



NSW Productivity

Commission Discussion Paper:

Kickstarting the productivity conversation

NSW Department of Education Submission

December 2019

Introduction

The NSW Department of Education welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the NSW Productivity Commission's discussion paper: *Kickstarting the Productivity Conversation*.

There is much work underway across NSW Government to give effect to the Premier's Priorities and other NSW Government objectives. This submission provides some additional context and commentary in response to the issues and challenges relating to the education portfolio raised in the Commission's discussion paper.

The NSW Department of Education looks forward to receiving the Productivity Green paper and considering the issues and any recommendations made by the NSW Productivity Commission.

Background

The NSW Department of Education is the largest provider of education in Australia, with responsibility for delivering high-quality public education to two-thirds of the NSW student population, or about 810,000 students. Our 2,206 public schools service the diverse range of communities across the state and enable all children and young people to have access to quality education. We ensure young children get the best start in life by supporting and regulating the early childhood education sector. We also work closely with the non-government school and higher education sectors. We have a responsibility to ensure that NSW public school infrastructure meets the needs of NSW's growing population and enables future-focused learning and teaching. School Infrastructure NSW (SINSW) is the centre for excellence for this work. SINSW drives the planning, procurement, construction and maintenance of school facilities to meet changes in population growth, accommodate new ways of teaching and learning, and help foster better educational outcomes for students.

Discussion paper topic: Building human capital for a modern and evolving economy

The Department is implementing evidence-based approaches to improve student outcomes and performance in NSW schools.

In 2018, the NSW Department of Education Strategic Plan set the aspiration of preparing children and young people for rewarding lives as engaged citizens in a complex and dynamic society, and to be one of the best education systems in Australia and the world.

The NSW Premier's Priorities for education are, by 2023, to increase the proportion of public school students in the top two NAPLAN bands (or equivalent) for literacy and numeracy by 15%, which includes a state-wide rollout of the Bump It Up program, and to increase the proportion of Aboriginal students attaining the HSC by 50% while maintaining their cultural identity.

In addition, the department will target improvement in:

- students reporting a sense of belonging, expectations for success and advocacy at school
- students attending school at least 90% of the time
- students at or above the proficient standards in international assessments
- students continuing to Year 12 and with HSC results in the top two achievement bands
- school leavers participating in higher education, training or work.

To ensure our system helps support equity of opportunity and outcomes, we will monitor the performance of specific groups of vulnerable students against these goals, including Aboriginal students, students living in rural and remote areas, students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students with a disability.

We seek improvement in our system on every dimension for students in NSW. Achieving our ambitious targets would likely result in NSW public schools exceeding the academic outcomes of the highest performing state system in Australia, including non-government schools, across a range of comparable targets by 2022. It would also be likely to reverse the decline of NSW public schools in relative and absolute performance on international tests.

Informed by evidence for what we need to do to improve student outcomes and where we have room to grow, from 2019 we are focusing on five Executive Priorities:

1) **Improving school performance and student outcomes**

We are working with schools to set school-level student outcome targets. We are tailoring school support to better meet the specific needs of schools and their students, moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach. We are focusing on supporting vulnerable students and their families. This support includes dedicated, flexible funding for wellbeing services to schools with high rates of disadvantage and specialist staff to help schools manage complex needs. We are also building our capacity to identify excellent practices that schools have developed themselves, so that we can share and scale these practices across the NSW public school system.

We are increasing line-of-sight to student outcomes – Significant investment in Directors, Educational Leadership in 2017 reduced line management and support from an average of 34 schools to 20 schools, creating clearer oversight to student outcomes and greater capacity to support improvement. Directors, Educational Leadership will work with all NSW school principals in 2020 to support every school in NSW adopting targets for students achieving NAPLAN top two bands in reading, students achieving top two bands in numeracy, and Aboriginal students attaining the HSC. These focused conversations at a school level will be supported by a strengthened school planning process; drawing a clearer link from aspiration to the shifts in practice required to improve student outcomes. Schools are articulating explicit student performance targets across each of the two Premier's priority domains, informed by rich data sets about what has been achieved by high performing schools with similar student demographic characteristics.

Tailored support to schools – the department is committed to providing support to schools tailored to their needs and context, based on evidence of what will lift performance. Around 500 schools have benefitted from tailored support in 2019; including support from 50 FTE Literacy and Numeracy Advisors in schools, with strong case studies emerging of improved student outcomes for those supported. In 2020, this tailored support will be tightly matched with the schools who most need to demonstrate improvement for students.

2) **Strengthening the quality of our teaching workforce**

Teaching is one of the most important and challenging of all professions. We are changing the way we recruit teachers to ensure that we attract and retain the best and brightest teachers — those who know their subject material inside and out, are passionate about their subject, and have the skills to pass this passion on to all their students. We are changing our on-the-job training to ensure teachers benefit from coherent, effective

professional development, including regular coaching and feedback from experts. We are identifying and recognising our very best teachers with a special accreditation, and supporting them to share their expertise.

Delivering targeted strategies – the department’s Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017–2020 promotes evidence-based tools and practices for literacy and numeracy across all NSW schools. The strategy focuses on:

- continued focus on intervention in the early years of schooling;
- clear guidance on explicit teaching and better diagnostic assessments;
- more support for literacy and numeracy in secondary schools;
- quality training for teacher education students in literacy and numeracy; and
- rigorous evaluation so that the focus for government and school investment is on what works.

\$340 million has been invested over four years to 2020 provide instructional leaders to develop the literacy and numeracy skills of at-risk Kindergarten to year 2 students across 665 schools including 528 government, 99 Catholic and 38 independent schools. Schools are increasingly taking up diagnostic assessments linked to the learning progressions. Six million observations have been recorded in the PLAN2 online system, which is used to track and monitor learning progressions since 2018. Best Start (individual assessment of students prior to enrolment) is now available across NSW public primary schools, enabling more differentiated teaching and personalised support. The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy will be refined and refreshed in 2020, building on the work done to date to provide high quality, focused support from the department to direct teachers and schools to use practices with the strongest evidence for lifting student learning.

3) Strengthening the **quality of our school leaders**

We know that a good principal can make a great difference to students. We want strong leaders in all our schools. This priority builds on the work started in 2016 with the School Leadership Strategy. We are improving how we develop, support and equip principals to ensure that every leader, every school, every teacher and every student improves every year. In addition to the investment in the Directors, Educational Leadership, references above, we are expanding the recently established School Leadership Institute to provide aspiring, new and experienced school leaders with evidence-based professional learning, building instructional capacity across the system. The department has also improved the clarity of the role of the principal in leading teaching and learning through the principal role description (launched in 2018), and is strengthening supporting materials and processes to ensure consistent effective performance discussions.

4) Improving **support for schools**

We are freeing up time to focus on students by reducing the administrative burden on schools. We are improving how we deliver change across our school network – increasing coordination, transparency, training and designing initiatives with schools to ensure they are well received. We are putting in place efficient and effective processes and systems to modernise our planning, human resources management, finance and budgeting, as well as our performance tracking and improvement.

5) Making the department a **great place to work**

Through a values-based approach the department is building positive and productive environments to increase employee engagement and to deliver improved outcomes for students and their communities throughout NSW.

The department is also keen to understand and improve **pathways** – how individual students navigate through the stages of education, and the role of parents and carers. This work will build on the pioneering Educational Pathways project. Insights will help us to better support young people to find meaningful work and engage in lifelong education. This need for better support is especially acute for the significant numbers of students who presently choose not to undertake a Higher School Certificate (HSC) qualification.

While this plan emphasises the work we need to do to improve outcomes, especially for students in NSW public schools, it also provides an indication of the reforms planned to support greater accountability for **non-government schools** and the state public funding that is provided to them through the department.

This plan is a living document, with work happening every day to build and strengthen our approach. We expect to refine priorities and initiatives over time, informed by evidence of what is working best to drive improved student outcomes. We are investigating additional performance targets for student independence and for parent and carer satisfaction. We want to engage parents and carers, so that they can take a more active role in their child's school.

There has been strong consultation and support for the development of this plan from NSW Treasury and the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Their help and counsel is greatly appreciated and the department looks forward to continuing to work closely with them.

For further information regarding the question of evidence-based practice to improve student outcomes please see the NSW Government's submission to the Legislative Council's Inquiry into measurement and outcome-based funding in New South Wales schools:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/65094/0018%20NSW%20Government.pdf>

It should be noted that the discussion paper refers to the most recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results. PISA 2018 data has recently been published, and may be referred to, if required, for further Green Paper discussion. It may be useful to also clarify, where appropriate, that the NAPLAN results referred to in the discussion paper are preliminary. The final results will be published in the NAPLAN National Report.

To achieve this priority the department will strengthen existing mechanisms to ensure all schools improve by increasing line-of sight to student outcomes; tailoring support to schools and delivering targeted strategies to support improvement in literacy and numeracy.

The Department prioritises outcomes for students with disability:

The department welcomes the paper's recognition that enabling everyone to participate to their full potential leads to a more productive economy.

Being able to make a contribution to society and feeling that one's contributions are valued can reap rewards both for the economy and for the individual and community. Ensuring that all members of the community can contribute to and benefit from the results of a strong human capital base is important.

Consistent with this approach, the Department of Education considers that the quality, access and equity of education for students with a disability is paramount.

It is therefore important to ensure that there are policy options that lead to improved outcomes for students with a disability. These options should aim for a model based on inclusive education, and focus on outcomes that see students with disability thrive academically, develop good physical, mental and emotional health, and gain the skills and support to live a fulfilling, independent life post-school.

In undertaking its work, the Commission should also ensure that efforts are made to include the voice of, and adequate input from people (including students) with disability, and their families. Further, it is essential that every effort is made to use current and appropriate 'person-first' language when referring to people with disability in this work, such as 'people with disability' or 'students with disability'.

In terms of improving outcomes for students with disability, it is also important to recognise the current limitations of standardised testing methods such as NAPLAN in capturing the strengths and abilities of students with disability, and those with complex needs.

In terms of current work on building human capital of people with disability, the Department of Education has a number of initiatives focused on improving the outcomes for, and school experience of, students with disability. Most recently, this includes the Department's Disability Strategy. The Disability Strategy was developed in year-long consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including people with lived experience of disability, students and families, leaders and school teachers, advocacy groups and experts and released in February 201. It sets a vision for an inclusive education system, including an ambitious agenda for achieving strong educational and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability in NSW Government schools. The full strategy is available here:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/disability-learning-and-support/our-disability-strategy>

The Progress Report: *Improving outcomes for students with disability 2019* is available here: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/disability-learning-and-support/our-disability-strategy/disability-progress-report/Progress-Report-Improving-outcomes-for-students-with-disability-2019.pdf>

As part of this, the NSW Department of Education is aiming to ensure children and young people with a disability are:

- welcomed and included in their local school community and enjoy a wide range of experiences
- learn to their fullest capability, achieving demonstrable learning, wellbeing and independence outcomes, in a safe, supportive and healthy environment
- receive an excellent education, with expertise available to support access to the full curriculum in a way that is relevant to them
- build friendships, interact with other students, and feel a sense of belonging.

The department is doing this by:

- investing in teachers and other support staff, through professional development opportunities to build their capacity to better support students with a disability,

- increasing resourcing and flexibility of resourcing in schools, to enable schools to be more responsive to the needs of their specific student cohort,
- streamlining processes by which families and young people access supports to improve the family and student experience of school, and;
- improving the way the Department uses data, to monitor and therefore improve outcomes for students with a disability.

The Disability Strategy is just one example of how the Government can work towards building human capital in NSW, particularly for people with a disability. The NSW Department of Education would welcome the opportunity to build on this work, and collaborate on any future work in this area.

For more information on how the Department supports students with a disability day-to-day, please go to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/disability-learning-and-support>

The Department has a plan to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students:

A focus on policy options that lead to improved outcomes for Aboriginal students is also important, to enable them to develop skills and contribute throughout their lives, but not from a deficit-based position.

The Premier's Priority concerning Aboriginal people reaching their learning potential, including increasing the proportion of Aboriginal students attaining Year 12 by 50 per cent by 2023, while maintaining their cultural identity, is relevant to this priority area. The completion of the HSC and creating opportunity to transition to tertiary education are enablers to the building of human capital.

There are other areas of activity that can lead to Aboriginal people being part of, and benefiting from, the development of human capital. These include focussing on policies to:

- Address disadvantage, including provision of adequate services in remote and rural areas.
- Lift Literacy and Numeracy achievement.
- Focus on the development of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in school curriculum.
- Enhance access to higher education through, for example, partnerships with universities and TAFE.
- Build cultural understanding and cultural competence in teacher training and within broader school operations.

The NSW Department of Education has implemented a range of initiatives focused on improving outcomes for Aboriginal students in NSW Public Schools. The department's Connected Communities Strategy is an innovative approach to address the educational and social aspirations of Aboriginal children and all young people in 16 schools in 11 of the most complex and vulnerable communities in NSW.

The Connected Communities Strategy provides an example of an approach toward building human capital. Its deliverables are designed to build the following for Aboriginal students:

- school readiness;
- family and community engagement at school, better attendance rates; improved literacy and numeracy results;
- completion of Year 12 or its equivalent;

- post school transitioning;
- flexible and responsive service delivery at school;
- valuing by the school of Aboriginal culture, goals and aspiration; and culturally responsive teaching practices.

More information on the Connected Communities Strategy is available on the department's web site at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/connected-communities>

Discussion paper topic: What are the core competencies that a modern school system should provide, given the increasing digitalisation of the economy?

We need to provide young people with enduring capabilities and skills to harness the opportunities of technological and global change. This starts with the educational foundation of strong literacy and numeracy, and extends to the development of core thinking skills: critical and creative thinking; computational thinking and ethical reasoning. As well, it is important that these capabilities provide a firm foundation for young people to continue learning across their lifetimes, which they will need to do in order to prosper through the 21st century as technology changes.

As for digitisation specifically, the development of computational thinking capability rests on core knowledge of maths and science and includes understanding algorithmic properties. The Premier has outlined her vision for a NSW curriculum that will enable 'every child in NSW to have the necessary maths skills to succeed in life'.

The NSW school curriculum is currently under review and the NSW Curriculum Review Interim Report has now been released. This is the first comprehensive review of the whole curriculum since 1989, and aims to ensure our education system is preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Independent Review Lead, Professor Geoff Masters, has developed the Interim Report as a basis for further public consultation (public consultation is open until 13 December). Further information regarding the review can be found at: <https://www.nswcurriculumreview.nesa.nsw.edu.au/home/homePageContent/view>

Current NSW Department of Education projects, such as *Education for a Changing World*, also focus on examining the strategic implications that advances in technology will have for education. The project is exploring:

- the challenges and opportunities presented by the vastly different, artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled world that students of today will live and work in
- how education can provide the knowledge, skills and experiences today's students need to thrive in tomorrow's world.

A body of evidence is being built and a series of events have been held to facilitate discussion of the issues. More information can be found at: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/our-priorities/innovate-for-the-future/education-for-a-changing-world-at-a-glance#:~:targetText=Education%20for%20a%20Changing%20World%20examines%20how%20advances%20in%20artificial,related%20technologies%20will%20affect%20education.&targetText=how%20education%20can%20provide%20the,to%20thrive%20in%20tomorrow's%20world.> and <https://education.nsw.gov.au/our-priorities/innovate-for-the-future/education-for-a-changing-world/resource-library/research-report/future-frontiers-analytical-report-preparing-for-the-best-and-worst-of-times>

Discussion paper topic: Do the issues and challenges identified in this section reflect the challenges facing the VET sector in delivering skills for a modern economy? What can be done to address these challenges?

Our people are our greatest resource and increasing education and skill levels is not only good for individuals but also good for employers and the economy and society more broadly.

The description of the key challenges for improving vocational education and training (VET) in the discussion paper (section 4.4) is supported.

For further information, the NSW Government submissions to the Joyce and Australian Quality Framework reviews are available at <https://pmc.gov.au/domestic-policy/vocational-education-and-training-review/vocational-education-and-training-review-submissions/nsw-government-submission> and <https://submissions.education.gov.au/Forms/AQF2019/Documents/006-NSW-Government.pdf>

On the question of what can be done to address the challenges for VET, many of these challenges will need collaborative action by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. The Department is pleased to note that the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) announced on 9 August 2019 that the COAG Skills Council, in consultation with Education Ministers, will advise leaders on future VET reform priorities by the end of 2019 and provide a roadmap to COAG in early 2020.

The COAG Skills Council has agreed to three reform priorities – relevance, quality and accessibility - for the roadmap. The roadmap will outline proposed actions to support the COAG Vision for VET, which will also tackle some of key challenges in the discussion paper.

On the issue of funding for the sector, it is recognised that there needs to be better integration of VET and higher education, including better alignment of student loan arrangements. The recently announced review of the National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development by the Productivity Commission will look at issues of VET funding, including options to promote consistency in funding and loan arrangements between the VET and higher education sectors. The NSW Department of Education will work closely with NSW Treasury and other agencies on a response to the terms of reference.

Other challenges outlined in the discussion paper can be addressed through the NSW VET system. The introduction of 70,000 new fee-free traineeships under Smart and Skilled from 1 January 2020 will help support a pipeline of skilled workers to service industries in NSW, such as aged care, health and childcare where demand for skilled workers is high. The Department has also improved information quality to students by introducing LifeLauncher, a new online tool to help school students make better informed decisions about their future careers.

The Smart and Skilled program provides support to disadvantaged VET students through fee-free foundation skills courses, fee exemptions and loading payments to training providers. The Department has commissioned research to examine new ways of supporting disadvantaged students and is evaluating the effectiveness of the loadings paid to providers.

How could governments raise the profile of VET, and shift cultural attitudes towards the sector?

To raise the profile of VET and shift cultural attitudes towards the sector, there is a need for government action on a range of fronts, including better integration and parity of esteem between VET and higher education (including funding and access), better consumer information and earlier experience with VET for school students. The recently launched Educational Pathways Pilot Program to be trialled in high schools in South West Sydney and on the North Coast will transform the way students and parents think about career pathways. The pilots will improve career advice, increase school-based apprenticeships and traineeships and help the most disadvantaged and disengaged students further their education and find the right career pathway, whether VET or university.

Discussion paper topic: Smart ways to get more from our infrastructure

The NSW Department of Education is committed to providing and maintaining infrastructure that supports better outcomes, and is committed to greater utilisation of school assets where safe and appropriate. This includes, getting the most out of existing assets. For example, the Department is considering opportunities to leverage insights developed from building information management systems installed in new projects such as Arthur Phillip High School across the portfolio. The Department is committed to opening up more schools after hours for communities to use available playgrounds and green space and to project selection to maximise the benefits of new and upgraded schools.