

Feedback on Interim Report of NSW Curriculum Review

Submission to the NSW Education Standards Authority

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Introduction

Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is thankful to the NESAs for this opportunity to contribute to this review of NSW Curriculum. P&C Federation supports the position of individual educational and developmental needs met by a range of differential services expressed through appropriate and well-planned curricula, programs and environments conducted by sensitive and well-trained personnel in conjunction with parents¹ and families.

The core belief of P&C Federation is that the education of our children and youth is the most fundamental means of ensuring individual and collective success and, as a result, our greatest national resource. We also support the concept that it is primarily the responsibility of governments to ensure education is well rounded and fully funded.

P&C Federation is a representative voice for public education in NSW. With over 1800 member associations our understanding of the issues within education is broad and carries with it the voice of a very large body of parents and carers.

We have attempted to address each of the reform directions in the Interim Report.

Terms of Reference

Reform Direction 1:

Address concerns about the 'overcrowding' of the curriculum and the resulting pressures on schools and teachers

Like most stakeholders, we agree that the curriculum has become overcrowded, and the Interim Report's proposals to improve this are commendable as far as they go. However, we need to stress again other significant impacts that although outside the remit of this review must be addressed as part of this reform.

The Impact of Compliance and Accountability

To a significant extent the perception of syllabus overcrowding is the result of systemic and government compliance requirements working its way into day to day teaching. In part teachers are seeing the syllabus as overcrowded because there is less and less time in the day to teach as a result of ever-increasing red tape. This additional burden starts with national bodies and builds as it progresses through systems and down to individual schools who seek to track and quantify an increasing set of parameters in the hope that an ever-greater set of data will generate the answer to better student outcomes or shape better teachers. At the school leadership level, the increasing burden of understanding and then meeting compliance takes away from the role of education leadership and as a consequence has a ripple down effect on teaching and learning. We see an increasing trend in systems and governments treating students like commercial commodities. Continuing this approach will inevitably lead to a major failure of the system.

¹ "Parent" refers to anyone with legal care of a child, such as a parent, carer or legal guardian

The introduction of standardised national testing which was originally intended to inform classroom practice is now a mechanism that creates an environment where schools see the need to promote and market themselves using test results. This creates a culture of teaching to the test, stalling the delivery of the curriculum to ensure the school performs well. This is particularly prevalent in primary schools where NAPLAN results are often seen as the only way to market the school. This is further compounded by systems that place great emphasis on NAPLAN, and by governments and media who simplistically use NAPLAN along with PISA and TIMMS results as the only indicators of performance.

Government and Political Interference

Another significant factor is the rapid introduction of government policy in response to singular issues that are seen as quick, simple short-term fixes but are often ill-considered with far reaching consequences for teaching and learning. This has led to pressure to add material to syllabuses that arguably should not be there or could be dealt with in other ways.

This is why in our original submission, to protect against overcrowding due to this factor, we recommended a permanent framework for making any changes to the curriculum falls to an independent, non-political body consisting of professional educators, parent and community representatives, and other relevant stakeholders and specialists. The appointment of members of this approving body should not be subject to Ministerial approval, and may be by the peak organisations that the representatives come from. This could perhaps be under the auspices of NESAs, following an amendment to the NESAs Act.

The rules governing any body charged with curriculum change and endorsement must ensure that any proposed changes be supported with:

1. clear explanations of the educational benefits of the proposed changes;
2. detailed breakdowns of the resources (human and physical) and the approved budgeted funding that will be required to implement the proposed changes;
3. clear estimates of how much time it will take for teachers to implement the proposed changes in their classrooms, based on the time it takes for them to cover what is already in the curriculum; and
4. supported by robust data

Protecting against syllabus creep

We are concerned that there are no proposals within the Interim Report to prevent future overcrowding. Even if the syllabus reset proposed within the report is undertaken, there is nothing preventing content from accumulating again over future years, leaving us in the same position a decade or two out.

We stress that no changes should occur to the curriculum without demonstrating clear educational benefits, guaranteed funding and resourcing, and a clear plan as to how teachers will be able to implement the changes within a reasonable timeframe.

To further prevent overcrowding, we support the guiding principle of “add something in, take something out”, although there should be limited flexibility. The driving factor is to maintain the core knowledge and skills.

Reviews of the curriculum should take place on a more structured cycle. This should be accompanied by a total quality management (TQM) philosophy, whereby the curriculum is constantly being assessed and reviews can still occur between these cyclical reviews if there is a substantive reason for an earlier curriculum update (e.g. if there is a major scientific or educational breakthrough or discovery that renders the curriculum obsolete in some way).

The reviewing body's recommendations at each curriculum review should be subject to approval from the NSW Parliament rather than the Minister of the day.

Addressing Actual Overcrowding

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. P&C Federation would not support a blanket reduction in each syllabus based on a fixed percentage. Rather we see a more considered approach in roughly the following order

- Identification of overlap/duplication across syllabuses
- Identification of repetition across the continuum (K-12). Is there material being repeated across stages or between primary and secondary
- Identification of material that is additional to the core concepts.
- Subsequent identification of material that is low priority or actually not required.

We stress, however, that core competencies such as literacy and numeracy must be reinforced across the entire curriculum.

Reform Direction 2:

Promoting Deeper Understanding

P&C Federation supports any move towards deeper understanding particularly in core material. However, we need to stress that deeper understanding depends on two essential elements

- More material in the syllabus including the time to teach
- Appropriately qualified (specialist) teachers to teach it

When asked about reducing syllabus content parents will often state that we need to make room for the teaching of deeper content. This is both necessary but also a potential issue. Care should be taken that this reform directions do not undermine the reform direction to declutter the curriculum.

While we agree with promoting deeper understanding of subjects, it is difficult to discern how the Interim Report's proposals would differ from current intentions of the curriculum. The Interim Report states that *"in each school subject, there must be clarity about core knowledge and pivotal concepts and principles"* which would *"need to be clearly identified and prioritised over content that is less central and could be given reduced attention or eliminated from syllabuses."*

This is already the stated intention of many syllabuses, and if these stated principles are not being implemented in practice adequately or consistently, then how these principles are implemented should be the primary focus of the Interim Report rather than the principles themselves.

Reform Direction 3:

Building skills in applying knowledge

The principal aim of education is not just to impart knowledge but to build capacity and confidence in students to be able to apply that knowledge to real life problems. Education is about teaching students not just how to pass exams but to teach them to take the knowledge they have learned, break down problems and issues and then come up with solutions. We have become too focused on the exam and the mark, ignoring to a large extent the assessment of the application of that knowledge through critical analysis and innovation.

While there are a small number of students who thrive in the purely academic arena, those without the gift of academic prowess need to work hard at achieving at this level. Some will never cope academically as their neurochemistry simply doesn't provide for this. Parents often comment that children simply switch off if they can't see the purpose of what they are learning. Others disengage because they have not had time to understand the concepts being taught and as a consequence fall further and further behind, and there are often no teaching strategies address students falling behind.

P&C Federation supports the concept of teaching critical and creative thinking, collaborating, interpreting, communicating all facilitated with the use of technology to the extent that these skills can be taught. This would require a substantive upskilling of the workforce to be able to not only teach but to assess progress in these skills. Care needs to be taken in the use of research that underpins the pedagogy in this space as it is easy to align with a narrow framework that may impact negatively on students.

In terms of the importance of these skills, we see a continuum of learning starting from Kindergarten. Collaboration and communication must be taught from a very young age albeit in a simplistic way. Nurturing creativity is also possible from a young age but this requires time to develop and specifically providing the opportunity to allow creative thinking, and create an environment where children can safely take risks and share their ideas without ridicule. We see these skills as being embedded across the entire curriculum as seamlessly as possible.

Reform Direction 4:

In revising the content of the curriculum, provide every student with a 'common entitlement'.

The concept of a common entitlement speaks to a core set of knowledge, skills and experiences that every child needs to meet so they not only benefit themselves but become positive contributors to society being able to navigate and survive in a rapidly changing world. We strongly support a base set of knowledge, skills and attributes that each child should take away from their years of schooling. Without a minimum benchmark for these attributes we allow students to slip below a point where they lack the basic knowledge needed for life.

Beyond this entitlement children should be relatively free to pursue learning in their area of interest.

We believe that there should be a common entitlement centring on numeracy, literacy including digital literacy, along with more emphasis on social and emotional development and that a core mix of these domains be mandated as part of the curriculum. At a fundamental level, children need to leave school with the ability to communicate both verbally and in writing, be able to read and comprehend written material to a reasonable level and have a solid mastery of basic numeracy including being able to undertake everyday math problem solving. Children also need to be able to use common digital tools to facilitate these core elements.

Retention of current mandated KLAS

Without question, numeracy and literacy are the essential core of the mandated subjects

Basic knowledge about, and appreciation of Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories

P&C Federation supports the concept of including a basic knowledge about and appreciation of Aboriginal language, culture and history. Every student, no matter their background should gain an appreciation of the indigenous cultures of Australia. It is not possible to have a full understanding of Australia, its history or its culture, without some understanding of Australia's indigenous cultures. We see this as the foundation for meaningful reconciliation and a more positive future for indigenous peoples.

However, we would note that this needs to be balanced against other aspects of the curriculum

Mandated language other than English

The idea of a mandatory study of a language has been discussed for many years and while most parents would love to have their child speak another language, there are significant reservations about the practicality and the real benefits of this approach.

Parents from a wide diversity of cultures have expressed the following concerns to us in regards to mandating the teaching of a language:

- There is already a significant shortage of qualified language teachers and this is just for secondary schools.
- Teaching of language in secondary schools in rural and remote areas is almost impossible without the use of correspondence courses or other external providers.
- Children are unlikely to become fluent speakers as there is insufficient time to bring them to this level within the curriculum. This significantly diminishes the benefit of teaching a language in the view of parents.
- There is disagreement over which language should be taught. Australia has many nationalities making up the population with many dialects even within the same language groupings. If any language is to be taught, the majority of parents prefer a mainstream language that would be useful later in a student's life.
- There is questionable benefit of learning a language without a cultural context, and in a world where English is the principal language of business, trade, science and academia generally.

Achieving a mandatory language would require a sufficient number of teachers who are qualified to teach these languages. At present languages are either not offered or are being taught by a large number of out-of-field teachers. The practice of requiring teachers to teach outside their area of expertise is far too widespread, with 26% of Years 7-10 teachers sometimes teaching outside their

field. In remote areas, 41% of Years 7-10 subjects are taught by an out-of-field teacher.² The impact on students is profound.

There are a large and increasing number of students in NSW schools that have a language other than English as their native tongue. Our understanding is that a majority of the parents of these children do not wish their child to learn their language at school as they prefer to send their child to a language school where native speakers not only teach the language but do it within a cultural context and to a high level of fluency. It should also be noted that the majority of parents with English as a second language want their children to learn English as a priority.

Our strong preference would be to allow language to be studied on a non-compulsory basis at primary based on the context and desires of the school community. If a child wishes to pursue a particular language later in their schooling they can do so at high school.

Reform Direction 5

More flexible curriculum

P&C Federation wholeheartedly supports the concept of disconnecting the current association between time and achievement. This is one of the single biggest factors driving disengagement and poor depth of knowledge. The perceived need, especially in senior schooling, to make sure all the dot points in a syllabus are covered tends to drive a pace that a large number of children simply cannot keep up with, causing them to slip further behind with no opportunity to revisit concepts. This is particularly prevalent in subjects such as mathematics where new concepts rely heavily on the understanding of the material that came before. In NSW, the NESA recommended hours are often taken as mandated hours, artificially limiting the ability of teachers to use judgement and take extra time where required.

Decoupling time will allow a wider range of achievement trajectories, enabling more advanced students to be extended and slower students to have time to come to terms with the fundamentals. The concept of achievement levels is very appealing in this regard, as it allows a student to reach and then strive for the next level at their own pace. There would nonetheless need to be some form of time limits set for a child to reach a particular achievement level in order for them to meet a minimum standard. There should therefore be a maximum amount of time for students to reach achievement levels/minimum standards, albeit that that maximum amount of time may vary between syllabuses. This must be accompanied by strategies to address those students who fail to meet the levels.

However, this reform direction would only be possible through major changes to the way students are taught and with the need to upskill a large part of the teaching profession.

Some of the issues that we see related to this are:

- Lack of qualified and experienced teachers in key subject areas. While this has traditionally been seen as a complaint in secondary schools, we see this as a major issue in primary schools

² Weldon, P.R. 2016. Out-of-field teaching in Australian secondary schools. (Policy Insights ; n.6). Melbourne : Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

where a single teacher is expected to teach across the whole curriculum when they may not be strong in one or more of the syllabus areas.

- Significant resistance to change within the profession. Historically there is a large amount of inertia within the profession that will need to be overcome to achieve this level of change. As it will fundamentally require teachers to upskill as well as change the way that they teach this change will take up to a decade to phase in.
- Limited ability of teachers to differentiate to more than three or four levels. In our experience the profession will talk to differentiation but anecdotally there is no evidence to support the levels of differentiation occurring or whether it is occurring in some classrooms at all. Again, it comes down to the quality and competency of the teacher in their ability to understand the needs and progress of their students and having the motivation and the time to do something about it.
- Teacher judgement requires a suitably qualified and experienced practitioner to exercise such judgement. There need to be checks and balances to counter for poor judgement.

This approach could be realised provided the current model of single teacher per class is replaced by a more flexible multi-teacher approach especially in primary school. This may also go some way towards minimising the differences between primary and secondary. The use of specialist teachers eg maths, science and English would significantly aid in students getting the knowledge they need in the early years of schooling and being able to differentiate more effectively.

Reform Direction 6

Restructuring the Curriculum

We see the concept of “Achievement Syllabuses”, as opposed to the established year/stage-based approach, as having significant merit. A syllabus that clearly articulates the knowledge, understanding, skills and outcomes of a particular achievement level will be easier for teachers, students and parents to comprehend and provide a method of feedback indicated by the achievement levels themselves. Disconnecting it from time (in due consideration of a minimum trajectory) will allow students to push to the limits of their ability. We see this as reasonably feasible to implement although it will require significant effort on the part of NESA in rejigging current syllabuses to align with achievement levels. Considering the work already undertaken on learning progressions there should be the possibility to align achievement levels to the progressions and then change the syllabuses accordingly. There would also be significant professional development required for teachers taking possibly up to a decade or so to fully implement. Most of this training would need to be around effective differentiation, team or parallel teaching and the assessment of students in relative to the attainment levels.

Reform Direction 7

establish a standard that every student should meet by the completion of their schooling

If improvement is to occur across the education system, then we cannot allow student trajectories to drift into a minimum energy state. There is a significant danger in creating a system where students can follow their own learning path, that some may see this as an opportunity to learn as little as possible, deliberately dragging their feet until they can leave school. This does nothing for the student

or for society at large, and wastes time and resources. It is therefore important to introduce minimum standards of performance in each subject domain to push students towards a set but achievable level.

There needs to be careful delineation between the term “high expectations” and what is being essentially proposed as a “minimum standard”. While some may see the bar as too high others will see it as far too low, so how we go about setting this bar and what level it is set at will be controversial but critical.

In setting the bar consideration needs to be given to the core knowledge, skills and understanding identified as part of earlier directions. Agreement on this will be difficult given the special interest groups at play in the education space. There will also need to be careful consideration given to all students’ needs.

Reform Direction 8

Monitoring whether learning is on track

The concept of “on track” only means something if there is some sort of trajectory or an end point with which to compare it against. As this report suggests the ability for students to move through attainment levels at their own pace, the suggestion of measuring whether a child is on track would entirely depend on what is being tracked.

A base level of tracking

At a fundamental level, a reasonable measure would be to indicate how a student is tracking in relation to Reform Direction 7 in terms of any minimum standard for a particular subject area. This would allow teachers to monitor whether or not a student requires additional support in order to meet these standards.

Critical to this is the early identification of students that are lower than the minimum trajectory. We see this as a major area of necessary reform. Early and targeted intervention is essential to this process. As not all teachers are skilled at this type of intervention, it would require the provision of specialist teachers either based in a single school or a small group of schools and used as a shared resource as needed. Over time professional development would need to be undertaken in how to support students falling behind in specific core areas.

We cannot stress enough the importance and impact of raising the level of children that fall below the minimum threshold.

Beyond the minimum

It would be useful to students, parents and teachers to know a student’s average trajectory which would provide a generalised idea of where a child was heading and whether or not additional support was required to help meet the trajectory they want to achieve. To create such a trajectory would require sufficient data over time to and therefore would only become truly meaningful in later years. In the simplest case the trajectory would be calculated using the time it takes between each attainment level. As it is more than likely that the majority of students will have non-linear progress

the average trajectory could potentially have a significant error associated with it but it would be a sufficient indication that would provide some value.

As students start to diversify their study into areas of interest it would be harder to provide more precise on-track information.

Reform Direction 9

Ensuring Continuity of Learning

Our current system is a series of steps that don't often align well. The change from primary to secondary is substantial, not just in the way courses are taught but in the expectations of teachers in relation to what students have learned. It is not uncommon for secondary teachers to assume that Year 7 students know little and therefore start essentially from scratch. Students go from a standard model of single teacher straight to multi-teacher environment. By creating this artificial difference, we have allowed a major separation in learning to occur.

P&C Federation sees the introduction of specialist teachers, specifically in numeracy, literacy and science as a possible way to prevent the gap between primary and secondary. In addition, the introduction of specialist classes in primary would help to bridge the gap between the two. In other words, remove the single teacher per class model.

This would require a significant investment in training specialist teachers and allowing schools to employ additional specialist staff beyond the limiting staffing methodologies currently employed in schools especially the government school sector.

Reform Direct 10

Assessing and communicating learning

The majority of people in school communities, especially parents but also teachers, don't understand the complexities of curriculum, the dot points and outcomes of syllabus and the teaching that goes around it. In a time-poor world, parents are seeking more information about their child's progress and how that fits in terms of tracking for a specific end goal and they don't want to have to understand the curriculum to do it. At present reporting consists of two reports per year which contain very little information that parents can easily align to a simple understanding of how their child has progressed or needs to progress. With such infrequent reporting parents often only find out about issues after a considerable period of time, while the child still remains in a situation that requires intervention.

We believe parents would not only want more frequent reporting, but that reporting should convey information about how their child is tracking. We see the attainment levels as a possible mechanism to provide an absolute scale against where students currently are and need to be to meet their goals.

Reform Direction 11:

Creating a more integrated curriculum

We do not oppose the creation of more integrated approaches, if that means less siloing and duplication across the Curriculum and less polarisation of students into academic or non-academic pathways.

There has been a tendency over the last two decades to break up substantive subjects into smaller more specialised ones, resulting in an explosion of subjects often impacting on the ability of schools to even offer them. Reducing the splintering of subjects and consolidating into more substantive courses would reduce the pressure on having teachers learn a multitude of subjects and would provide a more general background for students before undertaking tertiary studies.

There is a perception that the secondary sector feels compelled to offer more and more specialised pseudo-tertiary courses in an attempt to raise the profile of some courses. The tertiary sector benefits from this in receiving students with more specialised knowledge of which they need to teach less.

There has been an ever-increasing push, not necessarily intentional, to move students towards university entry despite a minority of students doing so. This pressure is driven to some extent by the need for universities to maximise their intakes. While this increase in places could be seen as a great thing for students, it must be weighed against the possible dilution in value of some degrees.

Students who wish to seek vocational options or have a desire to go straight into the workforce are largely ignored and their pathways seen as second rate. Our curriculum has become unintentionally elitist. The Record of School Achievement (RoSA) is largely considered pointless and it provides little to students in terms of a credential.

P&C Federation would like to see equity in terms of academic versus vocational pathways. We would like to see the reestablishment of the TAFE system, as the market driven commercial provider model is failing students and creating a shortage of qualified graduates in key trades. The introduction of achievement levels would form a perfect framework with which to provide meaningful information to colleges and employers alike.

However, there are at least two factors that must be addressed in implementing this reform direction:

1. Will there be sufficient qualified teachers able to carry out this reform?
2. How will an *“increased focus on developing students’ deep understandings of disciplinary concepts and principles”* be reconciled with Reform Direction 1?

Reform Direction 12:

Recognising progress and attainment

A major issue with the current system of schooling is that it largely ignores all the years of schooling prior to year 12. Although there is accumulated knowledge throughout the years, it is based on the

assessment and exam marks obtained as part of the HSC. It does not cover the electives studied in Years 9 and 10 nor does it provide any information on a student's history in Maths, English, Science, HSIE, PDHPE etc. Students may have done incredibly well up until the end of Year 10 in specific subjects only to drop them in favour of other subjects that may be seen to offer a scaling advantage for the calculation of the ATAR. Any knowledge or skills obtained as the result of earlier study is lost.

The introduction of attainment levels is a way of addressing this issue to some extent. We see a direct benefit in extending the attainment levels through all senior courses. There is also the possibility that the highest attainment level reached at the end of Year 12 would become the students' final result in that subject. While this could still have an external examination component, there would always be the possibility of having the test online but administered through the school, removing the need for final examinations and possibly lowering the stress on a large part of the cohort.

Reform Direction 13:

Introduce a single major project that every student is to undertake in the senior years of school, usually as part of a project team and in a learning area of their choosing.

It is unclear from the brief outline in the Interim Report how this final project would be structured. The report's wording implies that it is envisaged to be a separate subject in its own right, as opposed to being under the auspices of another subject. It is also not clear how the assessment of this task would be carried out.

Although P&C Federation sees some merit in introducing a major project there are a number of concerns arise with it:

- Students choosing creative and performing arts subjects already have major projects or performances as part of their course. Adding a mandatory project could cause additional stress.
- Students would essentially be unfettered in their ability to carry out any sort of project. Without constraints this could be anything from writing a book in a language other than English to building a robot or writing a university style thesis on particle physics or quantum mechanics. There is already a major shortage of specialist teachers, so we see major problems in being able to find suitable supervisors to support and mark the more demanding projects. The likelihood of finding a suitable supervisor within a student's own school is very small.
- Rural and remote students have even more limited resources further narrowing the choices available to them.
- The assessment of higher-level projects would be beyond the capacity of most teachers. This would require the sourcing of relevant expertise most likely from the tertiary sector.
- Moderating such a diverse range of possible project topics would be quite a challenge and it is unclear to us if it could be done equitably.
- Although there are methods for allowing assessment of projects where there has been collaboration, this could overly complicate the assessment process and possibly be biased depending on group dynamics.
- Some students may have access to significant resources which would allow them to gain advantage over others. This may well be a parent, relative or friend that works in a specific

field that mentors, coaches or even contributes to the students work. It might be access to facilities or financial backing that allows them to carry out more advanced project work. Minimising this advantage and ensuring that the work is that of the student would be a challenge

P&C Federation would support the introduction either of:

- Major projects as part of a specific subject but only where such a project was relevant and supported the assessment of the application of skills, or;
- The introduction of a separate major project subject but only as an option and only if there are constraints that address some of the issues listed above.

Reform Direction 14:

Introduce a new set of learning areas to reflect a more integrated approach to the curriculum in the senior years. Learning areas should be defined to incorporate all existing academic and vocational subjects

Redefining the KLAs needs to be more than just an exercise in redistributing subject areas. The potential gain from the reorganisation of certain KLAs such as human society and its environment (HSIE) and technological and applied studies (TAS) into more meaningful and better aligned areas could be great, but must be weighed against the possibility that we end up with more KLAs and therefore create more siloing of subjects and more artificial restrictions on student choice of subjects.

There are two main issues with the organisation of Key Learning Areas at present.

Certain KLAs are a lumping together of a diverse range of subjects mainly to satisfy school operation not the teaching of the subject. As a result, teachers from different disciplines are lumped together where in fact they may be more effective when collaborating within a KLA with subjects that are aligned.

KLAs impact on timetabling and therefore student choice. Apart from the inability of schools to offer specific subjects within a KLA, the structuring of timetabling often causes clashes for students that prevents them from choosing subjects they are interested in. Compounding this is an emphasis placed on the more academic subjects over those leading to vocational pathways.

The restructuring of the existing KLAs, specifically HSIE and TAS, may well result in a liberation of staff and a more effective delivery, provided that subject siloing did not become more prevalent. P&C Federation supports the concept of mixing both applied and theory-based subjects but would argue that overall, the syllabus for heavily theoretical subjects should have a greater degree of application within them and vice versa for applied subjects.

There must not be any implication in the curriculum that VET pathways are in any way inferior to academic pathways. This will require a major cultural change not just at the school level but within the systems that support them and ultimately within the communities that they service.

We believe there needs to be a reshaping of career advice within secondary schools. Career advisors need to be specialists with solid understandings of the pathways available to students including vocational pathways. This advice needs to be consistent across the state.

Reform Direction 15:

The school sector should work with the university sector and UAC to explore the possibility of not calculating and reporting ATAR, replacing it instead with transparent information about the basis for constructing course-by-course Selection Ranks, which should show an applicant's rank in relation to the number of places available in each of their preferred courses.

The ATAR is the single biggest driving factor for secondary students, parents, teachers and their school. The ATAR has managed to gain such high status because it is a simple single figure that students and parents can understand and work towards. Universities feed the hype as it suits their need to control course numbers.

The revelation that the ATAR is an intermediate number explains why some students who make the ATAR required still fail to gain placement. We find this misleading and to some extent dishonest.

Whilst it would be advantageous to try to remove the ATAR as a stress point for students, our concern would be that whatever replaced it would need to be thought out carefully to avoid creating a direct replacement.

One obvious and logical solution in the context of attainment levels would be to create an HSC that was simply based on the attainment levels reached at the end of Year 12. Under this model, there would be no final set of exams as such. From there, universities could choose students based on their attainment levels against pre-set course prerequisites. While this would take some careful calculation there is nothing to stop a university stating, for instance, that students wishing to study engineering must meet X level in Mathematics, Y in Physics or Chemistry as prerequisites, and then use the scores from exams or assessments in all subjects to calculate a ranking for entry.

There is plenty of scope here to work with the university sector on a new methodology. We believe that whatever form this takes there should be a consideration of a student's whole journey and that whatever can be done to reduce the stress associated with sitting the HSC should be done.