, 17 August, and 7 and 8 September 2020
- visit the Country Universities Centre (CUC) in Broken Hill, subject to the secretariat investigating the feasibility of travelling to Broken Hill, subject to social distancing restrictions
- authorise the secretariat to liaise with CUC to determine the site visit date.

5. Inquiry into the review of the NSW School Curriculum

5.1 Stakeholder list

The committee noted that, as per the committee resolution of 6 February 2020, in anticipation of the publication of the Masters Curriculum Review, the secretariat will circulate to members the Chair's proposed list of stakeholders to provide them with the opportunity to amend the list or nominate additional stakeholders. The committee is to agree to the stakeholder list by email, unless a meeting of the committee is required to resolve any disagreement.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 10.22 am, *sine die*.

Madeleine Foley
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 22

Wednesday 29 July 2020
Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education
via WebEx, at 11.00 am

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*
Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair*
Mr D'Adam
Mr Fang
Mr Farlow
Mrs Houssos

2. Apologies

Mr Shoebridge

3. Briefing by Professor Geoff Masters AO

The committee was briefed by Professor Geoff Masters on his review of the NSW school curriculum.

4. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That draft minutes no. 21 be confirmed.

5. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 30 June 2020 – Letter from Mr Mark Scott, Secretary, Department of Education, attaching responses to questions taken on notice and an opening statement given during a briefing on 22 June 2020
- 7 July 2020 – Email from Ms Kelly Jackson–Michaels, private citizen regarding the relocation of Marsden High School
- 14 July 2020 – Email from Mr John Murn, Leader Tertiary Initiatives and Policy, Higher Education and Tertiary Policy, Department of Education, requesting an extension to lodge government submission by 3 August 2020
- 23 July 2020 – Letter from Chief Commissioner Nick Saunders, A/g Chief Executive Officer, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, declining to make a submission to the Tertiary education inquiry but offering to contribute information where appropriate.

Sent

- 23 June 2020 – Email from the Secretariat to Mr Mark Scott, Secretary, Department of Education, requesting responses to questions taken on notice during the briefing on 22 June 2020 and the opening statement
- 2 July 2020 – Email from the Secretariat to Mr Paul Martin, CEO, NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), requesting NESA to inform the stakeholders of the Masters' review of the committee's curriculum inquiry and invite them to make a submission.

6. Inquiry into the review of the NSW school curriculum

6.1 Discussion paper

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Masson-Cox: That the discussion paper pose key questions for witnesses to consider ahead of the hearings and be structured in two parts: Part 1 – Committee's views on the NSW Curriculum Review - input from the chair and members, and Part 2 – Issues arising from submissions - identified by the secretariat.

6.2 Timeline

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Masson-Cox: That

- the discussion paper be circulated in September 2020
- hearings be held on 4 and 30 November 2020
- the report be tabled by mid-March 2021.

7. Inquiry into the future development of the New South Wales tertiary education sector**7.1 Amendments to the timeline**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee

- extend the submission deadline to 3 August 2020
- cancel the hearing scheduled for 12 August 2020.

7.2 Witness list

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee discuss the proposed witness list and the time allocated to each witness at the conclusion of the virtual site visit on 17 August 2020.

7.3 Physical site visit to the Country University Centre in Goulbourn

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That:

- the secretariat investigate the feasibility of conducting a physical site visit to the Country University Centre in Goulbourn
- the Secretariat identify potential dates for the site visit.

8. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 12.52 pm *sine die*.

Madeleine Foley
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 24

Monday 17 August 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

Room 814/815, Parliament, Sydney, at 3.03 pm

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair via WebEx*

Mr D'Adam, *via WebEx*

Mr Fang

Mr Farlow

Ms Houssos, *via WebEx*

Mr Shoebridge, *via WebEx*

2. Draft minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That draft minutes no. 22 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

Received:

- 29 July 2020 – From Professor Geoff Masters AO, Independent Review Lead, NSW Education Standards Authority to the Secretariat, providing the presentation slides he used to brief the committee on 29 July 2020
- 28 July 2020 – From Ms Shannon Hall, Parliamentary Liaison Officer, Office of the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, providing two attachments mentioned in the answers to supplementary questions for the Budget Estimates inquiry 2019/20 further hearing
- 22 July 2020 – From Author A, stating his support for Mr Shoebridge on the matters relating to the tertiary inquiry.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the Committee publish the two attachments from the Office of the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, dated 28 July 2020, as part of the answers to supplementary questions for the 2019/20 Budget Estimates further hearings.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the Committee accept the correspondence received on 22 July 2020 with the author's name redacted, as per the request of the author.

Mr Shoebridge joined the meeting at 3.06 pm.

4. Inquiry into the Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill

The Committee noted the following terms of reference referred by the House on 5 August 2020:

That Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education inquire into and report on the Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020.

Mr Farlow joined the meeting at 3.11 pm.

4.1 Inquiry timeline

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the inquiry commence with a two-hour briefing by the NSW Education Standards Authority.

Mr Fang moved: That the two current inquiries (Tertiary education *and* Curriculum) be given priority, and that:

- submissions open on a date to be determined after the NESAs briefing is held
- hearings be held in early 2021.

Mr D'Adam moved: That the motion of Mr Fang be amended by omitting all the words after 'That' and inserting instead 'submissions be opened this day and close on 11 September 2020, with the timetable for the remainder of the inquiry to be determined at that point'.

Question of Mr D'Adam put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox

The question resolved in the negative.

The original question resolved in the affirmative on the voices.

5. Inquiry into the future development of the New South Wales tertiary education sector

5.1 Public submissions

The following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submissions nos 1-9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18 and 21-37.

5.2 Partially confidential submissions – Name suppressed

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That the committee partially publish the following submissions with author's name and identifying information suppressed, as per the request of the author: submissions nos 10, 13, 16 and 19.

5.3 Confidential submission

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee keep submission no. 20 confidential, as per the request of the author.

5.4 Consideration of the witness list

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the secretariat circulate a copy of submission no. 38 with the potential adverse mention highlighted for the committee's consideration.

5.5 Physically distanced or virtual hearings

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee conduct physically distanced hearings on 7 and 8 September 2020.

5.6 Consideration of the witness list

As agreed to by the Committee, the following organisations will be invited to give evidence to the inquiry at the hearings on 7 and 8 September 2020:

- Mr Duncan Taylor, CEO, Country Universities Centre and the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (1 hour)
- University of New South Wales, University of Sydney and the University of Technology Sydney (two hours)
- University of Western Sydney, University of Wollongong and the Australian Catholic University
- University of New England and Charles Sturt University
- National Tertiary Education Union and Community and Public Sector Union, NSW Branch
- Dr Salvatore Babones and Professor Clive Hamilton
- Associate Professor Bassina Farbenblum & Associate Professor Laurie Berg and Alphacrucis College
- NSW Department of Education (1 hour, as the final witness on 8 September)
- Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment and Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

6. Inquiry into the review of the New South Wales School Curriculum**6.1 Discussion paper**

The Committee noted that members' contributions to the discussion paper on the curriculum review were due on 17 August 2020, and the only contribution received was from the chair. The Secretariat will commence the preparation of the discussion paper.

7. Inquiry into the future development of the New South Wales tertiary education sector**7.1 Site visit to Country Universities Centre in Broken Hill (via WebEx)**

The Committee received a briefing from the Country Universities Centre in Broken Hill:

- Ms Danielle Keenan, Centre Manager
- Mr Michael Williams, Chair, CUC Far West Board of Directors
- Ms Lisa Turner, Learning Skills Advisor
- Ms Sophie Weathersbee, Learning Skills and Wellbeing Advisor
- Ms Hayley Mayne, Student, Charles Darwin University, Bachelor of Midwifery
- Mr Cory Paulson, Student, Charles Sturt University, Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health)

- Mr Luke Dart, Student, University of New England, Bachelor of Computer Science.

8. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.27 pm, *sine die*.

Madeleine Foley
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 25

Monday 31 August 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

Room 1043, Parliament House, Sydney, at 9.30 am

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair (via Webex)*

Mr D'Adam

Mrs Houssos

2. Apologies

Mr Fang

Mr Farlow

Mr Shoebridge

3. Briefing by the NSW Education Standards Authority

The committee was briefed by the following representatives from the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) regarding the inquiries into the NSW curriculum and the Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020:

- Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Lyn Kirkby, Executive Director, Quality Teaching

4. Witness invitations declined for Tertiary inquiry

The Secretariat received three emails declining the invitations to appear as a witness before the inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector. The invited witnesses who declined to appear are:

- The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
- The Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, and
- Professor Clive Hamilton.

5. Partially confidential submission (previously circulated)

As per committee resolution of 17 August 2020, the Secretariat emailed the committee a marked up version of submission no. 38 to the Tertiary inquiry with potential adverse mention, inappropriate language and information identifying a third party highlighted for redaction. As no concerns were raised by members, submission no 38 will be published online with the redactions indicated.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 11.44 am, until 10.00 am, Monday 7 September 2020, Macquarie Room (*Tertiary Education Sector Inquiry*).

Madeleine Foley
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 26

Monday 7 September 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, at 10.07 am

1. Members present

Mr Fang, *Chair*

Mrs Houssos, *Deputy Chair*

Mr D'Adam

Mr Farlow

Mr Latham (*via videoconference*)

Mr Mason-Cox (*via videoconference*)

Mr Shoebridge

2. Chair and Deputy Chair

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Mr Fang be elected Chair and Mrs Houssos be elected Deputy Chair for the meetings of 7 and 8 September 2020.

3. Draft minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That draft minutes nos 23, 24 and 25 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received:

- 17 August 2020 – From Ms Danielle Keenan, Centre Manager, Country Universities Centre to the Secretariat, providing schedule for Learning Support Advisor workshops
- 17 August 2020 – From Mr Mark A Tarrant to the Secretariat, providing information relating to an on-campus incident concerning Mr Drew Pavlou
- 21 August 2020 – From Mr John Murn, Leader Tertiary Policy, Department of Education, to the Secretariat providing a replacement government submission to the Tertiary Education Inquiry
- 24 August 2020 – From Mr Mark A Tarrant to the Secretariat, providing personal background to the committee
- 24 August 2020 – From Author A, to the Secretariat, providing information about the Employee Performance and Conduct Directorate (EPAC) investigation into her conduct and raising concerns about the culture and behaviour of EPAC
- 28 August 2020 – From Mr Greg Simmons, Director, Policy and Analysis Group, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency to the Secretariat, declining witness invitation for the Tertiary education inquiry and offering to provide information as appropriate to assist the drafting of the committee report
- 28 August 2020 – From Ms Trish Lindh, A/g Director, Business Intelligence, Systems and Committee Inquiries, Parliamentary, Planning and Performance, Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment to the Secretariat, declining witness invitation for the Tertiary education inquiry and expressing interest in receiving findings relevant to the Department's responsibilities
- 31 August 2020 – From Professor Clive Hamilton to the Secretariat, declining witness invitation for the Tertiary education inquiry
- 31 August 2020 – From Ms Brooke Lawson, Executive Assistant to the CEO, NSW Education Standards Authority, providing presentation slides for briefing on 31 August 2020

- 31 August 2020 – From Mr Ryszard Linkiewicz, a NSW teacher, to the Secretariat, forwarding an email sent to the Chair outlining the author's thoughts and observations of the NSW education system
- 31 August 2020 – Correspondence from Mr Douglas Cooper to the committee, entitled Education – An Ongoing Catastrophe.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That the committee keep confidential the correspondence from Author A on 24 August 2020, on the recommendation of the Secretariat, because it contains personal and identifying information

5. Inquiry into the future development of the New South Wales tertiary education sector

5.1 Replacement government submission

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That the committee accept the replacement New South Wales Government submission and authorise the publication of it as a replacement of submission no. 35 to correct minor formatting inconsistencies.

5.2 Partially confidential submission

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the committee partially publish the following submission with potential adverse mention, inappropriate language and information identifying a third party redacted, on the recommendation of the Secretariat: submission no 38.

6. Camera operator arrangements for committee hearings

Members noted that the new three-year funding from Treasury has enabled the Parliament to extend its existing camera operator arrangements to cover committee hearings. Since 2018 the Parliament has had the equipment necessary to operate the cameras in the Jubilee and Macquarie Rooms from the broadcast control room on Level 6, but has been unable to utilise the capacity due to funding constraints.

The new arrangements mean that footage will switch between individual committee members asking questions and witnesses giving answers. The existing Broadcast Guidelines for the filming of committee hearings will continue to apply.

The committee secretariat present in the hearing room will continue to control the broadcast modes of 'Broadcast', 'Off', 'Deliberative' and 'In Camera'.

7. Allocation of timing for questioning of witness

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the committee allocate question time evenly between the opposition, the cross-bench and the government, in that order.

8. Inquiry into the future development of the New South Wales tertiary education sector

8.1 Public hearing

Witnesses and the media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor Attila Brungs, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Technology Sydney
- Dr Ian Watt, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International, University of Technology Sydney
- Dr Michael Spence AC, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Sydney
- Professor Ian Jacobs, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of New South Wales (*via videoconference*)
- Professor George Williams AO, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Assurance), University of New South Wales (*via videoconference*).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor Zlatko Skrbis, Interim Provost, Provost Portfolio, Australian Catholic University
- Professor Theo Farrell, Acting Vice-Chancellor, University of Wollongong
- Professor Barney Glover AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, Western Sydney University (*via videoconference*).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Mr Latham and Mr Mason-Cox left the meeting.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor John Germov, Acting Vice-Chancellor, Charles Sturt University (*via videoconference*)
- Professor Janelle Wheat, Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, Charles Sturt University (*via videoconference*)
- Professor Brigid Heywood, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer, University of New England (*via videoconference*)
- Mr Kris Kauffmann, Senior Executive Strategic Advisor, University of New England (*via videoconference*).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 4.35 pm.

9. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 4:36 pm until Tuesday 8 September 2020.

Zulpha Styer

Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 28

Wednesday 23 September 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

Room 1043, Parliament House, Sydney, at 6.34 pm

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair*

Mr D'Adam

Mr Fang

Mr Farlow

Mrs Houssos, *via teleconference*

Mr Shoebridge

2. Inquiry into the future development of the New South Wales tertiary education sector

The committee noted that the report deliberative meeting for the inquiry will be held mid-November 2020, with the date to be determined by email.

3. Inquiry into the review of the New South Wales School Curriculum – Draft discussion paper

The Chair tabled the draft discussion paper as previously circulated and noted that Mr Shoebridge had requested that the committee meet to consider the draft discussion paper.

The committee deliberated.

Mr D'Adam moved: That the consideration of the draft discussion paper be deferred by seven days to allow members to comment further on the discussion paper.

Question put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Fang moved: That Chapter 2 of the draft discussion paper summarising key issues arising from submissions be published as the Committee's discussion paper.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the question be amended by inserting 'and paragraphs 1.1 to 1.20 of Chapter 1 of the draft discussion paper' be inserted after 'arising from the submissions'.

Original question, as amended: That Chapter 2 of the draft discussion paper summarising key issues arising from submissions and paragraphs 1.1 to 1.20 of Chapter 1 of the draft discussion paper be published as the Committee's discussion paper – put and passed.

Mr Fang moved: That the committee publish Chapter 1 of the draft discussion paper as the Chair's discussion paper.

The Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the Chair's discussion paper be clearly marked as reflecting the views of the Chair, and not necessarily the views of other members of the committee.

4. **Behaviour Policy Briefing from the Department of Education**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the Department of Education be invited to provide a private briefing to the committee on the draft Student Behaviour Strategy.

5. **Adjournment**

The committee adjourned at 7.00 pm, *sine die*.

Zulpha Styer
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 29

Wednesday 28 October 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

Room 1043, Parliament House, Sydney, at 10.33 am

1. **Members present**

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)

Mr D'Adam

Mr Fang (via videoconference, until 11.50 am)

Mr Farlow (via videoconference)

Mrs Houssos

2. Apologies

Mr Shoebridge

3. Briefing on the draft Student Behaviour Strategy

The committee was briefed by the following representatives from the NSW Department of Education regarding the draft Student Behaviour Strategy:

- Ms Jane Simmons, A/Deputy Secretary, Learning Improvement
- Mr Ben Ballard, A/Executive Director, Learning and Wellbeing.

Mr Fang left the meeting.

4. Draft minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That draft minutes nos 26, 27 and 28 be confirmed.

5. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received:

- 9 September 2020 – Email from Mr Yonglin Chen to the secretariat, requesting that the committee accept a replacement submission
- 10 September 2020 – Letter from Mr Yonglin Chen to the chair, responding to the chair's letter seeking to ascertain the source of the disclosure of his submission to the *Daily Telegraph*
- 12 September 2020 – Letter from Mr Mark Tarrant to the committee, regarding potential misleading evidence given during a committee hearing
- 17 September 2020 – Email from Ms Karolina Nacovski, NSW Education Standards Authority, to the secretariat, providing answers to questions arising from the private briefing on 31 August 2020
- 14 October 2020 – Email from Lachlan Malloch on behalf of Commissioner Rose Webb, NSW Fair Trading, to the secretariat, seeking an extension of time to provide a submission to the inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector.

Sent:

- 8 September 2020 – Letter from the chair to Mr Yonglin Chen, author of submission no. 39, seeking to ascertain the source of the disclosure of his submission to the *Daily Telegraph*
- 24 September 2020 – Letter from the chair to Ms Rose Webb, NSW Commissioner for Fair Trading, NSW Fair Trading, inviting the agency to make a submission to the Tertiary Education inquiry responding to the evidence from Associate Professor Berg
- 2 October 2020 – Email from the chair to Professor Geoff Masters, inviting him to provide a submission responding to the issues raised in the committee's discussion papers by 30 October 2020, as raised by the committee during his July briefing on his review of the NSW school curriculum
- 2 October 2020 – Email from the chair to submission authors to the Inquiry into the Review of the NSW School Curriculum, inviting them to provide a submission responding to the issues raised in the committee's discussion papers by 30 October 2020.

6. Inquiry into Tertiary Education

6.1 Submission no. 39 from Mr Yonglin Chen

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason-Cox: That the committee:

- take no further action in relation to the disclosure of submission no. 39
- not accept the replacement submission provided in the correspondence from Mr Yonglin Chen, received on 10 September 2020, that removes identifying information relating to third parties.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the committee keep the original submission no. 39 confidential.

6.2 Correspondence from Mr Mark Tarrant

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the committee note Mr Tarrant's correspondence and keep it confidential.

6.3 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following responses had been received and published on the committee's website as per the resolution appointing the committee:

- Australian Catholic University, received on 9 October 2020
- Country Universities Centre, received on 9 October 2020
- NSW Department of Education, received on 14 October 2020
- Dr Salvatore Babones, received on 18 September 2020
- Alphacrucis College, received on 8 October 2020
- University of New England, received on 9 October 2020
- University of Wollongong, received on 8 October 2020
- University of NSW, received on 9 October 2020
- University of Sydney, received on 12 October 2020
- University of Technology Sydney, received on 8 October 2020
- University of Western Sydney, received on 19 October 2020.

6.4 Submission from NSW Fair Trading

The committee noted that a submission was provided by NSW Fair Trading on 20 October 2020, and was published under a previous resolution.

7. Inquiry into the review of the New South Wales School Curriculum

7.1 Hearing on 30 November 2020

The committee noted the chair's proposed witness list with no further suggested nominations.

7.2 Witness invitations declined for the hearing on 4 November 2020

The committee noted that the following organisations had declined to appear at the hearing for the inquiry to be conducted on 4 November 2020:

- Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW
- Australian Education Union and NSW Teachers' Federation – Joint submission.

7.3 NESA briefing – responses to informal questions on notice

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the committee publish the correspondence from NESA dated 17 September 2020.

7.4 Management of short individual 'pro forma' responses

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee resolve to process all short, individual emails regarding Asian languages received to date as a single submission, to be published online with a generic and de-identified version including the number of those responses received.

7.4 Submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the committee resolve to:

- redact the highlighted sections of submissions 13, 38, 41, and 65
- publish the redacted versions of submissions 13, 38, 41, and 65
- keep confidential submissions 2, 18, 20, 23, 26, 66 and 68.

8. Inquiry into Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020

8.1 Inquiry timeline

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That:

- the committee accept submissions from nominated stakeholders and organisations/experts in the field who apply to make a submission
- submissions from nominated stakeholders be open from Monday 18 January 2021 to Sunday 28 February 2021
- the committee not issue an open call for submissions through the website
- a stakeholder list for submissions be circulated in November, with members having 48 hours to comment or nominate additional stakeholders
- hearings be held in late March 2021 after submissions have closed.

8.2 Online questionnaire

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That the committee conduct an online questionnaire and that:

- the online questionnaire be open for the same period as submissions
- the committee not accept pro formas
- the wording for the website be as follows:

Before online questionnaire opens:

Submission process

- The committee has resolved to receive online submissions for this inquiry by conducting a questionnaire. This will be open from Monday 18 January 2021 to Sunday 28 February 2021. The committee will not be accepting submissions before this timeframe. A link to the questionnaire will be available on this webpage from 18 January.

While online questionnaire is open:

Online submissions

- Individuals are invited to submit their comments on the bill here [hyperlink to online questionnaire]. This is a new way for individuals to participate in inquiries in a timely and accessible way. The committee will not accept proformas.
- If you are an organisation or have specialist knowledge in the field and you would like to make a more detailed submission, please contact the secretariat before [submission closing date].
- the secretariat prepare a summary report of responses to the online questionnaire for publication on the website and use in the report, and that:
 - the committee agree to publish the report via email, unless a member raises any concerns
 - individual responses be kept confidential on tabling.

The committee deferred its consideration of the questions for the online questionnaire to the next meeting.

9. Inquiry into the NSW tertiary education sector – Report deliberative date

The committee noted that the date for the inquiry's report deliberative has been deferred to Wednesday 25 November 2020.

10. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 12.10 pm, until Wednesday 4 November 2020, 9.15 am, Macquarie Room, Parliament House (*public hearing – Inquiry into Review of the NSW School Curriculum*).

Shu-Fang Wei
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 30

Wednesday 4 November 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, at 9.20 am

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*
 Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair, (via videoconference)*
 Mr D'Adam
 Mr Fang
 Mr Farlow
 Mrs Houssos *(via videoconference)*
 Mr Shoebridge *(from 10.43 am)*

2. Draft Minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That draft minutes no. 29 be confirmed.

3. Inquiry into the Review of the NSW School Curriculum**3.1 Allocation of timing for questioning of witness**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That the timing of questioning for today's hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

3.2 Public hearing

Witnesses were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Greg Ashman, *via videoconference*
- Dr Fiona Mueller.

Mr Ashman tendered the following documents:

- a document entitled 'Learning progressions – Greg Ashman'
- a document entitled 'The Differentiation Myth'.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness were sworn and examined:

- Ms Norma Petrocco, Vice President, NSW Primary Principals' Association
- Mr Bob Willetts, Principal of Berry Public School
- Mr Michael Egan, President, Association of Catholic School Principals & Principal, La Salle College Bankstown
- Mrs Fran Bonanno, Vice President, Association of Catholic School Principals & Principal, St Felix Primary School Bankstown.

Mr Shoebridge joined the meeting at 10.43 am.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr David Hope, President, Northern Sydney District Council of Parents and Citizens Associations
- Mrs Sharryn Brownlee, President, Central Coast Council of Parents and Citizens Associations.

Mr Hope tendered his opening statement and a document containing two diagrams concerning undifferentiated teaching methods.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined *via videoconference*:

- Mrs Annabel Strachan, Rural Schools Portfolio, Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW
- Mrs Deborah Nielsen, Early Childhood Portfolio, Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Jane Simmons PSM, A/Deputy Secretary, Learning Improvement, Department of Education
- Mr Martin Graham, A/Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, Department of Education
- Mr Paul Martin, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority
- Ms Andrea Frost, Director, NSW Curriculum Reform Taskforce, NSW Education Standards Authority.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

3.3 Tendered documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee accept and publish the following documents tendered during the public hearing:

- a document entitled 'Learning progressions – Greg Ashman', tendered by Mr Ashman
- a document entitled 'The Differentiation Myth', tendered by Mr Ashman
- opening statement, tendered by Mr Hope
- a document containing two diagrams concerning undifferentiated teaching methods, tendered by Mr Hope.

3.4 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submissions nos 1, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, 31, 33-40, 42-51, 52, 53, 54-64, 67, 69, 70, 71, 71a, 72, 73 and 74.

3.5 Partially confidential submissions – Name suppressed

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the committee partially publish the following submissions with author's name and identifying information suppressed, as per the request of the author: submissions nos 4, 7-9, 14, 16, 27, 29-30 and 32.

4. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 3.10 pm.

Shu-fang Wei
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 31

Monday 30 November 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, at 9.16 am

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair, (from 9.16 am to 9.20 am, from 10.30 am – present as a member 9.49 am to 10.30 am)*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair, (via videoconference)*

Mr D'Adam

Mr Fang, *Acting Chair, (from 9.20 am to 10.30 am)*

Mr Farlow

Mrs Houssos

Mr Shoebridge (*from 9.38 am, via videoconference from 3.45 pm*)

2. Draft Minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason-Cox: That draft minutes no. 30 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following correspondence:

Received

- 4 November 2020 – From Ms Catherine Kemp, Executive Assistant to the CEO of Australian Council for Educational Research to secretariat, advising that Professor Geoff Masters would not be making a response to the committee's discussion papers
- 6 November 2020 – From Audrey Marsh and Jack Whitney, Co-Convenors, NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, to the committee, providing a submission to the curriculum inquiry and requesting a meeting with the committee
- 19 November 2020 – From Ms Sarah Williams, Executive Assistant to Elizabeth Labone, Executive Dean, Faculty of Education and Arts, Australian Catholic University, to the secretariat, declining the invitation to appear at the Curriculum inquiry hearing on 30 November 2020
- 23 November 2020 – From Mr Glenn Fahey, research Fellow in Education Policy, Centre for Independent Studies, to the secretariat, declining the invitation to appear at the Curriculum inquiry hearing on 30 November 2020
- 23 November 2020 – Ms Alba Åhlander, an international student enrolled at Sydney Film School, requesting that the committee consider the needs of international students at smaller tertiary education institutions and outlining her challenges in continuing her studies.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason-Cox: That the committee note the request from the NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby to meet with the committee. No further hearings are confirmed for the Inquiry into the Review of the NSW Curriculum.

4. Inquiry into the Future Development of the NSW Tertiary Education Sector

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That the reporting date be extended to 24 December 2020 and that the committee meet on 11 December 2020 at 10 am to consider the Chair's draft report.

5. Inquiry into Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020

5.1 Online questionnaire

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason-Cox: That the committee adopt the following questions for the online questionnaire, with the additions of a summary of the Bill and a question proposed by Mrs Houssos to seek parents' reflections of communications from schools:

1. What is your position on the Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020? Select one of these options: support, support with amendments, oppose, neutral/undecided
2. Should schools be teaching gender as:
 - a. a social construct (gender is fluid, and there is a difference between biological sex and human gender)
 - b. biological science (with very few exceptions people are born either male or female)
 - c. a combination of both a and b.
3. Do parents have enough say about what is taught in the classroom? Y/N
4. Should parents be provided with an extensive outline of the curriculum at the start of each school year? Y/N
5. Should parents have the right to take their children out of the classroom if what is being taught does not agree with their social and moral values? Y/N

6. On matters concerning a student's gender and sexuality, do you agree that parents are primarily responsible for the care and guidance of their children? Y/N
7. Do you have any other comments on the bill (300 word text box)
8. Please provide any other feedback on how schools communicate information to parents and broader school communities? What works well and what improvements could be made, especially during the COVID pandemic. (300 word text box)
9. In what capacity are you completing this questionnaire:
 - a. Parent/carer
 - b. Education professional
 - c. Student
 - d. Other.

6. Inquiry into the Review of the NSW School Curriculum

6.1 Allocation of question time

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That the timing of questioning for today's hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

6.2 Public submissions responding to discussion papers

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: supplementary submissions nos 21a, 31a, 31b, 34a, 41a, 43a, 45a, 47a, 50a and submissions nos 76-84.

6.3 Partially confidential submissions responding to discussion papers

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submission no. 75.

6.4 Confidential submission responding to discussion papers

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee keep submission no. 26a confidential, as per the request of the author, as they contain identifying and/or sensitive information.

6.5 Acting Chair arrangements for part of the hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason-Cox: That according to the sessional orders, in the absence of the Chair and given that the Deputy Chair is participating remotely via electronic means, Mr Fang be elected Acting Chair for the purpose of this hearing until Mr Latham re-joins the meeting and resumes the Chair.

Mr Latham left the meeting at 9.20 am.

Mr Fang assumed the Chair.

6.6 Public hearing

Witnesses were admitted.

The Acting Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Dr John Collier, Chair of the Anglican Education Commission and Headmaster of St Andrew's Cathedral School
- Mr Stephen Kinsella, Executive Director of the Anglican Education Commission
- Ms Jenny Allum, Chair, Curriculum Review Working Group, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, *via videoconference*.

Mr Shoebridge joined the meeting at 9.38 am.

Mr Latham joined the meeting at 9.49 am.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Mr Latham resumed the Chair at 10.30 am.

The following witness were sworn and examined:

- Ms Maura Manning, Director Learning, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta
- Mr Gregory Whitby, Executive Director, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Jeannie Douglass, Senior Manager, Parliamentary Education and Engagement
- Ms Daniela Giorgi, Senior Education Officer, Parliamentary Education and Engagement.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined *via videoconference*:

- Dr Bella d'Abrera, Director, Foundations of Western Civilisation Program, Institute of Public Affairs.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Karen McDaid, President, Mathematical Association of NSW
- Mr Darius Samojlowicz, Executive Officer, Mathematical Association of NSW
- Mrs Margaret Shepherd, President, Science Teachers Association of NSW
- Ms Jane Powles, Executive Officer, Science Teachers Association of NSW
- Mr Grant Byrne, President, Institute of Technology Education.

Mr Byrne tendered the following documents:

- a document entitled 'Student Work Samples for HSC Industrial Technology and VET Construction'
- a document entitled 'Models for increasing mandatory hours of study of Technologies'.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor Anne-Marie Morgan, Executive Officer, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, *via videoconference*
- Mrs Gillian Cordy, Executive Officer, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, *via videoconference*
- Ms Kyoko Hodgkinson, Member, HSC Japanese Committee
- Mr John Murn, Vice President, HSC Japanese Committee.

Ms Hodgkinson tendered a document entitled 'Summary of Submission for the Curriculum Review'.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined *via videoconference*:

- Professor Geoff Masters, Lead of the NSW Curriculum Review.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined *via videoconference*:

- Dr Ben Jensen, Chief Executive Officer, Learning First.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

6.7 Tended documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That the committee accept and publish the following documents tendered during the public hearing:

- a document entitled 'Student Work Samples for HSC Industrial Technology and VET Construction', tendered by Mr Byrne
- a document entitled 'Models for increasing mandatory hours of study of Technologies', tendered by Mr Byrne
- a document entitled 'Summary of Submission for the Curriculum Review', tendered by Ms Hodgkinson.

6.8 Invitation to the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee invite representatives from the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) to reappear before the committee on 11 December 2020 at 10.00 am for an hour for the purpose of answering subsequent questions from the committee and responding to issues raised in evidence, noting that this is the only date before the end of the year when it will be possible to hear evidence from NESA.

7. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.35 pm.

Zulpha Styer

Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 32

Friday 11 December 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

Macquarie Room, Parliament House, at 10.03 am

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair*

Mr D'Adam (*via videoconference*)

Mr Fang

Mr Farlow

Mrs Houssos

Mr Shoebridge

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That draft minutes no. 31 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Sent

- 30 November 2020 – From Chair to Tertiary Inquiry stakeholders including submission authors and witnesses, advising of the committee resolution to extend the reporting date from 30 November 2020 to 24 December 2020.

Received

- 1 December 2020 – From Alison Cantlon, Acting Manager, Office of the Secretary, Department of Education, providing answers to informal questions on notice taken during the private briefing on the draft Student Behaviour Strategy on 28 October 2020

- 1 December 2020 – From Anthony Giusti, Director, NSW Education Standards Authority, advising that the CEO was not available to appear before the committee on 11 December 2020 due to the national Educational Council meeting.

4. Inquiry into the Review of the NSW Curriculum

4.1 Additional questions for the NSW Education Standards Authority

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason-Cox: That additional questions be put to NESA in writing and be returned by 25 January 2021. Members should provide their questions to the secretariat via email by 5 pm Wednesday 16 December 2020.

4.2 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following responses had been received and published on the committee's website as per the resolution appointing the committee:

- Dr Fiona Mueller received on 17 November 2020
- Department of Education received on 1 December 2020
- NSW Education Standards Authority received on 3 December 2020
- Mr Bob Willetts, Vice-President, NSW Primary Principals' Association received on 7 December 2020
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW received on 7 December 2020.

4.3 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submissions nos 42a and 85-96.

5. Inquiry into the Future of the NSW Tertiary Education Sector

5.1 Consideration of Chair's draft report

The Chair submitted his Chair's draft report, entitled '*Future of the NSW Tertiary Education Sector*' which, having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That paragraph 1.3 be amended by omitting all words after 'international student fees'.

Question resolved in the negative on the voices.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That Recommendation 1 be amended by omitting 'over-'.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 2 be omitted.

Question resolved in the negative on the voices.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That Recommendation 3 be amended by omitting the word 'over-'.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason Cox: That 'over-' be omitted throughout the chapters of the report where it appears as part of 'over-reliance'.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the second paragraph of Chapter Two be amended by omitting the words 'and the problematic nature of the public-private divide in the tertiary education sector marketplace, which reduces competition in the sector'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted before paragraph 2.24:

'The Federal government's covid-19 response was inadequate to address the challenges faced by universities. There was no rational basis to exclude public universities from having access to JobKeeper payments provided they met the criteria simply on the basis of being public, not private, institutions. This was an example of ideology over common sense and it has impacted negatively on thousands of staff who have lost their jobs and students who have had reduced education opportunities.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That

- the following new paragraph be inserted in the Committee comment after paragraph 2.28:
'The vast disparity between the salaries paid to senior university administrators and the casual and insecure payments made to so many of the staff who actually conduct the teaching and research in universities is a matter of real concern to the committee. If the role of universities is to create new knowledge and disseminate that knowledge to students then the people who do this critical work need to be valued and respected. The current system that sees University Vice Chancellors paid 25 or thirty times more than many of the people undertaking the core work of universities must be reviewed and the failure to do this by the governing bodies of universities is evidence of a failure of leadership. This is a matter that should be reviewed by the Auditor-General.'
- Recommendation 3 be amended to include review by the Auditor-General of the salary packages of University Vice Chancellors and senior university administrators.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 2.29 with Recommendation 5 amended accordingly:

'While the committee has had evidence about multiple innovation precincts and potential industry clusters, it has not been provided with any independent or critical analysis of the benefits of these arrangements. Given their apparent prevalence this is an area that the NSW government should review and seek to undertake a rigorous analysis of their benefits and detriments in conjunction with the university sector.'

Question resolved in the negative on the voices.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 6 be omitted.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That reference to the statement made by the Treasurer relating to the NSW Government's offer of commercial loan guarantees to universities be inserted in the Committee comment after paragraph 2.28, and that relevant references also be inserted into the body of the report.

Mrs Houssos moved: That the following Finding X be inserted after paragraph 2.28:

Finding X

The decision of the Federal Government to exclude public universities from accessing the JobKeeper program has resulted in job losses, affecting the NSW economy.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That Recommendation 5 be amended by omitting the words after 'private tertiary providers.'

Mr Mason-Cox moved: That Recommendation 8 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That:

- the following new paragraph be inserted in the Committee comment after paragraph 2.28:

'Especially given the lack of support at a federal level there is a strong case for a conditional and time limited payroll tax waive for universities by the NSW Government. However this must be conditional on the money's saved being directed to the creation and retention of jobs and relevant reporting criteria be developed to ensure this benefit is obtained.'

- Recommend 6 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 10 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 11 be omitted and the following be inserted instead:

'That the NSW Government offer support for more education places to be provided locally in Western Sydney to meet increased demand through projected population growth and to improve access and equity in Western Sydney, noting the shortfall problem in Blacktown in particular.'

Mr Farlow moved: That Recommendation 13 be amended by:

- omitting the words 'introduce polices and funding to support the retention of all existing' and inserting instead 'advocate to the Federal Government to retain', and

- omitting all words after 'population growth'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Farlow moved: That Recommendation 14 be amended by omitting the words 'subject to detailed' and inserting instead 'to occur as part of the NSW Government planning process.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 16 be amended by inserting 'quality of' before the word 'student life'.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the following Recommendation X be inserted after Recommendation 16:

'That the NSW Government develop a plan for university course offerings across regional and Western Sydney to ensure access to opportunities are provided in a wide range of fields of study.'

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendations nos 18 and 19 be omitted.

Question resolved in the negative on the voices.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 19 be amended by omitting all words after 'Government' and inserting instead:

- (i) investigate the use of existing TAFE and other educational lands and infrastructure for the purpose of establishing facilities similar to the existing CUC arrangements;
- (ii) engage in an appropriate assessment of relevant census and other data sources when making future decisions around the funding and location of new CUC like centres; and
- (iii) consider providing support to CUC like centres to provide careers guidance and advisory services.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That Recommendation 21 be amended by inserting the following words after the word 'backgrounds':

', including school programs (run by Directors Education Leadership and complementary to HEPPP) that assist students and parents from disadvantaged schools become familiar with university opportunities, culture and academic life, as a pathway program for these students.'

Mr Shoebridge moved: That paragraphs 4.15, 4.18 and 4.21 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That paragraph 4.16 be amended by omitting 'There was a particularly concern about the high numbers of Chinese students.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That paragraph 4.16 be amended by omitting 'numbers of Chinese students' and inserting instead 'level of dependence on the Chinese students market'.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That paragraphs 4.27, 4.28 and 4.37 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the secretariat clarify in paragraph 4.47 what financial support was provided by the universities to international students, as mentioned in the Answer to Question on Notice from the Department of Education.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That:

- paragraph 4.62 be amended by omitting all words after 'risks' and inserting instead:
'due to reliance on income from overseas students. There are complex reasons driving this and many positives that come from it.'

There are clear and obvious benefits from a large international student population in Australia. It provides enormous opportunities for cultural and inter-personal exchanges and enriches our collective engagement with the world. Second, it provides very real economic benefits from the income generated by students and their families who visit in the short term and the longer term economic connections that occur between international graduates and Australia over time.

However a reliance on income from overseas students sees our universities very vulnerable to external diplomatic and economic shocks as well as the obvious impact from travel restrictions in the event of a pandemic or similar international crisis.

A review of historic funding rations demonstrates that one of the main reasons universities have had to focus on international students as a source of funding is the very large decline in federal government support. If we are serious about striving to be the clever country and invest in our people and industries the decline in federal government funding of universities must be reversed and billions more directed to these key drivers of economic and social success.

Any suggestion to unilaterally cap international student numbers would be economically and culturally damaging to Australia and the university sector.', and

- the following new Recommendation X be inserted:

'Recommendation X

That the NSW Government call on the Federal Government to substantially increase federal government funding of the university sector.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason-Cox: That the following paragraphs be inserted after paragraph 4.62:

'There are clear and obvious benefits from a large international student population in Australia. It provides enormous opportunities for cultural and inter-personal exchanges and enriches our collective engagement with the world. Second, it provides very real economic benefits from the income generated by students and their families who visit in the short term and the longer term economic connections that occur between international graduates and Australia over time.

However a reliance on income from overseas students sees our universities very vulnerable to external diplomatic and economic shocks as well as the obvious impact from travel restrictions in the event of a pandemic or similar international crisis.'

Mr Shoebridge moved: That paragraphs 4.63 and 4.64 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 22 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That Recommendation 22 be amended by omitting all words after 'Government' and inserting instead 'engage with universities and the federal government to develop a means by which New South Wales universities can diversify the revenue base to avoid any potential over reliance on foreign students and particular source countries'.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendations 24, 25 and 26 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That:

- Recommendation 25 be amended by omitting the word 'require' and inserting instead 'investigate requiring',
- Recommendation 26 be omitted, and the following new Recommendation inserted:

'Recommendation X

That the NSW Government investigate the use of foundations programs at universities, to ensure that they are fulfilling their mission.'

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 23 be amended by omitting words after 'diversification' and inserting instead 'and economic resilience.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 23 be amended by inserting ', economic resilience' after 'diversification'.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 27 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That paragraphs 5.15 and 5.16 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That paragraph 6.41 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the following paragraphs/sentences be omitted:

- paragraphs 6.47, 6.48, 6.49, 6.50 and 6.52, and

- paragraph 6.51 be amended by omitting 'Mr Robert French's free speech code should be included in the NSW statutes covering universities.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 29 be amended by omitting all words after 'Government' and inserting instead 'urgently bring to Parliament legislation to provide far greater protection for international students and other students in shared accommodation arrangements including the rapid progression of the proposed Shared Accommodation Act.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendations 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37 and 38 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That paragraphs 7.4 and 7.35 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That:

- paragraph 7.19 be omitted
- paragraph 7.31 be amended by omitting all words after 'overseas', and
- paragraph 7.36 be amended by omitting 'to overcome the problem.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Houssos moved: That:

- Recommendations 31, 32 and 33 be omitted and the following Committee comment inserted:

'The committee notes that the Federal Government recently released a report from former High Court judge Robert French outlining an academic freedom charter, which is currently being implemented by universities. The committee supports freedom of speech and the principle of academic freedom, and will await to see the outcome of this implementation, before making further recommendations.'

- The following new Finding X be inserted after Recommendation 30:

'Finding X

That the committee supports the principle of freedom of speech and the principle of academic freedom.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Houssos moved: That:

- Recommendations 35, 36 and 37 be omitted, and
- Recommendation 38 be amended by inserting 'including the implementation of the Broderick report.' after the word 'offences'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Fang, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That paragraph 7.35 be omitted and the following paragraph inserted instead:

'Any University which is over-reliant on foreign student income could potentially be exposed to undue foreign influence.'

Mr Shoebridge left the meeting.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That:

- the committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect recommendations, changes to recommendations, or new recommendations resolved by the committee;
- the committee secretariat circulate the draft report, as updated, to the committee by Tuesday 15 December 2020;
- the committee provide any further comments, amendments, and/or dissenting statements by Friday 18 December 2020;

- that the reporting date be extended to 24 January 2021
- the committee adopt the draft report, as amended, via email;
- the committee present the report to the House;
- the transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, and correspondence relating to the inquiry be tabled in the House with the report;
- upon tabling, all unpublished transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, and correspondence relating to the inquiry, be published by the committee, except for those documents kept confidential by resolution of the committee;
- the committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling; and
- the Chair to advise the secretariat and members if they intend to hold a press conference, and if so, the date and time.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 12.10 pm, *sine die*.

Zulpha Styer

Committee Clerk

Draft minutes no. 37

Tuesday 13 April 2021

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

Room 1043, Parliament House, at 10.00 am

1. Members present

Mr Latham, *Chair*

Mr Mason-Cox, *Deputy Chair*

Mr D'Adam

Mr Farlow

Mrs Houssos

Mr Martin (*substituting for Mr Fang*) (*via Webex*)

Mr Shoebridge

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That draft minutes nos. 34, 35 and 36 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 19 November 2020 – Ms Sarah Williams, Executive Assistant to Executive Dean, Faculty of Education and Arts, Australian Catholic University, to the secretariat declining invitation to appear at the curriculum inquiry hearing on 30 November 2020.
- 23 November 2020 – Mr Glenn Fahey, Research Fellow in Education Policy, Centre for Independent Studies, to the secretariat, declining invitation to appear at the curriculum inquiry hearing on 30 November 2020.

- 24 November 2020 – Ms Annabel Bleach, Manager, Ministerial, Board and Executive Services, NESA to the secretariat asking if a supplementary question directed to the Department of Education can be reassigned to NSW Education Standards Authority.
- 1 December 2020 – Mr Anthony Giusti, Director, Ministerial Board and Executive Services to the secretariat regarding NESA's invitation to attend proposed hearing on 11 December 2020.
- 21 December 2020 – Mr Grant Byrne, President, Institute of Technology Education to the Chair providing feedback on NSW Curriculum Review final report *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion - Designs for a future school curriculum*.
- 12 January 2021 – Ms Jane Powles, Executive Officer, Science Teachers Association of NSW to the secretariat providing position paper on the NSW Curriculum Reform.

Sent

- 1 December 2020 – Email from the secretariat to Mr Martin, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority inviting NESA for another hearing on 11 December 2020.

4. Inquiry into the Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020

4.1 Public submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason-Cox: That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 76, 79, 80 and 81.

4.2 Change to requested publication status from submission author

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee agree to the request from the author of submission no. 68 and authorise its publication on the committee's website.

4.3 Witness list for 20 and 21 April 2021

The committee discussed concerns raised by Mr D'Adam via email about the previously circulated witness list for the hearings on 20 and 21 April 2021.

Mr D'Adam moved: That the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People and the Office of the Children's Guardian each be called to appear as a witness.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Anti-Discrimination NSW be called to appear as a witness.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That the Gender Centre be called to appear as a witness.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW be called to appear as a witness as part of the previously resolved panel 6 on 20 April 2021, and that the time allocated to this panel be extended to 1 hour.

Mr D'Adam moved: That the Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta be called to appear as a witness.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That the Uniting Network NSW and ACT be called to appear as a witness.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Mason-Cox: That the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People and the Office of the Children's Guardian each be called to appear as a witness as part of the previously resolved panel 7 on 21 April 2021, and the time allocated to this panel be extended to 1 ½ hours.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby be called to appear as a witness as part of the previously resolved panel 3 on 20 April 2021.

Mr Mason-Cox moved: That the Chair's revised witness list, as amended, be agreed to.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

5. Inquiry into the Review of the NSW School Curriculum

5.1 Answers to questions on notice

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- NESAs, received 20 January 2021
- Ms Jeannie Douglass and Ms Daniela Giorgi, Parliamentary Education and Engagement, received 25 January 2021
- Dr Bella d'Abrera, Institute of Public Affairs, received 3 February 2021.

5.2 Submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That the committee authorise the publication of submissions 85-90 and 93-96, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which are to remain confidential, as per the request of the author.

5.3 Proformas

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That:

- proformas be treated as submissions; and
- one of each proforma be published on the committee's website as a submission, noting the number received by the committee but without the author's names.

5.4 Consideration of Chair's draft report

The Chair submitted his Chair's draft report, entitled '*Review of the NSW School Curriculum*' which, having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Mr D'Adam moved: That the following preface be inserted before page 1 of the report:

'Preface

The Masters report on Curriculum is a work of significant vision. It is an attempt at initiating a bold restructuring of our education system. It is perhaps a work before its time and it is certainly a proposal for bold reform that is ill-suited to the temperament of a government that lacks the stomach for it. Former Minister Rob Stokes commissioned Professor Masters to undertake the task, perhaps if he had remained the Minister for Education the reception of Masters recommendations may have been different. Unfortunately for Professor Masters, a new Minister was in place to receive his recommendations, a Minister who has neither the temperament nor the disposition to take on a bold reform agenda.

The proposals of Professor Masters were too bold for the Government. So rather than being upfront about their discomfort at the proposed reform direction they first tried to spin the proposal as a back to basics initiative. As a fall back many of the key recommendations were supported "in principle" so as to provide enough political wriggle room to avoid implementation. Behind the scenes, the government has been working hard to drain the process of curriculum reform of any meaningful content.

Now through this Committee report, the Government no doubt hopes that a final fatal blow can be delivered to the Masters Report. This Committee has accepted the contract to execute a hit on Masters and his reform proposal. It is a task that any fair member of the Committee must decline to be a part of. We should not do the dirty work of the Government when they lack the courage to say that the Masters report is not what they wanted or expected. Their approach has rendered the process a monumental waste of time for all who bothered to offer their feedback. Masters should be applauded for his work. Not denigrated.

Masters has taken to its logical conclusion the narrative of differentiation that has informed educational practice in this state for more than a decade. Learning progressions have also been part of educational practice for some time. It is not a new concept and the notion of an un-timed syllabus is an extension of this idea into the structure of the whole curriculum. The Masters report challenges the Government to think differently about how education might be delivered.

The preparation of this report

The Chair is obliged under the standing orders to seek unanimity in the formulation of the report of the Committee. In this report no such effort has been made.

The Chair has drafted a report full of provocations and gratuitous ideological statements. The arrangement of the evidence is also skewed to support the prejudices of the Chair. Large segments of the report contain quotes from the Chair's own discussion paper. The Chair was not a witness before the inquiry and has no particular expertise on the subject matter. The report elevates the opinions of crank right-wing think tanks well beyond their social and political relevance. Any serious consideration of the issues is buried beneath an avalanche of dross and right-wing culture war tropes.

This Committee's report creates a caricature of the contemporary classroom that is not grounded in evidence and is certainly not reflected in the evidence presented to the inquiry. Many of the assumptions in this report are wrong and offensive to the thousands of teachers working tirelessly in our schools every day. We should trust their professionalism and let them get on with the job.

The crowded curriculum

The government didn't need Professor Masters or this Committee to tell it that the curriculum was overcrowded. This has been a well-known fact for a very long time. A fact reflected in the original terms of reference for the Master's review. What is also clear is that teachers are under the pump. They lack the time to be able to develop the resources necessary for the effective delivery of the curriculum. This is a direct result of the decision of this Government to gut the Department's curriculum development and support resources when it decided to shift this function to schools as a savings measure dressed up as devolution. If curriculum reform is to be successful, this vital support function needs to be restored.

Curriculum development and reform should be entrusted to educators and not be the subject of relentless political interference. Like we have done in health policy during the current crisis we should place our faith in experts who know what they are talking about rather than be guided by the ill-formed opinions of politicians who are driven by ideology.

The Masters review and curriculum reform were touted by the government as the answer to declining results. Having abandoned Masters as a viable proposal the Government has left itself with no coherent strategy to address this issue.

There are some useful observations in this report however to give support to one recommendation is to confer a level of legitimacy on the whole report and its recommendations, a position that cannot be justified.

Sadly this report will give the government the political cover to not do what they didn't want to do in the first place.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved: That the report be amended by:

- a) omitting all findings except for Findings 13 and 16
- b) amending Finding 16 by omitting the words, 'Material that detracts from the teaching of rich knowledge and deep comprehension of academic skills must be removed.'
- c) deleting all recommendations.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 1 be amended by omitting 'and the personal view of Professor Masters' after 'high-level architecture'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 2 be omitted and the following new Finding be inserted instead:

'The terms of reference for the Masters review did not include detailed analysis of the syllabus documents and as a result this did not form a significant part of the review.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the report be amended by:

- a) omitting Findings 3 and 4
- b) inserting the following new Finding instead:

'The Masters review did not consider practical examples of use of the curriculum in schools. This should form part of future reforms in the area.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 6 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 7 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 8 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 9 be omitted and the following new Finding be inserted instead:

'Social wellbeing is an important purpose for schools, without ensuring student wellbeing many students are unable to properly engage with education. Student achievement and wellbeing must both be considered in design of the syllabus.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 10 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 11 be amended by omitting ', opportunities were missed for Minister Mitchell's goal of removing overtly political content. In the committee's view, this goal is most valid.' after 'the NSW curriculum'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 14 be amended by inserting 'for instance by removing scripture classes from school hours and returning this time to teachers to allocate as is determined most appropriate' after 'the 'decluttering' process'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 18 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 18 be amended to omit 'It must not reflect post-modernist theories of knowledge being 'socially constructed'. This is an anti-educational doctrine causing confusion and distrust among school students.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Findings 21 and 22 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Finding 23 be amended by omitting 'and, in effect, is undertaking the 'deep dive' that Professor Masters neglected.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 1 be amended by omitting 'In particular, it must actively support explicit teaching practices and standardised teacher and student experience inside schools, from class-to-class and year-to-year.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Farlow: That Recommendation 1 be amended by omitting 'standardised teacher and student experience' and inserting instead 'common teacher and student experiences'.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendations 5 and 6 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 7 be amended by omitting 'by making it compulsory for all students to take 'Making a Nation' as part of this cohort's history syllabus.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 9 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 10 be amended by inserting 'This should include oversight of all materials for programs like scripture classes and school banking programs with all materials available publicly on the Department's website' after 'for success'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 12 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 14 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That the report be amended by:

a) amending Recommendation 15 to omit 'The committee recommends that the NSW Government adopt a clear policy statement in this regard, prohibiting future re-cluttering by identifying two main culprits:

- (a) caving into knee-jerk political and media pressure points about the latest 'big news story' by announcing that schools will now study this subject area
- (b) using schools as a repository for addressing miscellaneous social issues (usually in health, law and order, fad ideological campaigns and social engineering) through the introduction of non-academic and non-vocational courses and content.

Further, as part of this policy statement, that the NSW Government and NSW Education Standards Authority ensure that any proposals for new syllabus material are assessed against a proven evidence

base, testing the fundamental proposition: will the proposed change enhance student academic and vocational outcomes?'

b) omitting Recommendation 16.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendations 21 and 22 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 23 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 24 be amended by omitting 'and other vocational training' after 'buy in TAFE'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative

Mr Shoebridge moved: That Recommendation 31 be omitted.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That paragraph 1.16 be amended by inserting 'key foundational' before 'basics'.

Mrs Houssos moved:

a) That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 1.16:

'Despite acknowledging publicly that the decline in NSW school standards is "unmatched in the rest of the world," the Masters review also failed to provide any analysis of why this has occurred.'

- b) That the following new paragraph be inserted after Finding 2:

Finding X

The Masters review provided no analysis of why NSW school students' results are declining – declining in comparison to the rest of the world, the rest of Australia and even past NSW results.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos.

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox, Mr Shoebridge.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That paragraph 1.98 be amended by omitting 'This' before 'is an insult' and inserting instead 'While schools need to provide additional support for some students, to assume schools must play this role for all students'

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That Finding 8 be amended by omitting 'That' before 'the Masters review' and inserting instead 'While some students will require additional support from their schools.'

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That Finding 9 be omitted: 'That social wellbeing must not be the primary purpose of schools, but should be supplementary to the core functions of student achievement, both academic and vocational', and the following new finding be inserted instead:

Finding X

'That student wellbeing, while not the primary purpose of schools, should be complementary to the core functions of student achievement, both academic and vocational.'

Mrs Houssos moved: That paragraph 2.41 be amended by omitting 'back to basics approach to' and inserting instead 'a focus on building the key foundations.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That Recommendation 23 be amended by omitting 'support' and inserting instead 'mandate'.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That Recommendation 27 be amended by omitting 'poor' and inserting instead 'disadvantaged'.

Mrs Houssos moved: That Finding 22 be omitted: 'That too many schools and teachers have a random approach to identifying and using learning materials, with an over-reliance on searching the Internet, and that the NSW Education Standards Authority and the Department of Education are unaware of the particular learning materials used by schools. The evidence base for high-quality learning materials is being ignored', and the following new finding be inserted instead:

Finding X

'Because of a lack of support and oversight by the Department of Education and the NSW Education Standards Authority, too many schools and teachers are forced to identify and use learning materials

themselves, including searching the Internet. This results in a lack of consistency across NSW schools. The Department of Education and the NSW Education Standards Authority must ensure that every student receives the best, evidence-based learning materials.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Houssos: That the following new recommendation be inserted after paragraph 4.47:

'Recommendation X

'That primary schools in remote NSW be better utilised as hubs for distance learning for high school students.'

Mrs Houssos moved: That the following new recommendation be inserted after paragraph 4.47:

'Recommendation X

'That the process for establishing preschools at primary schools in remote NSW be reviewed, including considering how to streamline and speed up the process.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mrs Houssos, Mr Shoebridge.

Noes: Mr Farlow, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Houssos moved: That the following new recommendation be inserted after paragraph 4.57:

'Recommendation X

That in mid-2022 Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education inquire into and report on progress with its two major initiatives and recommendations for lifting NSW school performance, that is:

1. the reform process for school measurement, accountability and outcome-based budgeting (Portfolio Committee No. 3's 2020 report); and
2. curriculum reform implemented by NESA (Portfolio Committee No. 3's 2021 report).'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Noes: Mr Shoebridge.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Farlow moved: That:

- The draft report, as amended, be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House;
- The transcripts of evidence, submissions, tabled documents, answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, the Chair's discussion paper, the committee's discussion paper, responses to follow-up questions from private committee briefings, samples of proformas received by the committee, and correspondence relating to the inquiry be tabled in the House with the report;

- Upon tabling, all unpublished attachments to submissions be kept confidential by the committee;
- Upon tabling, all unpublished transcripts of evidence, submissions, tabled documents, answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, responses to follow-up questions from private committee briefings, proformas received by the committee and correspondence relating to the inquiry, be published by the committee, except for those documents kept confidential by resolution of the committee;
- The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling;
- The committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect changes to recommendations or new recommendations resolved by the committee;
- The secretariat table the report on Monday 19 April 2021;
- The Chair to advise the secretariat and members if they intend to hold a press conference, and if so, the date and time.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Farlow, Mrs Houssos, Mr Latham, Mr Martin, Mr Mason-Cox.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Mr Shoebridge.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Shoebridge: That dissenting statements be provided to the secretariat by 2.00 pm Thursday 15 April 2021, subject to this being not less than 24 hours after receipt of the draft minutes of the meeting.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 11.44 am, until 9.15am, Tuesday 20 April 2021, Macquarie Room, Parliament House (Parental Rights Bill hearing).

Anthony Hanna and Helen Hong
Committee Clerks

Appendix 5 Dissenting statements

The Hon Anthony D'Adam MLC, Australian Labor Party

The Masters' report on Curriculum is a work of significant vision. It is an attempt at initiating a bold restructuring of our education system. It is perhaps a work before its time and it is certainly a proposal for bold reform that is ill-suited to the temperament of a government that lacks the stomach for it. Former Minister Rob Stokes commissioned Professor Masters to undertake the task, perhaps if he had remained the Minister for Education the reception of Masters recommendations may have been different. Unfortunately for Professor Masters, a new Minister was in place to receive his recommendations, a Minister who has neither the temperament nor the disposition to take on a bold reform agenda.

The proposals of Professor Masters were too bold for the Government. So rather than being upfront about their discomfort at the proposed reform direction they first tried to spin the proposal as a back to basics initiative. As a fall back many of the key recommendations were supported "in principle" so as to provide enough political wriggle room to avoid implementation. Behind the scenes, the government has been working hard to drain the process of curriculum reform of any meaningful content.

Now through this Committee report, the Government no doubt hopes that a final fatal blow can be delivered to the Masters' Report. This Committee has accepted the contract to execute a hit on Masters and his reform proposal. It is a task that any fair member of the Committee must decline to be a part of. We should not do the dirty work of the Government when they lack the courage to say that the Masters' report is not what they wanted or expected. Their approach has rendered the process a monumental waste of time for all who bothered to offer their feedback. Masters should be applauded for his work, not denigrated.

Masters has taken to its logical conclusion the narrative of differentiation that has informed educational practice in this state for more than a decade. Learning progressions have also been part of educational practice for some time. It is not a new concept and the notion of an un-timed syllabus is an extension of this idea into the structure of the whole curriculum. The Masters' report challenges the Government to think differently about how education might be delivered.

The preparation of this report

The Chair is obliged under the standing orders to seek unanimity in the formulation of the report of the Committee. In this report, no such effort has been made.

The Chair has drafted a report full of provocations and gratuitous ideological statements. The arrangement of the evidence is also skewed to support the prejudices of the Chair. Large segments of the report contain quotes from the Chair's own discussion paper. The Chair was not a witness before the inquiry and has no particular expertise on the subject matter. The report elevates the opinions of crank right-wing think tanks well beyond their social and political relevance. Any serious consideration of the issues is buried beneath an avalanche of dross and right-wing culture war tropes.

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The crowded curriculum

The government didn't need Professor Masters or this Committee to tell it that the curriculum was overcrowded. This has been a well-known fact for a very long time. A fact reflected in the original terms of reference for the Master's review. What is also clear is that teachers are under the pump. They lack the time to be able to develop the resources necessary for the effective delivery of the curriculum. This is a direct result of the decision of this Government to gut the Department's curriculum development and support resources when it decided to shift this function to schools as a savings measure dressed up as devolution. If curriculum reform is to be successful, this vital support function needs to be restored.

Curriculum development and reform should be entrusted to educators and not be the subject of relentless political interference. Like we have done in health policy during the current crisis we should place our faith in experts who know what they are talking about rather than be guided by the ill-formed opinions of politicians who are driven by ideology.

The Masters' review and curriculum reform were touted by the government as the answer to declining results. Having abandoned Masters as a viable proposal the Government has left itself with no coherent strategy to address this issue.

There are some useful observations in this report however to give support to one recommendation is to confer a level of legitimacy on the whole report and its recommendations, a position that cannot be justified.

Sadly this report will give the government the political cover to not do what they didn't want to do in the first place.

The Hon Courtney Houssos MLC, Australian Labor Party

No analysis of the reason for the decline in NSW school results

As Professor Geoff Masters wrote in his review of the NSW curriculum, “NSW students slipped from being among the highest performers in the world in 2000, to being the OECD average in 2018.”

NSW students’ results have dramatically declined when compared against other countries; they have declined in comparison to other states across Australia; and have even declined when compared to previous NSW students. In 2019, a NSW year 9 student was five months behind a NSW year 9 student in 2011.

The NSW Liberal-National Government has consistently said that the curriculum review, conducted by Professor Masters, would provide the road map to correcting this decline. Yet, Professor Masters’ review provided no analysis of the reason for this long-term decline in NSW school results. It is very difficult to fix a problem, when you don’t know what’s causing it. Despite all of the consultations undertaken, despite all of the teachers, parents and community members who engaged in his review with the best of intentions, there was no reason given in Professor Masters’ review for this dramatic, long term decline in NSW students’ results.

Building strong, foundational skills for all students

There was wide agreement that there is a need to declutter the curriculum, and focus on building strong, foundational skills for all of our students, especially in the early years of schooling. Greg Ashman provided particularly compelling evidence to the committee, when he explained how students need to have a deep knowledge base, before they can begin to critically analyse a topic.

In implementing the Masters review, the NSW Liberals and Nationals have claimed they will take a ‘back to basics’ approach, but this simplistic slogan ignores the complexity of learning in the 21st century. Despite using this slogan frequently, the NSW Liberal-National Government still hasn’t developed a comprehensive plan to improve the foundational skills of students, which are in decline.

Lack of support for teachers

The Gallop Review, released after this inquiry completed its hearings, received similar feedback as the Masters curriculum review: teachers’ work is intensifying, with more and more subject content to teach, and less support to do that work. The Gallop Review showed that it was the cuts made by the NSW Liberals and Nationals after they took office in 2011 that have made this worse: cutting the curriculum, literacy and numeracy experts who used to support teachers from regional education offices. Instead, teachers have been left to fend for themselves.

Preschools in remote NSW

Finally, the committee received compelling evidence from the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of NSW about the difficulties in establishing preschools in remote parts of NSW. It is clear that there is a need to streamline the way that preschools can be approved to operate on school grounds in remote areas. This may mean that they operate for just a few years at a time, and then again later when demand means they are required again.

Although I don’t agree with everything recommended by this report, I sought to engage with it in a constructive manner, proposing and voting for a number of amendments to improve it. It is clear that after a decade in government, the legacy of the NSW Liberals and Nationals is a dramatic decline in the results achieved by our school students. This must change.

Mr David Shoebridge MLC, The Greens

This is another report from the Education Commission that reflects the opinions and personal biases of the Chair, rather than the raft of credible evidence provided by the community and education experts.

It is disappointing and disrespectful to see that the time of highly professional and engaged education experts was wasted by the Committee, only to see a report that looks like it was written by a right-wing political ginger group.

The idea advanced in this report, that making the material relevant to young people by situating it in the real-world is somehow a postmodern fancy is plainly foolish. Teachers work hard to make what they're teaching relevant to their students because they know this increases the chance that their lesson will be interesting, engaging and prompt further exploration.

Likewise, the suggestion that "source verification" should be removed from the teaching of history and english, demonstrates a view woefully out of touch with the connected world young people are growing up in - where being able to critically evaluate the veracity of claims and sources is more essential than ever.

The recommendation that history be taught in a strictly linear fashion with an increased focus on the role of white men is pathetically outdated and would do students a disservice. Expanding the syllabus to give students a broader depth of knowledge, for instance, the history of First Nations, is an important move. It must not be undone to court favour with a minority of right-wing MPs and commentators who would prefer students to rote learn the dates that Europeans "discovered" Australia, rather than the true history of thousands of years of prior occupation by First Nation's peoples.

The fundamental impact of inequality within the education system is ignored in these recommendations. Many students aren't able to access a world-class education because they simply can't afford one - their local schools may be run down, textbooks few and far between and access to devices and the internet unreliable or non-existent. Until we address these fundamental issues of equity we cannot begin to answer the question of how we can improve educational outcomes in NSW. Meanwhile, elite private schools continue to rake in public funds to build new orchestra pits and swimming pools. This fundamental inequity was not even addressed in this report.

Finally, in a report that constantly refers to the "crowded curriculum" and the need for "evidence-based teaching", there is no push back against one lesson a week being thrown away on untested and ad hoc preaching in the form of special religious education. If the majority was genuinely concerned about a crowded curriculum, then the most obvious way to start the decluttering is removing SRE from the weekly lesson plan in every state school.

Frankly, both teachers and students deserve better than this report - It does not reflect the best evidence out there and it does not demonstrate a useful path forward.

