

# ***Future Directions of Secondary Education: A Report***

New South Wales. Department of Education, 1984

## **Overview of the document**

38 page report prepared by D. Swan and Ken McKinnon. The report is based on discussions with major interest groups and submissions of written responses following the release of a discussion paper in 1983 and sets out proposals for broad directions of secondary education. Major recommendations include the establishment of the Board of Secondary Education to replace the Secondary Schools Board and the Board of Senior School Studies and the replacement of the School Certificate with a Certificate of Secondary Education for all students who leave prior to the completion of Year 12.

## **Keywords**

Core curriculum; balance in the curriculum; essential learning; social change; technological change; general education; assessment and credentials; aims of education; the eighties; youth support; principles of education; Board of Secondary Education.

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## **Summary of Contents**

### **1. THE CHALLENGE OF THE EIGHTIES**

- Begins by noting that the context in which schooling takes place has altered dramatically and that these changed circumstances require new arrangements.
- Argues that the fundamental task of schooling should continue to be “the pursuit of excellence and the preparation of young people as competent, caring, socially responsible and self-reliant citizens” (p. 5) but that higher standards are now required.
- Proposes that schools need guidance in the form of a policy mandate.
- Notes that the proposals in this paper “chart the broad outlines of the policy response the education system ought to make.” (p. 5)

### **Social, Economic and Technological Change**

- Notes the social, economic and technological changes which impact upon education, including gender roles and family structures, immigration patterns and greater heterogeneity of the population, increasing complexity of working life, changing relationships between individuals, “the modes of authority and the means of production” (p. 5), the necessity to change jobs and unemployment.
- Discusses youth unemployment (which is approximately three times the adult rate), technological change and the disappearance of unskilled work.
- Argues that educational change is needed in the context of the “massive growth of knowledge and the recognition that our present knowledge may be superseded by new discoveries”. (p. 6)

### **Educational Challenges**

- Notes that the community has already begun to respond to these challenges by keeping young people at school for longer and that participation rates have increased with some 90 per cent of students now entering Year 10, over half of these going on to Year 11 and a majority of those remaining to Year 12. (p. 6)
- Outlines the following as educational challenges for the eighties:
  - “What does it mean for the nature and organization of secondary schooling for most young people to reach adulthood while enrolled in schools?
  - How can secondary schooling be of more benefit to all students, and in particular, to those who would have been part of the group of early school leavers?
  - What can secondary schools do to prepare students for a world constantly changing in unpredictable ways?” (p. 7)

### **The Need for a Mandate**

- Suggests that schools have responded to present challenges in a number of ways: some have continued to fulfil traditional role of academic preparation for the few; a few have developed comprehensive programs designed to equip students with practical and social skills; and most have “responded more cautiously by developing a small number of additional courses tailored to the local community and to the needs of the students”. (p. 7)
- Notes that the Secondary Schools Board and the Board of Senior School Studies have introduced changes but these have been hampered by the constraints of the structures from which they operate. Argues that “the most severe limitation has been the division of responsibility for the first four years and the fifth and sixth years of secondary education. The need to change these arrangements and establish a single

board with an appropriate mandate to tackle the educational challenges of the eighties and nineties is apparent and has almost unanimous support in the educational community”. (p. 7)

## 2. KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE EDUCATIONAL RESPONSE

- Advises that in the context of the majority of young people remaining to the end of secondary education there is a need to assess the aims of education.
- Notes that general aims were issued in 1974 and suggests that the general thrust of these aims remains valid: “individual development in the context of society through recognizable stages of development towards perceptive understanding, mature judgement, responsible self-direction and moral autonomy.” (p. 9)
- Argues that there is a need to augment these general aims with a set of principles. Sets out ten principles which should govern secondary education in the future as follows:
  - “Six years of secondary education for all or at least the great majority of young people, although not necessarily continuous, is a desirable goal which can and should be attained without recourse to compulsion.
  - Secondary education must have purpose and value for all students, developing them to the maximum extent—it should not be regarded principally as a process to select and prepare a minority for tertiary education or be dominated by such processes.
  - Its primary orientation should be towards the preparation of knowledgeable, skilful and caring persons within a common cultural framework which recognizes that Australia is a diverse, multicultural society.
  - It is important to both society and the individual that every student acquires a well-consolidated general education encompassing skills of oral and written communication, quantitative reasoning and other skills needed for successful participation in modern society.
  - There ought to be closer relationships than now between theoretical and applied studies; the demands and intellectual challenge often attributed to traditional content can also be found in learning across a wide range of other human activities and areas of knowledge.
  - Assessment and reporting of achievement focussing on student success should be organized on the basis of publically understood statewide credentials, with provision for students to be able to reverse earlier failures, repair omissions and re-enter education.
  - The educational experiences offered to post-compulsory age students should be shaped more than at present by their emerging abilities, interests and aspirations for vocation, leisure, family and community life.
  - Provision ought to be made for various structures and institutional frameworks, including TAFE and possibly new institutions to be involved in the delivery of post-compulsory secondary education.
  - The community has a right and obligation to be involved in deciding what is to be taught in schools and what is important for all citizens to know, as well as in shaping the processes and institutional forms appropriate for the development of such skills and knowledge.
  - Youth support arrangements need to be reorganized in ways which not only encourage continuing education more than idleness but which include study as a form of work—possibly even the preferred form of work for those under 19 years.” (pp. 9-10)

- Makes the following recommendation:
  - Recommendation 1: “We recommend that the government endorse these ten principles for the further development of secondary education in New South Wales.” (p. 10)

### 3. STATEWIDE ORGANIZATION AND CONTROL

- Notes that the two statutory boards have exercised authority over curriculum since their establishment.
- Suggests that there are sound arguments for continuing the arrangement which ensure that all students have common patterns of study and a stable curriculum framework
- However, argues that a revised structure is necessary and that “the division of responsibility between the two current boards is no longer appropriate.” (p. 11)
- Notes that the increase in enrolments at senior secondary level “makes the provision of a continuum of study desirable.” (p. 11)
- States that “There is now a clear perception that secondary education should involve integrated and developmental studies which should provide both for the common learnings essential for all students and for an increasingly wide range of student interests, aptitude and maturation rates particularly in the post-compulsory years when students are no longer compelled to attend school” (p. 11) and suggests a more flexible approach to student entry and exit.
- Makes the following recommendations in relation to the Board:
  - Recommendation 2: “We recommend that a statutory Board of Secondary Education be established, replacing the Secondary Schools Board and the Board of Senior School Studies and having responsibility relating to Years 7 to 12 of secondary schooling.” (p. 12)
  - Recommendation 3: “We recommend that the Board have authority to determine the nature of the curriculum, prepare or approve courses of study and make provision for the balance of studies, including compulsory and optional courses, as deemed appropriate for Australian society. (p. 12)
  - Recommendation 4: “We recommend that the Director-General of Education be Chairman of the Board.” (p. 12)
  - Recommendation 5: Outlines a proposed membership for the Board.
  - Recommendation 6: “We recommend that, in making appointments, the Minister ensure that the Board has among its members persons with experience in or commitment to primary education, the education of girls and children of Aboriginal and ethnic communities.” (p. 13)
  - Recommendation 7: “We recommend that members be appointed for a four-year term of office and that appointments be staggered.” (p. 13)
  - Recommendation 8: “We recommend that the Board support services operate as a unit of the Department of Education under a Senior Officer and with augmented staff; other central and regional Departmental staff should be made available to the Board on an annually agreed basis.” (p. 14)
  - Recommendation 9: “We recommend that the Board have powers of delegation of any of its functions to committees.” (p. 14)
  - Recommendation 10: “We recommend that the Board establish a Committee specifically to be responsible for the conduct of the Higher School Certificate examination.” (p. 15)
  - Recommendation 11: “We recommend that the Board be required to present to government once every four years, a review of current practices and future directions for secondary education.” (p. 15)

- Notes that “in response to the new demands on education that are a product of social change and the wider range of student aspirations, interests and abilities, many schools have considered ways of broadening their curriculum” and have taken the opportunity to develop new courses and seek approval from the Boards to include these courses in the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate. (p. 15)
- Suggests that the Board have responsibility and authority “to encourage the efforts of individual school communities and consortia of schools to develop their own courses and programs with due regard to the desired outcomes delineated by the Board”. (p. 16)
- Notes that the Board “should have a responsibility and a capacity to identify and syndicate exemplary courses, to bring together like courses and to synthesize and publicize them as suitable for use in many or all schools.” (p. 16)
- Makes the following recommendation in relation to school based courses:
  - Recommendation 12: “We recommend that the Board have the responsibility and authority to accredit course proposals and whole programs from individual schools and groups of schools and to identify and promote exemplary courses.” (p. 16)
- Advises that “just as the Wyndham Committee twenty years ago was confident in presenting its proposals that they were building on the best of current practice and setting out courses of action well within the capabilities of schools and teachers, so are we confident that our proposals build on what many schools and teachers are doing and are capable of doing”. (p. 17)
- Suggests that schools will need guidance and teachers will need in-service education to enhance and refine their skills and makes the following recommendation:
  - Recommendation 13: “We recommend that implementation of the changes proposed in this report be accompanied by opportunities for in-service education for teachers.” (p. 17)

#### **4. THE FUTURE AGENDA: CURRICULUM**

##### **Key Outcomes**

- States that “Success and achievement at school are still best considered in terms of the preparation of young people for effective participation in society. In this respect nothing has occurred which diminishes the importance of equipping young people with a core of essential knowledge and skills. These serve as reference points for the further development of personal beliefs, for the assessment of the validity of new information, as well as its organization and categorization and for the development of higher level intellectual and practical skills.” (p. 18)
- Notes that schools have “consistently endeavoured to develop in their students the skills of logical thinking, the capacity to marshal and judge information, the capacity to present ideas clearly and concisely, and habits of diligence and enquiry”. (p. 18)
- Suggests that such outcomes of schooling are of enduring and increased importance, both for the development of social competence in an increasingly complex world, and also in being able to utilize information technology.

##### **Problems of the Secondary Curriculum**

- Suggests that if extended secondary schooling is to have purpose for all students, aspects of the curriculum must be reconsidered.
- “The problems of devising programs and courses which result in all students being challenged and extended, while providing sufficient material to be studied in common, particularly that which is crucial to our common identity as Australian

citizens, is one of the most fundamental challenges for educational administrators and government.” (p. 18)

- Notes that the age group coming to adulthood while still at school “creates a need to consider what ought to be included in the curriculum which bears on the activities of adults and equips school leavers for those activities”. (p. 19)
- Since the senior secondary curriculum had been designed for those who would go on to further study, there are “gaps and omissions not tolerable in a more comprehensive view of the function of the post-compulsory stage secondary education [which] need to be taken into account”. (p. 19)
- Stresses that there needs to be closer relationships between theoretical and applied studies as well as greater integration of work and community activities.
- Notes that there is a particular need to reconsider what constitutes general education for Years 11 and 12.
- States “The presence of a wider spectrum of students in Years 11 and 12 challenges curriculum developers and teachers to consider content and approaches within the framework of a continuing and enhanced commitment to liberal general education and high standards”. (p. 19)
- Notes also the problem of students’ view of the curriculum and that insufficient attention is given to practical personal needs. Suggests that the curriculum must not only be about knowledge and skills of long term usefulness but that it must also respond to real need.

### **Core Learning**

- Acknowledges that there is much debate about the core curriculum. “In our view, the main, and perhaps only, sense in which it is useful to use the term is in reference to desirable common educational outcomes of the type mentioned at the beginning of this section”. (p. 20)
- Suggests that the range of “educational experiences” included in the curriculum should be primarily related to “desired outcomes”. States that “Students should have some breadth of knowledge in both the sciences and humanities and practical experience of scientific investigation, historical analysis and other methods of critical thought. In addition to the pursuit of higher order skills of oral and written communication and mathematical reasoning skills, students should be exposed to other cultures and other times, should be equipped to deal with the moral and ethical dilemmas which face individuals and society, understand the forces which affect labour, technological and industrial development and have experience of participation in groups. They should have practice in the arts and physical skills as well as being introduced to our heritage of literature, art and a range of sport and leisure activities.” (p. 20)
- Notes that objectives in each curriculum area should be stated “as precisely as possible”. (p. 20)
- States that “At all levels there should be mandatory and optional elements in the curriculum.” (p. 21)
- Argues that at the senior level, developing vocational interests can inform choice but it is not envisaged that the secondary school become vocational training institutions.

### **Balance**

- States that “The Board of Secondary Education will need to take up the difficult question of how to provide a framework for the curriculum which reconciles questions of continuity, breadth and specialization and, in addition, takes note of the

importance of providing means of overcoming earlier failures, of catering for late-developing interests, for part-time study and for re-entry to study in the upper levels of secondary education after a period away". (p. 21)

- Notes that "An important task for the Board will be to shape a clear framework of expectations about the desired balance and coherence of the curriculum offered to students at various levels". (p. 21)
- Argues that strengthening the curriculum in the upper secondary level will depend on further developing the extent to which students take responsibility for their own learning.

### **Organizational Implications**

- Notes that ideas about essential learning have implications for the organization and structure of schooling.
- Argues that school practices should be coordinated with curriculum structures
- Suggests that interest in students' intellectual development should be matched with interest in their social and emotional development (p. 22).
- Argues that school learning should be structured so that there is a gradual transition from one class being taught mainly by one person to specialist teachers in senior secondary. States that "The present abrupt changes in organizational arrangements between Year 6 and 7 and between Year 10 and Year 11 should be erased." (p. 22)
- Argues that secondary schools should be organized to reflect the following:
  - i. Mandatory and optional elements should be in the curriculum at all stages of schooling and there should be balance between the mandatory and optional.
  - ii. Mandatory elements should include broad sets of skills, knowledge and abilities, which can be attained in a variety of ways through particular subject areas, by practical experience, integrated courses etc.
  - iii. Schools should plan studies so that continuing and enrolling students have access to the major curriculum options and are not confronted with dislocation in later years. Possibilities utilized for this include:
    - School cluster curriculum planning
    - Explicit, publicly available curriculum prospectuses
    - Use of 'building block' units for curriculum/program/course planning
    - Within grade and cross-grade teaching/learning groups
    - Lateral options within programs or courses through 'short courses'
  - iv. School activities should be set in the context of broader programs with explicit objectives "so that present distinctions between 'courses' and 'other activities' are eliminated". (p. 23)
  - v. "The extension of student choice and the greater breadth of courses must be tempered by a concern for the coherence of an individual's program of study including the sequence of courses, breadth of experience and sustained learning." (p. 23)
- Argues that "These general characteristics delineate a pattern for the arrangement of schooling which should achieve a reasonable degree of consistency across the state while allowing for local variation". (p. 23)
- Makes the following recommendation:
  - Recommendation 14: "We recommend that the Board of Secondary Education continue development of the secondary curriculum in ways which provide for a balance of common and specialized studies, in ways which establish continuity between levels, and in ways which make a stronger connection between theoretical and applied studies, so that there will be opportunities for

all students to complete six years of secondary education with benefits.” (p. 23)

## **5. THE FUTURE AGENDA: CREDENTIALS**

### **Principles**

- Notes that the arrangements proposed in the Report require a reappraisal of credentials and that ideally, students should be entitled to credentials at whatever point they finish.
- Notes that without credentials individuals are doubly disadvantaged, in terms of both access to work and access to further education.
- Outlines three principles which should inform the development of credentials which are understood by the public and enjoy public confidence: a credential for all school leavers; external validation of all school programs; and a common framework. (p. 24)

### **A Credential for all School-leavers**

- Notes that the School Certificate issued at the end of Year 10 “has virtually lost its traditional uses for a variety of reasons including the high proportion of students going on to higher levels”. (p. 24)
- Notes that in 1983 the Board of Senior School Studies recommended that a Year 11 certificate be introduced but that this Report suggests that “It would not be wise, in our view, for there to be a confusing variety of certificates.” (p. 25)
- Argues that it is necessary to retain the HSC and that there should be only one other certificate, “The Certificate of Secondary Education”, issued as a statement of achievement for students who leave school (serving the same general purpose that transcripts from tertiary institutions do). Notes that the Certificate of Secondary Education would serve as the basis for further study.
- Makes the following recommendations:
  - Recommendation 15: “We recommend that the School Certificate be replaced by a Certificate of Secondary Education issued by the Board of Secondary Education to any student upon leaving school prior to the completion of Year 12.” (p. 25)
  - Recommendation 16: “We recommend that the Certificate of Secondary Education record the main achievements of students including those of an artistic and musical kind.” (p. 25)

### **External Validation**

- Argues that “External validation rather than a state-wide external examination should apply to the Certificate of Secondary Education”. (p. 26)
- Makes the following recommendation:
  - Recommendation 17: “We recommend that external validation of courses and monitoring of assessment practices be the responsibility of the Board of Secondary Education operating through accreditation panels.” (p. 26)

### **A Common Framework**

- Argues that “The Board of Secondary Education should have responsibility to ensure a degree of comparability in the standards of courses across the state.” (p. 26)
- Notes that this responsibility should be discharged through general specification of the breadth and balance of study, its course approval function and registration of schools, school moderation by panels of peers and specialists and the responsibility to issue guidelines governing the form and content of Certificates of Secondary Education.



### **The Higher School Certificate**

- Notes that there is still widespread support for an examination-based credential at the end of secondary education.
- Encourages the Board to initiate public discussion on other forms of assessment.
- Notes that in the immediate future it will be appropriate to expand forms of assessment, including those for oral and practical skills.
- States that “A further development we propose is reconsideration of the ‘conduct, attendance and progress rule’ [which has]...restricted the award of certificates to candidates from schools...This would allow ‘private study candidates’ to obtain the Certificate...The changes would also ensure that the certificate is available to all who complete six years of secondary education or its equivalent in a variety of institutions at different rates and times.” (p. 27)
- Proposes, however, that one aspect of this rule be maintained and strengthened – the requirement of attendance and participation.
- Notes that it has been the practice to distinguish between achievements in state-wide examinations and school-based courses but that “We propose that there be no distinction in recording the outcome of particular subjects on the Higher School Certificate, subject to satisfactory evidence that the rules of the Board have been adhered to.” (p. 28)
- Discusses scaling and the aggregate and notes that “The proposals of the present Board of Senior Secondary Studies to change to a common marking scale for each course have our support. We believe that the new Board of Secondary Education ought to adopt that or a similar method of presenting the marks of candidates.” (p. 28)

### **Tertiary Entrance**

- Suggests that the problems for tertiary institutions that will result from these changes need to be understood but stresses that the proposals for changes will continue to provide tertiary institutions with enough information for selection processes.
- Proposes that, for the future, tertiary institutions should devise additional selection methods that take into account a broader range of abilities. Notes that the Federal Government’s policy of achieving greater equity would be assisted by a revising these processes.

## **8. THE FUTURE AGENDA: STRUCTURES**

### **Compulsion**

- Notes that the aim of six years of secondary education for all students “should not be pursued by compulsion”. (p. 30)
- Argues that “We do not see a case for lifting the age of compulsory school attendance past 15. Nor, in our view, should six years of secondary education necessarily imply six years of continuous education, or six years attendance at a secondary school.” (p. 30)

### **Organizational Arrangements**

- Notes that secondary education for the majority of young people will be continuous and will take place in schools and that “accordingly, some changes in schools and the way they operate are desirable” (p. 30).
- Asserts that “Good schools and schooling do foster the student outcomes we value”. Acknowledges that some schools are achieving expected outcomes but that other schools “deter a significant number of young people; the experiences offered are

unattractive and not helpful to many students. Increased participation will demand, and in part be attendant on, more humane and effective schools and schooling.” (p. 30)

- Argues that “School organization should become more adaptive particularly in relation to social development and the promotion of self-disciplined students.” (p. 31)

### **Institutions**

- Notes that TAFE provides an alternative avenue for the completion of secondary schooling and that the Board of Secondary Education should encourage cooperative arrangements between schools and TAFE colleges.
- Notes that there have been suggestions that Community Colleges be considered and that the Report supports the further exploration of this concept.
- Argues that schools and other institutions offering post-compulsory schooling should offer integrated courses and that the organization of post-compulsory secondary education should be such that it allows for part-time study and return to study and should be able to accommodate a mix of ages, abilities and interests.

### **Broader Professional Involvement**

- Argues that “In our view it would be beneficial to broaden the cross-section of skills within the teaching profession.” (p. 32)
- Makes the following recommendation:
  - Recommendation 18: “We recommend that consultations be held between government authorities and unions to develop means of utilizing in schools the services of persons with appropriately varied expertise on an appropriate basis.” (p. 32)

### **Community Involvement**

- Notes the important role of the community in curriculum development and suggests that school devised courses should have broad community support before being proposed for external validation and accreditation by the Board.
- Makes the following recommendation:
  - Recommendation 19: “We recommend that as part of the process of course accreditation the Board of Secondary Education require evidence of local school community involvement in the development of school-initiated courses.” (p. 33)

### **Arrangements for Youth Support**

- Notes that “There are a number of issues of importance that will influence and directly affect the success and effectiveness of our proposals”, some of which are beyond the education system (such as technological and social change) and others which are the responsibility of government (such as youth support arrangements). (p. 33)
- Notes the need for a national youth policy and a coordinated approach to financial assistance for young people.
- Notes that “We regard changes in financial arrangements as an important adjunct to moves for greater participation in secondary education and crucial to the greater participation of disadvantaged students and hence to the pursuit of equity.

- Makes the following recommendation:
  - Recommendation 20: “We recommend that the state arrangements for financial support for secondary school students be reviewed in the context of moves towards a national youth policy.” (p. 33)

### **Implementation**

- Urges the government to implement the proposals contained within the Report with a minimum of delay, stating “First we propose that the Board of Secondary Education be established before the end of 1984. Second, we propose that government endorse the contents of this document as the future agenda for Board action. Third, we believe that government should indicate, when establishing the Board, that the curriculum changes the Board will stimulate should come into effect after due notice to schools, colleges and tertiary institutions.” (p. 34)
- Makes the following recommendation:
  - Recommendation 21: “We recommend that the New South Wales government endorse the directions set out in this Report, that it establish the Board of Secondary Education by the end of 1984 and that it request the Board, the Department of Education and non-government school authorities to implement the proposals in the Report after due notice to schools, colleges, tertiary institutions and the public.” (p. 34)

### **7. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Provides a summary of the report’s recommendations.