



New South Wales Teachers Federation
a branch of the Australian Education Union

AEU NSW Teachers Federation Branch ABN 86 600 150 697



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NSW PRESIDENT: Maurie Mulheron • NSW GENERAL SECRETARY: John Dixon

15 April 2016

In reply please quote: 334/2016/DF:jep

Professor Bill Loudon
Chair - BOSTES Review
Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational
Standards NSW (BOSTES)
PO Box 5300
SYDNEY NSW 2001

By email: bostes.review@det.nsw.edu.au

Dear Professor Loudon

Re: Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES) Review

The NSW Teachers Federation is pleased to provide you with our submission, as attached, to your Review of BOSTES.

Please contact the office of Maurie Mulheron, President of the NSW Teachers Federation, in relation to any of the matters herein.

Yours sincerely

John Dixon
General Secretary

Encs.



NEW SOUTH WALES TEACHERS FEDERATION

SUBMISSION TO

**The Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational
Standards NSW (BOSTES)**

ON

THE REVIEW OF BOSTES

Authorised by

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'JD', is written over a horizontal line.

**John Dixon
General Secretary
NSW Teachers Federation**

15 April 2016

TEACHERS FEDERATION SUBMISSION TO REVIEW OF BOSTES

CONTEXT

It is appropriate at the outset to reflect upon the context in which this Review is being conducted in order to comprehend the nature and focus of our response to the process.

1. THE BEREJKLIAN DOCTRINE

The NSW Treasurer has very recently made the government's position quite plain in relation to its management theory and the quest for the further reduction in government bodies and functions.

In a front page article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 29, 2016, headed, "*Treasurer Gladys Berejiklian flags significant cuts to NSW government agencies*" the report revealed,

"NSW Treasurer Gladys Berejiklian has foreshadowed a dramatic reduction in the number of government departments, agencies, state owned corporations, boards, committees and trusts in a new efficiency drive that could include public service job cuts.

In a speech to be delivered on Monday night, Ms Berejiklian will reveal details of an expert panel she has commissioned to audit government structures and 'present recommendations on how to make our processes leaner and more efficient'.

Ms Berejiklian will say the audit has identified 870 government entities.

'Many of these identified bodies overlap in terms of the functions they perform,' Ms Berejiklian will say ...

In the speech Ms Berejiklian says the process 'could deliver significant cost savings which could be poured back into essential services'."

It is not difficult to understand why there is a significant degree of discomfort and wariness in the education community around the surprising and unheralded announcement of a review into BOSTES so soon after the pronouncement of the State Treasurer's intentions in relation to government agencies.

This is compounded by the continuing reality of annual "efficiency dividends" forced annually on government departments and agencies in NSW. Such a process has already led to the dismemberment of the NSW Department of Education, radical cuts to its consultancy and teaching support services, its sell-off of the Head Office of the Department and job losses across the system.

This review is being conducted within the context of these ideological realities and managerial experiments.

2. CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND INTENTIONS

Whilst there is a discernible shift in emphases between the initial Terms of Reference Paper and the current Issues Paper it is timely to note the stated intentions of Federal government leaders and their commitment to responsibility for education and in particular, public education.

The Terms of Reference speak fondly of the "national architecture" for education and specify federal government agencies that are said to occupy similar domains to the BOSTES and its

operations. These federal agencies are implicitly posited as potential entities that might take over some of the functions of the BOSTES under the rubric of “duplication”.

There has perhaps never been a more perilous time in Australia’s constitutional history for educators in NSW to lean on national architecture.

In March, the Federal Education Minister, Simon Birmingham restated the Commonwealth’s rejection of playing an operational role in state-based education.

Minister Birmingham made it clear:

“The Commonwealth runs no schools and employs no teachers ... it is the states and territories that are responsible for the quality of our education system since they all administer education acts, register and regulate all schools, regulate all teachers, accredit all teacher courses, and determine the implementation sequence and timing of the national curriculum [Sydney Morning Herald, March 15, 2016]”.

In this context it is hard to imagine how these educational leaders would welcome, or indeed abide, the prospect of federal government education agencies and instrumentalities taking over further education responsibilities from the states or indeed, one single state.

This simple fact has been made ever more plain by the proclaimed desire of the federal government to abandon any responsibility for state-based education, especially in the public school sector.

During the discussions and negotiations in the period leading up to the April 1 meeting of COAG, according to a vast range of reports, the Prime Minister is recorded as saying that it was his belief and desire to end the federal government’s involvement in public schools and to change revenue arrangements so that the Commonwealth would not remit funds to any state to fund or support public education. This is an extension of the position outlined in a Federation Green Paper during the Prime Ministership of Mr Abbott which also revealed a desire to jettison responsibilities for supporting education.

The COAG cycle of events established that under the current dispensation there is an active desire of the Federal Government to vacate itself from responsibility for education.

It would be reckless to choose this moment in history to seek succour and support for NSW education in any federal jurisdiction, authority or domain.

That national architecture is rapidly crumbling. And it being pushed over by leaders at the national level.

3. THE PROVENANCE OF THIS REVIEW

When reviews into vital areas of public policy heave into view it almost always has followed a period of public consternation, controversy, conflict or concern.

This Review does not fit this historical pattern. It came suddenly and without public clamour. It stunned so many stakeholders. The demand for the review is uncertain. The intellectual source is not revealed. The terms of reference do not openly identify the manifest problems that it is seeking to remedy. Much is implied. Little is stated.

It is difficult to locate a literature, store of research or evidence base that identifies a case for changing the fundamental settings for curriculum development, assessment policy or teacher accreditation in NSW.

No alternative or superior models are posited or suggested.

No mention is made as to what possible benefits might accrue to students or parents, the essential users of education services.

Reference is made in the Rationale to, “contemporary governance principles and standards” but apart from echoing the dictums within the State Treasurer’s manifesto there is no elaboration of this managerialist concept or what it might mean to the children in NSW schools. There is no evidence base proffered to chronicle a lack of expertise within the existing inclusive models of policy development.

UNDERSTANDING THE PRESENT

It is timely to reflect upon the heritage of education policy development in NSW to appreciate why the structures have such resilience and broad support in the education community of the state.

The current Board composition was developed by the government and parliament in 1990 after a period of turmoil in NSW education politics. Amidst the period of upheaval previous representative boards were to be swept away and replaced by nominated “experts” appointed by the Minister of the day. Policy was to be developed by ministerial diktat.

The Board composition that was finally legislated allowed for ministerial nominees to be appointed to provide sufficient “expertise” whilst nominating bodies were required to outline the experience and aptitudes of the people they were putting forward. A wide cross section of the education community was included on the Board blending both a representative and specialist nature to its overall composition. Pluralism was central to its composition and orientation.

This in part explains how policy in NSW education is broadly “owned” by the education community itself and why the Board and its policies and processes have deep support. Once curriculum and assessment policies have been arrived at there is a substantial level of parental understanding and support along with commitment from the teaching profession across all sectors that delivers them in schools.

This is mirrored in the syllabus development process which is both expert and inclusive. Syllabuses are developed through appropriately thorough consultation and discussion. They are not imposed documents. They have historically been able to avoid perceptions of being tendentious which has been the case in syllabus development in those jurisdictions which emphasise speed, narrow “expertise” and closed processes.

If one dwells on some recent examples of “expert” committees reviewing policy in education some instructive pitfalls can be identified.

The federal review of the Australian Curriculum conducted by two handpicked, politically acceptable, idiosyncratic reviewers has become a laughing stock. It is closely associated with a narrow, highly subjective and ideological set of curmudgeonly enthusiasms. It has had no impact on improving the delivery or content of the Australian Curriculum.

The federal Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group [TEMAG] also suffered from similar perceptions. Again, the process was headed by a figure close to the prevailing political regime and formed recommendations known to be of comfort to government. The fact that the head of this review was also a known player in the controversy and politics of the issues and had published widely his own controversial positions prior to the review did not assist in building reputation or effectiveness of the review’s unsurprising “findings”.

Similarly, the recent exemplars of expert policy development emanating from this same federal domain have been problematic.

The drafts of the Australian Curriculum that made their way to NSW did not greatly inspire or persuade local parent, teacher or academic representatives of their quality or utility. There were many iterations between Canberra and Sydney before the Australian Curriculum became acceptable for NSW schools and to inform NSW syllabus development. The Australian Curriculum had to be substantially revised, repaired and strengthened before it could form a part of the underlying framework for syllabuses and teacher practice in this state. ACARA does not figure substantially in the thinking or daily teaching lives of the great majority of teachers in NSW.

However, AITSL has an even worse reputation. AITSL stands as an affront to the teaching profession in NSW and across Australia. It is unique in the realms of professional bodies as being an entity that refuses to have representatives of that profession in its composition. The latter-day purging of the membership of the board of AITSL caused the teaching profession in Australia to view it with disdain.

The reality is that teachers and parents in NSW look to their state-wide curriculum and assessment authority. They have commitment to its outcomes and opportunity for participation in its policy development at all stages. There is deep heritage and trust in the relationship between teachers and parents and their local education statutory authority.

This stems in large measure from the pluralist model of syllabus and curriculum development.

The Board itself also represents a streamlined model of decision-making given the scope of its responsibilities. On the one entity, the Board has responsibility for curriculum, assessment and teaching standards from Early Childhood education to Year 12 and now has the linked responsibility for standards in Initial Teacher Education.

Such continuity has long been seen as an ideal articulated learning continuum for students and the integration of policy responsibility now allows for the alignment of curriculum and assessment throughout all of these years and the inculcation of appropriate high standards for teaching practice from Early Childhood to university.

SOME PRINCIPLES FOR THE FUTURE

1. NSW has a settled and consensual education community which gathers around the BOSTES and which has high, agreed standards across its sectors. The case to overturn this settlement has not been made in any of the discussion emanating from the Review process;
2. NSW has achieved a learning and standards continuum which is the result of partnerships between employers, teacher unions and the BOSTES within the state. These include formal agreements, at times embodied in Awards, that commit to the lifting of professional standards by all teachers. There is a partnership based around the NSW policy of *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* that is embedded across the profession;
3. For reasons of history and heritage NSW has a longstanding commitment in its education community that relies upon its local institutions, often embodied in law, and is perceived by stakeholders as being highly successful and effective. It is demonstrably recognised as “fit for purpose”;
4. National entities in education do not figure significantly in the thinking or orientation of the great majority of parents, teachers and principals in NSW. AITSL in particular has made itself an irrelevance;

5. The recent history of Commonwealth “expert” bodies formulating education recommendations and policies have been widely discredited and disregarded in NSW;
6. The teaching profession in NSW has had a diminution in support in the areas of curriculum change and systemic professional learning. There is a great need for expanded resourcing of the BOSTES to allow it to more effectively discharge its responsibilities at a time of substantial curriculum change, whole-of-profession accreditation, the application of standards from Early Childhood to Year 12 and to ensure high quality programs of teacher education in universities;
7. Syllabus development in NSW has a heritage of being based on a blend of pluralism coupled with embedded expertise. All key stakeholders have an involvement through engagement and consultation and participation in syllabus committees. NSW has been almost entirely free of controversy about provider capture or ideological tendentiousness in its syllabuses. This is a direct consequence of the process and composition that allows for deep deliberation and review at all stages within the pluralist model that exists in the state;
8. Arising from this mode of syllabus and curriculum development is the strength of the credentials that emanate from the examination of this curriculum and in particular, the HSC. This credential enjoys deep and longstanding community support. Its reputation is shared across the education sector, in NSW, nationally and beyond. This esteem is a direct consequence of the deep intellectual power of the syllabuses from which the HSC is derived and is linked directly to the embedded outcomes in the various syllabus areas. It is an exemplary case of how the pluralist-expert model that currently exists in NSW curriculum development provides for high standards in examination, true alignment between what is taught and what is tested and community “ownership” of these fundamental processes that blend excellence and equity. The underpinnings of such a sound educational reality are tinkered with at our peril;
9. For NSW, the eventual achievement of a single Board that now links curriculum, assessment and accreditation is one that best corresponds to the interests of students and the building of a coherent learning continuum across their years of schooling;
10. At times, perhaps in domains to do with rapid curriculum change there is a case for more rapid curriculum and syllabus adaptation but as a general principle curriculum change should reflect advances in the best intellectual understandings, the rate of parental understanding and acceptance, the resource capacity of school systems to deliver adapted syllabuses and the rate at which the profession can be trained and re-trained to appreciate and teach to the new syllabus approaches. Haste can be the adversary of this provision of high quality curriculum change;
11. The inexorable cutbacks that beset education departments and statutory bodies renders endemic the difficulties of inculcating higher levels of teaching performance and curriculum delivery across schools and systems;
12. The policy of devolving to schools the wholesale responsibilities for professional learning and across-system change is the least appropriate model of affecting substantial change and improved teaching practice in the interests of all children especially those in greatest educational need;
13. The great and urgent needs of children in NSW schools are not addressed by experiments in governance, ideological constructs or management-speak. Such irrelevancies have lingered in this state for over a generation and have obscured the greater need for using the best of educational research, practice and exchange to further enhance teaching and learning across the state;

14. There is perhaps a unique quality in the relationship between education and public policy formulation. While some domains that do not have a deep, direct and very human connection to the lives and futures of children may have policy developed by experts on a fast-track model, education is different. Education policy at its best is generally characterised by a thoughtful and consensual and pluralist model of intellectual and ethical development. Therefore models of thinking that might exist comfortably in the corporate world do not translocate appropriately to the world of education and children.