

ORIGINS OF THE NSW SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' COUNCIL 1954-1977

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Author's note: The rediscovery of some invaluable NSWSPC archives in early 2019 has led to the creation of this paper, a broad outline of the history of secondary principals' councils in NSW prior to the formation of the first truly representative state-wide secondary council in 1977 – the NSW High School Principals' Council (later renamed the NSWSPC).

My research was originally focused on trying to expand the information I had found in a brief three-page paper called *A History of the NSW Council of High School Principals*, written by Bruce Bensley in 1986 (Bruce was NSWSPC President from November 1979 to November 1983). It was only five months, hundreds of pages of Council archives and 7000 words later that I stumbled across a second paper (this one far more detailed than the previous one) called *Background Information concerning the Development of Organisations representing High School Principals in New South Wales*, written by Bill Myles in 1976 (Bill was President of the Metropolitan Headmasters' Council from 1973-1975 and then became NSWSPC Research Officer from 1976-1981.) Oh my, if only I had found Bill's paper months earlier it would have saved so many hours!

Apart from Bruce Bensley and Bill Myles, I would also like to formally recognise and acknowledge all those early principals like Ron Rushbrooke and Joe Byrne who wrote such detailed notes during those years and who, along with Mary Armstrong, chose to preserve such an amazing amount of documentation from those times. In addition, special thanks go to Col Cooksey and Jim Harkin for their invaluable recollections of their early years in the Council, which triggered my interest in finding out more.

Finally, in reading all our Council archives, one cannot fail to recognise and acknowledge the impressive dedication and foresight of all those outstanding principals who served as Presidents, Executive and Employed Officers on all our various earlier principals' councils. We owe them much.

Précis

By the end of the 1960s there were almost a dozen relatively independent secondary principals' groups operating across NSW. In Sydney there was a Metropolitan Headmasters' Council (formed in 1954) and a Metropolitan Women Principals' Council (formed in 1967-68), plus several metropolitan Area Principals' Councils (Regional Councils) which had been formed subsequent to the Department's division of the state into Administrative Areas (later Regions) back in the early-mid 60s.

In most of the non-metropolitan Areas there were also Area Principals' Councils, many of which had also been formed back in the early-mid 60s as the Department's Administrative Areas were rolled out across the state. Unfortunately there was considerable friction between metropolitan and non-metropolitan principals, with metropolitan principals being seen as getting favoured treatment from the Department, including direct access to Departmental information and personnel and significant influence on Departmental decision-making, at the expense of country principals.

During 1970-71 there was a push by a small group within the Metropolitan Headmasters' Council to establish a state-wide principals' organisation that could represent principals across the state. This was particularly important given that NSW was to host the national conference of the Australian High School Principals' Association (later ASPA) in 1972.

By the end of 1972 a 'NSW Council' had been established. Now there were five main groupings of secondary principals in NSW – the Metropolitan Headmasters, the Metropolitan Women Principals, the metropolitan Area Principals' Councils, the non-metropolitan Area Principals' Councils and the new 'NSW Council of High School Principals'. This new Council was particularly supported by the non-metropolitan Principals' Councils and quite a number of metropolitan principals who all saw the need and value of there being one fully-representative secondary principals' association in NSW.

In April 1976 the five groups eventually agreed to form a state-wide principals' organisation which would be called the NSW High School Principals' Council. This was a direct result of a push by Arthur Buchan, at that time Assistant Director-General and Director of Secondary Education. In early 1975 he had directed the Women Principals' Council to merge with the Headmasters' Council, and then in late 1975 he basically told the Headmasters' Council to merge with the NSW Council, which already had a direct and very close relationship with all the metropolitan and non-metropolitan Area Principals' Councils.

The task of forming the new state-wide Council, however, was not easy. There was hesitation and even outright resistance to its formation from a variety of sources and for various reasons. In March 1977 the new Council finally received advice from Doug Swan, the new Director-General of Education, that it had been officially approved. The first state plenary meeting of principals was held in April 1977, at which a new constitution was adopted and the first Executive elected.

In 1989 the NSW High School Principals' Council changed its name to the NSW Secondary Principals' Council to better reflect the nature of the secondary schools from which its members came.

ORIGINS OF THE NSW SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' COUNCIL, 1956-1977

Introduction

The NSW Secondary Principals' Council (NSWSPC) was formally established in 1977, but as a professional association seeking to represent all secondary principals across NSW, it first began its life as the NSW Council of High School Principals. This earlier Council had been established in 1972, following a push during 1970-71 by a group of dedicated principals who recognised that there was an urgent need for the creation of a state-wide principals' organisation of this kind.

Prior to 1972 there were multiple principals' councils in operation, all representing different groups and locations. In Sydney, for example, there was a Metropolitan Headmasters' Council, a Metropolitan Women Principals' Council and several Area (Regional) Principals' Councils, while non-metropolitan areas all had their own Area (Regional) Principals' Council.

Each of these groups prided itself on its independence and autonomy, pursued its own agenda and enjoyed a different level of support and influence with the Department. Only a small number of secondary principals from across the state ever came together once each year and this was at a two-day Department-organised conference held at Narrabeen National Fitness Camp in the January school holidays.

In the end three major forces contributed to the formation of the original 'NSW Council' in 1972:

- The push by some members of the already firmly-established Council of Metropolitan Headmasters, encouraged by the Director of Secondary Education (Arthur Buchan), to investigate the concept of a state-wide council that could link together and represent all NSW public secondary school principals
- Growing antagonism and resentment from Area Principals' Councils outside Sydney over the dominant influence of Sydney principals in the Department's consultation and decision-making processes and the favoured treatment that they received from the Department over country principals
- The emergence of the Australian High School Principals' Association in 1968 (later ASPA) and its practice of rotating its annual conference between states.

It was only in 1977 that all the existing 'independent' councils were finally approved by the Department to join together to become the NSW High School Principals' Council, which subsequently changed its name to the NSW Secondary Principals' Council in 1989. This later name change was deliberately made to better reflect the inclusive nature of the Council, given that it comprised not only high school principals but also central school principals and principals from a range of other secondary school settings.

The Council of Metropolitan Headmasters of High Schools

This Council first met in October 1954 at Fort Street Boys High School with nine headmasters from Sydney metropolitan boys' high schools in attendance. Bob Golding was elected President and Graham Shaw was elected Secretary. Its original purpose was "to meet once or twice each term to discuss matters of common interest".

The formation of this group had been greatly encouraged by Bert Stephens, then Deputy Director of Secondary Education, who believed it could act in a valuable advisory role to the Department. He convinced the then Director of Secondary Education, Phil Price, to support this idea and allow meetings to be held in school time. The group subsequently became known as the Council of Metropolitan Headmasters of High Schools.

Bert Stephens remained a strong supporter of the group when he himself became Director of Secondary Education from 1956-1965, organising to meet with representatives of the Council after every term meeting they held.

The Headmasters' Council was a strictly non-industrial group and by the early 60s was holding three meetings per year during school time (it was a three-term year). The Director of Secondary Education (or one of his deputies) would seek to attend these term meetings whenever possible, and usually there was a meeting with the Director soon after each meeting.

By the late 1960s the Headmasters' Council was also cooperating with the Department's Inservice Branch to organise the Department's two-day January Narrabeen Conference each year (originally initiated by Bert Stephens in 1958-59) and in 1966 it had also introduced the idea of an evening dinner to coincide with the Term 3 Friday Plenary Meeting of the Council.

It was in the mid-60s that the term 'principal' replaced the terms 'headmaster' and 'headmistress', but the Headmasters' Council retained its name until it merged with the Metropolitan Women Principals' Council in October 1975.

As the years progressed, the number of Council members expanded considerably to include men in charge of co-educational high schools and junior secondary schools and eventually, in June 1971, women in charge of co-educational high schools.

In 1973, when Bill Myles became President, the Metropolitan Headmasters' Council had a membership of about 75 financial principals and by 1975 it had grown to 89. As President from 1973 to 1975, Bill Myles initiated a streamlining of the Council's procedures and meetings that resulted in even greater interest and support for its activities by Sydney principals, plus more carefully prepared papers for discussion with the Director of Secondary Education.

In November 1975 Bill stepped down prior to retirement and his place was taken by Reg Clarke. As President of the Headmasters' Council during 1976, Reg Clarke was one of those instrumental in the creation of the new state-wide Council that was to become the NSWSPC.

The Metropolitan Council of Women High School Principals

It was only in 1967-1968 that a Metropolitan Women Principals' Council was established, and it operated both independently and in conjunction with the Headmasters' Council, but the Headmasters' Council was much more powerful and influential.

By late 1972 the two groups had set up a 'Metropolitan Principal Advisory Panel', representative of all secondary schools in the Sydney metropolitan area, which met with the Director of Secondary Education from time to time. In October 1975, with only 40 principals as members and at the direction of the Director of Secondary Education earlier that year, the Women Principals' Council formally combined with the Headmasters' Council to create the 'Council of Metropolitan High School Principals'.

In April 1976 this combined Sydney metropolitan group subsequently agreed to join with the NSW Council of High School Principals (the 'NSW Council' established in 1972 – see below) to create the NSW High School Principals' Council (NSWSPC) in April 1977.

Area Principals' Councils (later Regional Councils)

The first of the Department's Administrative Areas (later Regions) was established in the Riverina in the early 60s and by 1966 the whole state had been officially divided into eleven Areas (five metropolitan and six country). It was in this year that the then Director of Secondary Education, Hedley Yelland, wrote to all existing Principals' Councils calling on them to form Principals' Councils in every Area across the state.

Although every Area did have its own Area Principals' Council eventually, they were first to form and grow in strength in non-metropolitan Areas, given that Sydney principals were already represented by the two councils mentioned above. We know that the Western Region Secondary Principals' Council was first established in 1964 and Principals' Councils certainly existed in all six non-metropolitan Areas by 1966. These Councils included principals from high schools, intermediate high schools, central schools and other schools of a secondary nature. The last Area Principals' Council to be formed was that of Central Metropolitan Area in 1976.

In those early years Area Principals' Councils in non-metropolitan areas took a variety of forms. Some met as more or less autonomous groups with the full blessing of the Area Director, others were totally dominated by the Area Director and his/her regional administrative staff, while the remainder were somewhere in between these two extremes. In some Areas where principals were carefully controlled by strong Area Directors, these Area Directors would call meetings of principals at their discretion and then, once again at their discretion, decide whether or not to give time in their meetings for Council business as an act of goodwill. For possibly half the Area Councils in the 60s and early 70s, Council meetings were more a regional directors' conference than a meeting of principals.

Area Councils in non-metropolitan areas were strong in numbers and gender inclusive but male dominated. Budgets were tiny, comprising just the few dollars collected at meetings and managed by an elected or appointed secretary or treasurer. Each Area Council operated independently of the others and prided itself on that independence and autonomy*.

[*This desire for independence and autonomy remained in some Regions until at least 1996, when a revised NSWSPC Constitution finally confirmed the place of the state-wide Council above Regional Councils.]

By 1970 there had emerged a growing antagonism between the principals' councils in country areas and the metropolitan councils, with the firmly held view by some country areas that there were two Departments of Education, one operating in the metropolitan area and the other in the rest of the state. Information was given by the Department to metropolitan principals before country principals and metropolitan principals had direct telephone access to Head Office that was denied to country principals, who were only allowed STD access to their Area Office but not beyond that. In addition, major policy decisions made in Head Office in Sydney would often be run past the metropolitan principals, but would arrive as a fait accompli on country principals' desks.

The 'them and us' attitude that emerged between the metropolitan and country principals' groups was also exacerbated by the belief held by a majority of metropolitan principals that they could adequately represent all principals because most of them had previous country experience. When the move began to form a NSW state-wide council in 1971, strong support was given by country Area Councils, particularly Riverina and Newcastle. On the other hand, the move to create a state-wide Council was increasingly resisted by a significant number of metropolitan principals.

The Australian High School Principals' Association (AHSPA)

The concept of a national federation of secondary principals emerged out of Victoria in early 1967. The first official meeting of principals occurred in May 1968 and comprised delegates from each state and territory in Australia, who discussed in detail various aspects of the proposed national association. This was followed by the inaugural meeting of the new association in May 1969. For the first four years of its existence, i.e. from its first annual conference in May 1969, NSW was represented at AHSPA conferences by principals appointed by the Director of Secondary Education, selected from nominees put forward by the metropolitan and country Councils.

It was the practice of AHSPA to rotate its Annual Conference between states and in 1972 it was to be the turn of NSW to be the host state. When Allan White (Sylvania High School) and Sid Pryor (St. Ives High School) attended the AHSPA Adelaide Conference in July 1971 as the NSW representatives, Allan was elected 1972 AHSPA President and Sid elected 1972 AHSPA Secretary. This put them in a very difficult situation of hosting interstate delegates on behalf of NSW principals because not only did they not represent all those principals but in addition they did not have the support of any cohesive state-wide organisation *per se*. It was obvious that NSW desperately needed a principals' association representing all NSW secondary principals.

Moves to establish a state-wide council

With the establishment of AHSPA in 1969 and the flagging of NSW as the host state for the 1972 AHSPA annual conference, a small group within the Metropolitan Headmasters' Council, led by Allan White, became keenly interested in the formation of a state-wide Council that could represent all NSW high school principals and thereby be affiliated with AHSPA.

Allan White had been one of the NSW delegates to the May 1970 AHSPA conference in Brisbane and had ended up being elected as the AHSPA Vice President. When he returned from that conference, he wrote to the Secretary of the Headmasters' Council (Ron Rushbrooke) requesting time at the next meeting of that Council for him to report on the Brisbane conference and to raise the issue of the difficulties facing NSW delegates to AHSPA truly representing the views of all NSW principals. At this subsequent meeting he put forward the view that the only way this problem could be resolved was through the increasingly urgent need for state-wide links between all of the existing principals' councils in NSW.

In April 1971, a Headmasters' Council sub-committee was established to consider ways in which a NSW High Schools Principals' Association could be formed. It subsequently developed a series of recommendations that were put to the Headmasters' Council in July 1971, the same month that Allan White became President of AHSPA. This resulted in the Headmasters' Council establishing a steering committee to progress this idea. It subsequently met with the Director of Secondary Education (Arthur Buchan) on two occasions. The Department viewed the formation of a 'NSW Council' quite favourably.

At the Department's Narrabeen Conference in January 1972, Allan White convened a special meeting of interested principals to discuss the concept of a state-wide principals' council and address the issue of the need to organise the upcoming NSW-sponsored AHSPA annual conference. The Director of Secondary Education at that time (Arthur Buchan) supported this meeting by approving leave, paying travel expenses for country principals and also helping with the mailing of notices etc.

Though not well attended, those present unanimously accepted the proposal for the formation of a State Council comprising delegates from all metropolitan and country principals' councils, which could serve to unite the work already being done by the various Area Councils, act as a co-ordinating body and provide a unified voice for secondary principals across the state.

The meeting developed a proposed structure for the new council, comprising an Executive and one annual meeting attended by delegates from each of the eleven Areas. It also established a membership fee of \$4.00 per annum and elected an interim executive of:

President	Allan White, Sylvania High School
Vice-President	Helena Moore, Sydney Girls' High School
Secretary	Syd Pryor, St. Ives High School
Assistant Secretary	Alf Gray, Pennant Hills High School
Treasurer	Vere Humphreys, Canterbury Girls' High School

This group assisted Allan White and Syd Pryor run the AHSPA National Conference at Sylvania High School on the 1-2 July 1972, and all NSW principals were invited to the conference dinner at Ashfield Polish Club. Though not a large gathering at the dinner, it partially saved face for New South Wales and acted as the inaugural dinner of the new council.

During 1972 Helena Moore had to take sick leave and she was replaced on the Executive by Betty Bowen. In addition, Alf Gray took five months Long Service Leave and as a result, Bruce Bensley filled that position.

The new 'NSW Council' meets for the first time

On 29 September 1972, the first official State Delegates Meeting of the newly-formed NSW Council of High School Principals took place at Killara High School. In attendance were 55 principals from both metropolitan and country Areas.

The meeting itself comprised a Council business session until morning tea, a Departmental session until lunch and a discussion of issues and motions after lunch. At this meeting a set of provisional rules was adopted while a formal constitution was being prepared, and the first official Executive were elected comprising:

President	Allan White, Sylvania High School
Vice-President	Betty Bowen, Killara High School
Honorary Secretary	Alf Gray, Pennant Hills High School
Assistant Secretary	Bruce Bensley, Newcastle Technical High School
Honorary Treasurer	Vere Humphreys, Canterbury Girls' High School

The NSW Council was based on representation from each Area (three delegates from each Area Council being funded by the Department). The provisional rules specifically recognised that the autonomy of Area Councils would be maintained, and also clearly stated that the Council was to be a purely professional body that would "speak with authority on matters of educational importance and with relevance to secondary education in particular". Its main role was to be "a means of communication, the link between Area Councils, and the central body to approach relevant authorities on matters of state-wide importance".

The provisional rules also stated that membership would be open to principals of all high schools, other secondary schools and central schools in NSW.

The new Council was to be structured on the basis of a 'Management Committee', made up of an Executive of five principals and one delegate from each Area Council, who would meet each term (i.e. three times per year), plus there would be a mid-year Annual Conference of a professional nature to which all metropolitan and country principals were invited, and at which the Executive would be elected for the following twelve months.

Each Management Committee meeting comprised a Council business session, followed by a mid-morning session with Department senior officers, followed by Council discussion and motions in the afternoon. Also invited to Management Committee meetings as a matter of courtesy were representatives from the Metropolitan Headmasters' Council and the Women Principals' Council (they were formally included as delegates on the Management Committee following a change to the constitution at the 1974 AGM). In between meetings of the Management Committee, the affairs of the Council were to be managed by the Executive who met at least once before each Management Meeting, or more frequently if required.

Subsequent development of the 'NSW Council'

The first Executive meeting of the new council occurred in November 1972 and the first Management Committee meeting of delegates was held in April 1973. The Management Committee also began the first of its formal meetings with the Director of Secondary Education (Arthur Buchan) in June 1973, and he subsequently attended one session of every Management Committee meeting from then on.

The first annual conference of all principals was organised for Saturday, 14 July 1973 in the Commonwealth Bank Building, Martin Place, Sydney, and was preceded by a dinner at Carss Park Bowling Club on Friday 13 July. Attending this conference were just over 70 principals – the largest group of secondary principals ever gathered together in the state – and the conference was officially opened by the Director-General, Jack Buggie.

It's important to realise that the timing of this conference in July reflected significant dissatisfaction by secondary principals with the Department's Narrabeen Conference and its personnel, venue and timing. This dissatisfaction had resulted in a decision by the new Executive to break away from the Narrabeen Conference, which was essentially a parade of senior Department officers.

The NSW Council's first annual conference on that Saturday comprised a Council business session including the election of the Executive for 1973-74 (the current executive were re-elected unopposed), a guest speaker (Bessie Mitchell, Principal, Cheltenham Girls High School) on a topic of professional relevance ('The Changing Role of the Principal'), and the presentation of six detailed reports and prepared papers by members of the Council on various issues.

A formal constitution was adopted at the 1973 AGM, held during the July 1973 annual conference, but this constitution was subsequently reformed in 1975 mainly through the work of Alf Gray and, with variations reflecting changing times, structures and issues since then, it remains the essential basis of the present NSWSPC Constitution.

The first state-wide newsletter to all principals ('Headlines') was printed in March 1973. It had an introduction on the front page by Arthur Buchan, Director of Secondary Education, warmly welcoming the formation of the new state council.

In that same year, the Council was asked by the Director-General (Jack Buggie) to organise a one-day state conference of principals to discuss the draft document *The Interim Aims and Objectives of Secondary Education in NSW*. All metropolitan principals were invited to attend and rail warrants were provided for two principals from each Region.

Another first was the nomination of delegates to AHSPA. From 1968 to 1972 delegates had been appointed by the Director of Secondary Education, but in 1973 the Department accepted the Council's nomination of Management Committee members Allan White and Bruce Bensley to attend the national conference in Hobart and established the practice of the Department paying the expenses of two delegates from the NSW Council to the Australian High School Principals' Association.

In June 1974 the NSW Council ran its second annual conference at Ku-ring-gai College of Advanced Education, with a larger number of principals in attendance than at last year's conference. During this conference Allan White (President) announced his intention to retire at the end of the year and therefore not to stand for the President's position. At the AGM in July 1974 Allan White was awarded Life Membership of the NSW Council and the following Executive members were elected for 1974-75:

President	Alf Gray, Pennant Hills High School
Vice-President	Betty Bowen, Killara High School
Honorary Secretary	Tom Maguire, Engadine High School
Assistant Secretary	Bruce Bensley, Newcastle Technical High School
Honorary Treasurer	Vere Humphreys, Canterbury Girls' High School

In March 1975 Sid Pryor, who had only recently retired and had been the Secretary of the NSW Council from January to September 1972, was appointed as 'Organiser' for the Council. This involved various clerical and editorial tasks, with all expenses being paid and an Honorarium of \$100 per annum. At the 1975 AGM Vanessa King (Narrabeen Girls' High School) replaced Betty Bowen as Vice President.

The Executive of the NSW Council for 1975-76 was as follows:

President	Alf Gray, Pennant Hills High School
Vice-President	Vanessa King, Narrabeen Girls High School
Honorary Secretary	Tom Maguire, Engadine High School
Assistant Secretary	Bruce Bensley, Newcastle Technical High School
Honorary Treasurer	Vere Humphreys, Canterbury Girls' High School

Responding in a time of explosive educational change

One of the essential reasons for the formation of the NSW Council in the early 70s was the state of education both in NSW and at a Federal level at that time. In particular, these years were a time of explosive change in secondary education and there was a great need for NSW secondary principals to form an organisation so that their voice might be effectively heard.

At the Federal level, Gough Whitlam had become Australian Prime Minister in December 1972 and the Schools Commission, formed in 1973 as a result of the Karmel Report commissioned by the Whitlam

Government, established the notion of ‘disadvantaged schools’ and the flow of considerable funds into those schools, plus there were very significant increases in Federal spending on special education programs, teacher professional development and school buildings.

At the State level, based on the Minutes of the NSW Council between 1972 and 1976, some of the major issues and challenges which they addressed and responded to via submissions and high-level meetings during those years included the following:

- *The Aims and Objectives of Secondary Education in NSW (1972)* – the ‘Vaughan Report’
- *The Community and Its Schools (1973)* – Ministerial discussion paper on regionalisation and community involvement in schools – it proposed the establishment of School Councils
- Restructuring of HSC courses 11-12, including the introduction of ‘2A’ courses and ‘Other Approved Studies’
- *Base Paper on the Total Curriculum Years 7-10 (1975)* – established a new framework of 7-8/9-10 courses of study in Year 7-10 and the notion of mandatory hours of study in each curriculum area
- *Report on Sex Education in Schools*
- *Report on Religious Instruction in Schools*

In addition, there were many school-related matters to be addressed:

- Catering for disadvantaged students and non-academic students, plus the call for the introduction of Support Units in all secondary schools
- Religious instruction in schools, the introduction of Work Experience and Driver Education courses, school sport issues
- Removal of corporal punishment, students dress standards, excursion safety
- Introduction of external school appraisals to replace school inspections
- Professional responsibilities of principals, the role of the principal as an educational leader
- Increasing principal workloads, introduction of two deputies, the call for school bursars and maintenance officers
- Inservice training issues and staff professional development
- Flexibility in the staffing of schools, recruiting of overseas teachers, assessment of probationary teachers, appointment and payment of ancillary staff
- School finances, cash grants, annual requisition of school supplies, school fees, school maintenance
- Granting of approval for principals to be out of their school, approval for principals to use other means of transport vs. the Department’s current requirement for train travel only.

It’s also interesting to read that at one meeting in 1973 the Deputy Director of Secondary Education also made a plea for more principal understanding in relation to the limitations of the Department in doing its job!

The amalgamation of Principals’ Councils begins

It is very important to remember that the initial establishment of the new state-wide council in 1972 was not supported by a majority of metropolitan principals and there was distinct ongoing opposition as this new council developed. Metropolitan principals felt they had a very satisfactory meeting schedule of their own (meetings three times per year for all principals), were more than happy with the significant level of representation and direct access they had to Head Office, and felt they could more than adequately represent their country colleagues – so why change? Country principals and Area Principals’ Councils, on the other hand, felt considerable resentment and animosity that they continued to remain at a very significant disadvantage to their city colleagues.

By early 1975, the antagonism between the new NSW Council (bringing together and representing all the Area Principals’ Councils across the state) and the two Metropolitan Councils (bringing together and representing only Sydney principals) had reached a point where it became obvious that a solution had to be found.

This situation was exacerbated by the fact that by mid-1974 the Department was recognising the NSW Council’s Management Committee as the official body truly representative of the opinions of all NSW high

school principals, and therefore the Director of Secondary Education was personally attending one of the Management Committee sessions each term. This was in contrast to the Headmasters' Council which had to organise for a small group of its representatives to meet with the Director of Secondary Education any time up to a month or two after each of their term meetings, and the Women Principals' Council which communicated with the Director by letter.

In addition, the Department had also decided to abandon its January 1975 Narrabeen Conference in favour of supporting the NSW Council's July conference for secondary principals*, in addition to a second separate conference for primary principals as a result of the newly-formed NSW Primary Principals' Council.

[* The Narrabeen Conference, organised by the Department's Inservice (Professional Learning) Branch, had included Inspectors of Schools, Head Office senior personnel and both primary and secondary principals and deputy principals. Its whole content had focused on the communication of Department-related matters and contained nothing related to principals' groups *per se*. Attendance of all conference participants had been at their own expense.

The NSW Council's annual conference in 1975 was a joint collaboration between the Department and the Council. It replaced the Narrabeen Conference and was the first three-day fully-residential conference of secondary principals, with two of those days in school time. It comprised a compulsory Department 'staff conference' on Thursday and Friday, Friday night conference dinner and Council business and professional development on the Saturday. It was funded by the Department and travel and accommodation expenses were paid for all principals in attendance. It was held at the University of NSW and was seen as a major feather in the cap of the NSW Council.]

One additional problem, as the NSW Council's July 1975 conference drew closer, was that two metropolitan Areas (Central Metropolitan and St George) still hadn't established a Principals' Council for their Areas. For representation on the NSW Council's Management Committee they still relied on the delegates from the Metropolitan Headmasters' Council and the Women Principals' Council. However, the existence of these two delegates created a problem for the NSW Council, as it also had delegates from the Metropolitan Area Councils that had already been formed, meaning that most metropolitan principals had double representation.

The resolution to these problems first began to emerge in March 1975, when the Women Principals' Council wrote to the Headmasters' Council indicating that they had been directed by the Director of Secondary Education (Arthur Buchan) to commence discussions regarding an amalgamation of the two metropolitan organisations, and that this would need to occur prior to the Department's full implementation of its regional structure across the state in 1976. The Executive of the two groups subsequently met in April and again in September that year to discuss this matter.

It was at a combined meeting in October 1975 that the two metropolitan groups finally officially merged to form a new 'Council of Metropolitan High School Principals', with a new Executive being elected for 1976.

The amalgamation continues ...

Despite the amalgamation discussions that were occurring between the two metropolitan councils during 1975, in September of that same year Arthur Buchan also raised with the Metropolitan Headmasters the issue of how the metropolitan councils were perceived by 'some administrators' within the Department as being out of step with the times. These people (the Area Directors and the Director of Secondary Education himself?) felt that the existence of a single strong metropolitan council stood in the way of moves to decentralise the Department into regions and it also detracted from the standing of the individual city and country Regional Principals' Councils at a time when regions and regional structures were the priority.

Subsequent discussions with the Director of Secondary Education led to him basically telling the Metropolitan Council that it needed to find some way of merging with the NSW Council because this other Council represented all the Area Councils across the state. Around that same time however, Arthur Buchan also approached the NSW Council and expressed concern that the existence of three major Councils plus all the Regional Councils required rationalisation into one New Council representing all secondary principals across the state. He suggested that the NSW Council could provide the model for this to happen.

In March 1976 a joint meeting of the Executive of both the NSW Council and the Metropolitan Council met to consider proposals for an amalgamation of the two groups. The joint meeting recognised two essentials:

- the NSW Council needed the strength of numbers of the Metropolitan Council
- the Metropolitan Council needed the status of the NSW Council and the support of the Department, which the NSW Council now enjoyed.

As a result they all agreed in principle to an amalgamation that would seek to bring together the best elements of the Headmasters' Council, Women Principals' Council and NSW Council. A range of issues were subsequently discussed in relation to the Council's structure and constitution etc and these proposals were taken back to both principals' group for discussion, debate and approval in the weeks that followed. These proposals included:

- That the Council of Metropolitan High School Principals should merge with the NSW Council of High School Principals to become the NSW High Schools Principals' Council, representing all eligible secondary principals.
- That the New Council should retain the independence currently enjoyed by the current Councils.
- That the New Council should adopt the structure of the old NSW Council, with control residing in a Management Committee consisting of the Council Executive plus three delegates from each Region to meet once each term.
- That the New Council should adopt the practice of the old Metropolitan Council in having a general plenary meeting of all principals once per term during school time.
- That the New Council should adopt the Constitution of the old NSW Council, with minor changes that included the Annual General Meeting and election of Executive being moved from the July Annual Conference to the Term 3 Plenary Meeting each year.
- That the New Executive should comprise 25% representation from non-metropolitan regions.
- That Area Principals' Councils should be encouraged and supported in their growth, and that these councils should deal with regional matters while the State Council should focus its attention on state-wide matters.

In April 1976 a subsequent meeting of the Combined Executive from both Councils firmly agreed that the two groups would now combine. In addition, it was also agreed that all members of the Executive from both existing groups would comprise the New Councils' Interim Executive until the election of the 1977 office bearers, which was proposed to take place at the Council's State Plenary Meeting in October 1976*.

[*However, due to circumstances that unfolded later, the Interim Executive continued to operate until April 1977 when, finally, the New Council was approved by the Department and a new Executive was elected.]

The Interim Executive was as follows:

President	Reg Clarke, Hurlstone Agricultural High School (President of the Metropolitan Council)
Senior Vice President	Alf Gray, Pennant Hills High School (President of the NSW Council)
Vice Presidents	Shirley Hokin, North Sydney Girls High School (Immediate Past President of the Women Principals' Council) Vanessa King, Narrabeen Girls High School (NSW Council) Peter Johnman, North Sydney Boys High School (Metropolitan Council)
Secretary	Joe Byrne, Seven Hills High School (Metropolitan Council)
Assistant Secretary	Bruce Bensley, Newcastle Technical High School (NSW Council)
Treasurer	Al Kemp, Pendle Hill High School (Metropolitan Council)
Assistant Treasurer	Vere Humphries, Canterbury Girls High School (NSW Council)

In addition, two more country principals were also invited to join this Interim Executive, thereby increasing country representation. These two principals were Jack Johnstone (Keira High School) and Morrie Beaton (Wagga Wagga High School).

Trouble lies ahead

Later that same day in April 1976 several members of the Combined Executive met with Arthur Buchan to

outline their proposals for the New Council. He subsequently replied to them by letter in mid-June, following consultation with the Regional Directors, indicating that approval had been given for:

- A meeting of the Executive and three regional delegates per region once per term
- A meeting of the Executive once per term in advance of the delegates' meeting
- A meeting of the President, Secretary and one other member of the Executive with the Assistant Director-General and Director of Secondary Education following each Management Committee meeting.

These approvals were to apply from the start of 1977, but the Council's current meeting arrangements for the 1976 school year could continue as planned.

The problem with Arthur Buchan's reply was that it removed approval for Regional Principals' Councils to meet independently of Regional Directors' meetings, and it also removed the existing Metropolitan Council's plenary-style meetings of all principals once per term, which had been in existence in the city for more than 20 years and which all principals valued enormously for their information sharing, professional development and networking opportunities with other principals.

The reason behind this decision initially appeared to be that some Regional Directors didn't want their principals out of school more than once per term, particularly if it involved travel to Sydney for a meeting that some of them deemed irrelevant (and for which they had to use regional funds to provide rail warrants), when they believed that their own regional principals' meetings (which many of them effectively controlled) were far superior*. The other reason provided several months later was that the Department was very keen for Regional Principals' Councils to flourish during this time of 'regionalism' of the Department, and that the diversion of principals to state meetings in the city might adversely impact on the effectiveness of Regional Councils.

[*For some Regional Directors the growing power of principals was a direct challenge to their own ever-expanding regional power, which many of them sought to consolidate even further. In one document written at the time, it refers to regions as now being 'regional kingdoms' with any 'requests' from Regional Directors now considered as 'royal commands'. Given principals' views on the considerable inadequacies of some Regional Director-approved Regional Council meetings and the immense value of the far more professionally-focused State Council plenary meetings, trouble was brewing.]

In July 1976 a plenary meeting of the New Council took place as a direct result of Arthur Buchan's previous approval that existing arrangements for 1976 could still go ahead for this year only. Invited to this meeting were all metropolitan and country principals plus three delegates from each country region who were to be specifically funded by the Department to ensure regional representation. At this meeting there was considerable discussion of Arthur Buchan's letter and as expected, a fierce resolve emerged from the meeting to fight for the continuation of state plenary meetings each term and regional meetings independent of Regional Directors' meetings.

The final power play

It is obvious from the original source documents in the NSWSPC archives that for secondary principals, 1976 was a year of some considerable anxiety about the future of the New Council. Not only was there some resistance to it expressed by the Minister, but some Regional Directors also appeared to be against the state-level Council in favour of the growth of their own Regional Principals' Council, forcing Arthur Buchan (now Assistant Director-General and Director of Secondary Education) to back off from fully supporting every aspect of the New Council as suggested by principals.

However, just as important at this time, the NSW Teachers' Federation mounted an offensive against the New Council because it saw the emergence of this more powerful state-wide principals' council as a significant threat to its own power and authority. As early as 1970 the Federation had written to the Director of Secondary Education strongly protesting at the discussion of issues of an industrial nature between him and the Headmasters' Council, and this campaign gradually grew in intensity over the following years to come to a head in 1976-77.

In September 1976 Arthur Buchan wrote to the New Council advising that the Department had reconsidered the situation and was now prepared to allow the release of all principals for one meeting per year, provided that this replaced one of the proposed term delegates meetings and principals stayed on for a second day in their own time, thus allowing a two-day conference at which a plenary meeting could be held (i.e. there could be one plenary meeting per year).

In October 1976, with the state plenary meeting issue still not resolved to the satisfaction of principals and the Teachers' Federation highly displeased, the last plenary meeting of the New Council for 1976 occurred in Wollongong. The purpose of this meeting was to consider progress in the formation of the New Council and elect a new Executive for 1977.

The mood of the meeting was both anger and disappointment given that the Department was not prepared to accept the New Council's request for the continuation of state plenary meetings each term into 1977. It was decided to seek from Arthur Buchan time for further submissions from the Council on this matter before he made a final decision or recommendation to the Director-General. In addition there was also a final motion that the Council should arrange a plenary meeting for early 1977 anyway, whether or not it had official approval. Given the very tense situation that currently existed, it was decided to leave the existing Interim Executive in place until that meeting, now planned for April.

In November 1976, following a meeting of the Interim Executive post-Wollongong, representatives from that Executive met with Arthur Buchan to discuss the New Council's situation and outline their members' current mood. The Executive decided to delay calling the proposed April plenary meeting in favour of calling a delegates' meeting in February to coincide with the next Regional Directors' meeting in Sydney, where it was hoped that a meeting of Council delegates and Regional Directors could take place.

In December a delegation from the Council Executive met with the Minister, Eric Bedford, given his apparent resistance to the proposed further development of the Council. This subsequently resulted in a letter from the Council to the Minister formally stating the proposals and conditions that would allow recognition and formation of the New Council, supported by a detailed research paper on the history of secondary principals' councils in NSW written by Bill Myles (as mentioned previously, Bill had been President of the Headmasters' Council from 1973-1975 and then, following his retirement at the end of 1975, he had become the New Council's Research Officer).

Although the Minister still appeared unconvinced, in January 1977 he wrote to the Council requesting that they arrange another meeting with him in February.

Resolution of the issues

February 14, 1977 was a critical day for the New Council. In addition to a special meeting of regional delegates and the Executive to consider progress in the formation of the Council, there had been the request from the Minister for a delegation to meet with him and the Assistant Director-General (Arthur Buchan) to decide its future, plus a meeting at the end of the day had been arranged with all the Regional Directors, who appeared to be increasingly opposed to the Council's full-day state plenary meetings that could, in theory, involve all members across the state. As the minutes of this special meeting recorded, "We are fighting for our very existence".

Later that day the delegation to the Minister returned to the delegates' meeting and reported that they would be told the Council's future the following week, after the Minister had consulted the new (incoming) Director-General Doug Swan, who was taking up his position the following day. However they were also advised that they could also make arrangements for a state plenary meeting in April, as originally planned.

On 2 March 1977 Doug Swan wrote to the Council and advised it that approval had been given for the formation of the New Council on a twelve-month trial basis – probably the first policy decision made by him in his new role as Director-General.

Approval for the formation of the New Council was based on the following key points:

- That the Metropolitan Council's full-day plenary meetings held in school time each term could remain, but in addition to all principals from the five metropolitan regions being able to attend, the Department would also provide rail warrants for three delegates from each of the six country

Regions plus all country members of the Executive.

- That an Executive meeting (i.e. Management Committee meeting), comprising the Executive plus one delegate from each Regional Council, should be held in school time prior to each full-day plenary meeting so as to finalise the agenda and items for discussion.
- That as soon as possible after each meeting of the Council there should be a meeting with the Director-General (or his nominee) by the President, Secretary and two other representatives from the Council Executive to discuss important issues arising from the meeting.
- That if the Council were to hold an annual conference in conjunction with one of the plenary meetings and partly over the weekend, the Department would favourably consider the release of all country principals to allow their attendance.

On 22 April 1977 the first state plenary meeting of the New Council took place at Canterbury-Hurlstone Park RSL Club with 140 principals in attendance. Invited to this were all principals from across the state, plus the Executive and three funded delegates from each of the country regions. (However, given the location of this meeting in Sydney and the difficulties of country principals getting to the meeting, the result was that the vast majority of principals at this meeting were from metropolitan Sydney.)

It was at this meeting that a new Executive was elected for the remainder of 1977 and a new Constitution defining the Council's structures and meetings was adopted. The first office bearers of the now-confirmed New Council were as follows, comprising representatives from both the Metropolitan and NSW Councils*:

President	Reg Clarke, Hurlstone Agricultural High School (previously President of the Metropolitan Council)
Vice President	Alf Gray, Pennant Hills High School (previously President of the NSW Council)
Secretary	Joe Byrne, Seven Hills High School (Metropolitan Council)
Assistant Secretary	Bruce Bensley, Broadmeadow High School (NSW Council)
Treasurer	Al Kemp, Pendle Hill High School (Metropolitan Council)

[*Council elections at this time comprised nominations taken from the floor at the state plenary meeting, with the ballot being determined by the voices, but if it appeared to be close then there would be a show of hands. This method of electing Council's office bearers continued through until the very early 90s when a state-wide postal ballot was finally introduced to enable maximum member participation across the state.

It's also interesting to note that while the first NSWSPC President (Reg Clarke) had come from the Metropolitan Headmasters' Council, the second President (Bruce Bensley) came from the NSW Council and had also been President of the Hunter Region Principals' Council, while the third President (Nancye Harris) came from the Women Principals' Council – perhaps an excellent example of the intricacies of politics?]

The new Constitution included among other things that:

- Membership would be open to all principals of public secondary schools and central schools in NSW
- Regional Councils would manage their own affairs within the framework of the new State Council
- The Executive would comprise five elected officers plus one representative from each Regional Council
- The Executive would meet prior to each Council plenary meeting and at other times as required
- Representatives of the Executive should meet with the Director-General after each plenary meeting
- Council plenary meetings would occur once per term and all Council members were invited
- The Annual General Meeting would be held during the Term 3 Council plenary meeting.

The New Council's first annual conference (a two-day residential conference involving one day in school time and one day on the weekend) was held at Goulburn College of Advanced Education on Friday 5 and Saturday 6 August 1977.

What was later to be renamed the NSW Secondary Principals' Council had survived its first major challenges and was now officially in existence.

Brian Ralph, December 2019

Contributor details

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Brian was Principal of Auburn GHS (1992-2002), NSWSPC Futures Principal (2003), Secondary Principal in the Secondary Education Directorate (2004-2005) and Principal Liaison Officer Strategic Initiatives Directorate/Student Engagement Directorate (2006-2009). He was a member of the NSWSPC Executive from 1995-2009 and is a Life Member of the NSWSPC. Currently Brian is the coordinator of the NSWSPC Retired Principals' Network and NSWSPC Principal Futures Website.