



**Submission to the BOSTES
response to the Next
Generation HSC Position
Paper**

Prepared by: Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New
South Wales

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MINIMUM STANDARD

Proposal 1: Establish a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy for the award of the HSC

P&C Federation supports the introduction of minimum standards of numeracy and literacy for the HSC. We see this as a positive step in further strengthening the HSC as a valued credential and giving a sense of assurance that graduates have at least achieved a minimum standard before entering the tertiary system or the workforce. This change goes some way to addressing the concerns of parents.

P&C Federation believes that the identification of students with potential literacy or numeracy issues needs to take place as early as possible so that appropriate action can be taken. Early identification and intervention would reduce the number of students needing further support in later years and minimise the number of students needing to demonstrate they meet the standards post high-school.

If as part of this reform the aim is to provide satisfactory competence in English including grammar, spelling and punctuation then the P&C Federation would argue that these aspects of English need to be explicitly taught and reinforced as an integral part of the English curriculum up to at least year 10. Parents often comment that the teaching of grammar, spelling and punctuation drops off dramatically upon moving into high school due to minimal reinforcement.

As mathematics is not a compulsory HSC subject, minimum levels of numeracy need to be established by the end of year 10. Although the criteria sought for minimal numeracy are presently in the K-10 curriculum there is still a significant cohort (15%) that do not meet the requirements. P&C Federation would argue for a strengthening of numeracy especially in Years 7-10 and the possible introduction of STEM to these students to try to engage those that might otherwise fail to see the connection of mathematics to the real world.

CURRICULUM

Proposal 2: Deliver online syllabuses that are reviewed regularly

P&C Federation supports the delivery of syllabuses online and minor adjustments as required. Being able to alter a syllabus in response to current terminology, new concepts and practices is a highly desirable capability.

A five year regular review cycle would be the maximum period we would wish to see and would suggest an initial review after only three years.

Proposal 3a: Offer new BOSTES HSC courses

P&C Federation supports the introduction of philosophy and psychology as new subjects. We see the introduction of psychology in particular as providing pathways into a myriad of careers such as advertising, counselling, human resources, marketing and mental health care.

We see the introduction of philosophy as a positive move as its core emphasis on reasoning and argumentation is excellent preparation for careers in law, social work, journalism, religion, business, diplomacy and politics. However we envisage that the number of students enrolling in this subject would be fairly low as it may be seen as 'antiquated' or of little relevance to modern life. We would suggest a small amount of marketing would be required to make the course relevant to students.

The introduction of these subjects does raise concerns as to the number of teachers currently trained to deliver these subjects. In considering the introduction of any new subjects P&C Federation would hope that processes would be put in place to train both under graduate and current teachers with the skills and knowledge to teach the subjects. Of particular concern is the ability to deliver these subjects in rural areas.

We would note that the introduction of psychology will have a measurable impact on other HSC subjects. If the level of uptake follows that of Victoria there could be a significant movement of students from other courses. Close monitoring would be required to ensure other courses were not overly impacted.

Proposal 3b: Provide new opportunities to extend high-achieving students

P&C Federation supports the refreshing of existing extension courses and the introduction of opportunities to further extend high-achieving students. Although we support the introduction of extensions in the sciences and possibly other subjects, the extension courses must be made attractive in order to boost student enrolments.

P&C Federation is concerned that the fall in student enrolments in the higher level course may in part be due to students enrolling in less challenging courses in the belief that they can achieve higher ATARs. This would need to be addressed as a starting point.

P&C Federation also supports the opportunity for students to study approved university courses that would count towards a student's ATAR and provide credits towards tertiary study. However we would ask that in the development of such opportunities consideration be given to regional students being able to participate in such courses.

ASSESSMENT

Proposal 4: Introduce new, rigorous guidelines for effective school-based assessment

P&C Federation supports the introduction of more rigorous guidelines for school-based assessment provided that these guidelines promote depth of learning rather than encouraging rehearsals for HSC examinations. P&C Federation also supports limiting the number of assessment tasks to facilitate a reduction in student stress and to allow more time for in-depth learning.

In addition to addressing the issues of plagiarism such guidelines should take into account methods for ensuring that assessments are actually the students' own work and not that of parents, family or tutors.

P&C Federation would strongly support the opportunity for one or more assessments to take place in year 11 if this would spread the work-load and further assist in greater depth of knowledge and skills.

Proposal 5: Redesign HSC examinations to assess depth of knowledge and application of skills

P&C Federation supports the redesign of HSC examinations to assess a greater depth of knowledge, understanding and skill. P&C Federation also supports a redesign that will reduce the opportunity for students to pre-prepare, be intensively coached in responses or plagiarise work.

Although P&C Federation supports any steps to mitigate plagiarism we see practices that involve the intensive coaching of students in pre-prepared responses to HSC examinations as more prevalent both within schools and by external coaching organisations. Such practices indicate that there is a certain level of predictability to HSC examinations which allow students to be coached in and recall pre-prepared responses. This does not truly test a student's ability to apply knowledge, demonstrate critical thinking or other higher-order skills. Such changes would need to be in conjunction with a curriculum that supports the teaching of a subject to a greater depth.

Proposal 6: Expand computer-based assessment

While the P&C Federation can see the benefits of computer-based assessment we have significant concerns about the equity and fairness of using technology in this way. There are many factors that can impact on the equity of testing students;

- Access to computers (rural and remote versus metropolitan, low socio-economic versus high socio-economic)
- BYOD versus school provided equipment
- Brands and models of computer
- Desktop versus laptop versus tablet
- Differences in operating system,
- Available screen area,
- Mouse versus trackpad versus touch screen versus stylus
- Physical keyboard versus virtual keyboard
- Web browser compatibility,

- Access to required software,
- Access to reliable internet infrastructure,
- Cheating during assessment (access to on-line materials, collective cheating by use of social media software),
- on-line versus offline assessment
- inability of departmental infrastructure to handle large numbers of students on-line simultaneously

Whether this is for assessment during senior years or for the final HSC examinations there are many issues to overcome before assessment or testing could be considered fair and equitable. With a huge variation in internet and computer access across schools in the state the P&C Federation sees a major challenge that will take some time to address. Such a challenge will require a significant investment in infrastructure on the part of government. It is important to note that P&C Federation does not see BYOD as an equitable solution.

In the case of HSC subjects with small enrolment numbers there may be the opportunity in the immediate future to trial computer-based assessments. However for main stream subjects there are still significant hurdles in both assessment and examination arenas.

Proposal 7: Apply a common scale for subjects with a hierarchical structure

P&C Federation supports the use of common scaling for subjects with a hierarchical structure. It is the experience of parents that students will often select or be advised to take less difficult courses in the belief that it will improve their ATAR. This impacts on the uptake of the more challenging courses with the flow on impact being a reduction in entry level knowledge and skills of those choosing to undertake tertiary studies particularly in mathematics. We see this trend as counter productive to the student, employers and to the nation in the long run. The use of a common scale may well act to counter the trend towards simpler subjects.