

1981 – The Impact of Powerful New Bodies

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Major Papers/Reports

- The 'Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon the School Certificate' (the McGowan Report, 1981) – recommended elimination of the School Certificate and major changes to the curriculum. Proposals re teaching and assessment practices included significant impacts for the way schools operated (*see summary of recommendations on page 4*).
- The Thomas Committee's 'Pupil Behaviour and Discipline Report' became the 'Self-Discipline and Pastoral Care Report' – which no longer addressed the original concerns of problem behaviour. While stressing community-based decision making, the report recognised the principal's role in establishing policies that parents and teachers would understand and accept.
- 'Maintenance of the Six Year Secondary School': N Harris, NSWSPC AHSPA Rep. – was a history of NSW education listing reasons why a junior/senior school construct wouldn't benefit students or teachers.
- 'Survey of Teacher Absences': Hunter Region SPC – suggested that employing casuals after one day's absence, rather than two, would reduce teacher absences and provide potential cost savings for DoE.
- 'Changes to the Staffing Formula': Central Met Region – proposed more flexibility as enrolments changed.
- The Ministerial 'Report on Religious Education' – supported the status quo and included a reference to the practice in some schools of local churches financing a member of school staff.

Major Impacts on DoE, Schools and Principals

- The principal functions of the NSW Education Commission, established the previous year with its elected representatives of the teaching service, were to employ teachers, determine their conditions of work and be the primary advisory body to the Minister on educational policies, priorities and planning. The Minister, Paul Landa, in response to Council's request for representation on its major policy committees, advised that government policy was to invite the Teachers Federation to nominate representatives of the profession, but it would welcome the Council separately responding to any review on behalf of principals.
- The Federal Government launched (and initially funded) its Transition Education Program to increase retention rates in schools, based on Victoria's two-tier system of academic and vocational schools. While the states were required to match the grant in the first year, in subsequent years the total amount for the transition programs was taken out of the recurrent grants to states, reducing funding for other priorities at State level.

Council Matters

- The Council reaffirmed support for retaining existing appointment procedures for principals (via the Inspectorate, promotions lists and seniority) despite pressure from the Education Commission, parent bodies and the media for parent/teacher involvement in the selection of principals and the introduction of limited tenure after appointment.
- The President reminded members that Council, with no real authority, could only influence policies and procedures by strategic planning and evidence-based submissions.
- The Director-General of Education (DG), Doug Swan, continued to invite principal representation on DoE committees and Council was invited to talk to the 'Inquiry into the Inspectorate'.

- The Council needed to face existing and future challenges with little expectation of increased resourcing.
- Annual Conference, which was held at Hawkesbury Agricultural College, rejected moves to include assessments in HSC examination results, although it was felt that they could be reported separately.
- Council expressed concerns about a lack of information when students excluded from non-government schools were being enrolled by Regional Offices into their local public school.

Relationships with the Department

- DoE printed the Council's 1981 Annual Conference papers and again assured the Council of funding for the May 1982 Australian High School Principals' Association (AHSPA) conference, to be held over three days at the Sydney Opera House. It was also agreed that all principals would be released to attend this conference and country principals would have their travel and accommodation funded.
- DoE advised that a report on 'Equal Opportunity' was to be presented to the Government and further advice would be provided to schools.
- Council concerns about current audit procedures being adopted by school auditors and their lack of understanding on how schools operated led to recommendations for change. To ensure that the rules would be clear, the DoE began developing a finance manual and associated training for all principals.
- The DG asked Council to review procedures used when a principal was setting up a new school.
- A memo from the DG reminded teachers that in the 1950s, the school day in high schools was extended by 30 minutes to provide for a sports afternoon and the previous requirement for high school teachers to be present 30 minutes before school no longer applied, provided schools ensured some form of effective supervision was in place.
- The results of a survey of school fees (230 responses) led to a statement by the Minister and DG that "fees for elective subjects are not voluntary fees".

The Teachers Federation

- The DG was reportedly frustrated by the increasing power of the Teachers Federation in influencing government policy and the way in which schools were managed.
- Concern was expressed by principals that the Federation was advising staff on significant policy and procedural matters being considered by the Education Commission before principals were advised of these deliberations, potentially setting up conflict situations.

Other Matters

- A motion from John Hale (Orange HS) at Annual Conference recommending the creation of an industrial body to represent principals was ruled as being out outside the constitution, despite being supported by a number of country regions.
- One school found significant disruptions to teaching time and classroom learning was caused by regular interruptions impacting on day-to-day school operations and it was suggested to other principals that this was worth checking in their own schools.
- Proposed changes to the state superannuation scheme were foreshadowed with more information to be provided.
- There was concern over a directive in some regions that the District Inspector's approval was required for principals or teachers to leave the school premises during the school day.
- DoE disquiet about the McGowan Report led to The Entrance High School's 'Vertical Semester System' curriculum experiment being shut down. This experiment involved structuring curriculum offerings in

semester blocks and students not being restricted to their own year cohort in order to study those courses that suited them best and interested them most.

Items of Interest

- The new Education Commission set as its priorities for 1981 programs in Special Education and Aboriginal Education and the provision of Consultants for the Disabled. They determined to increase school counsellor ratios and to reduce the burden on parents by increasing per capita and textbook allowances for schools.
- Funding for executive restructuring, reduction in class sizes and other benefits for schools was no longer possible due to the impact of the Education Commission's decisions and the cost associated with the Commonwealth Government's Transition Education Program.

Please see below for a summary of the McGowan Report.

The McGowan Report: Summary taken from the 'Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon the School Certificate', NSW Parliament Legislative Assembly, 1981 (Chaired by Brian McGowan)

Key recommendations from the 39 recommendations included in the final report:

- The School Certificate should be abolished and replaced by a new credential, the Certificate of Secondary Education, available to all students beyond the legal leaving age. This certificate should be issued by schools, comprise of a record of achievement in the years leading up to its award, and be available to students whenever they leave school, be it in Year 9, 10, 11, or 12.
- Schools should develop courses for the special needs and interest of their students. Such courses must gain the approval of the central authority for implementation and for eligibility for inclusion in the Certificate of Secondary Education.
- All courses should be offered in half-yearly semester units. Students should be able to select new courses every semester with greater opportunities to include a range of subjects.
- The first semester of Year 7 should be a time to assist students to adapt to secondary schooling.
- While all courses should be in semester units, in major subject areas they should provide opportunities for sustained study, i.e. most courses should be part of course sequences.
- Every course that is part of a sequence should be a prerequisite for every later course in that sequence. Students should not be eligible to choose a course until they have passed all its pre-requisites or co-requisites.
- Schools should provide special courses for special needs to meet the needs of students who require remediation, are about to enter the work force, or have special talents and interests.
- Students should know exactly what is required of them and published course outlines should include aims and objectives, material to be covered and learning experiences provided, material required and the cost, achievements that will need to be demonstrated to pass, and specific details of assessment procedures and course requirements.
- Students should be assessed by the school in each semester course, and if not demonstrating the achievement specified in the course should fail that course. There should be two consequences of failure:
 - a) That this course should not be added to the student's record of achievement.
 - b) That this student should not *normally* be eligible to select subsequent courses until such time as the failed course has been successfully repeated.
- Students who fail should have a right to repeat courses.
- Schools should provide full and frank reasons for failure to students and parents.
- The central authority should have available two kinds of semester courses:
 - a) courses that have been declared by the Minister to be compulsory for all students;
 - b) other approved courses which schools may choose to offer from those courses approved by the Authority.
- Students should be able to select courses on the basis of their readiness and ability to undertake them, rather than on the basis of their age or year cohort. That is, it should be possible for classes to reflect ability grouping across years.
- Students should not be categorised into permanent groups but be free to select either mainstream, academic courses or specific purpose courses, but schools should provide appropriate counselling services to parents and students.
- All semester courses should be allocated the same number of teaching periods. Subjects which warrant relatively little study time overall should be given their full allocation over one or two semesters, while subjects that warrant deeper and more sustained study should be available through two or more complementary courses.
- Each semester, schools should notify the central authority of all approved courses to be added to each student's record-of-achievement.
- School zoning, i.e. the practice which directs all government school students to attend the school designated for the area in which they live, should be abolished.

You can read more about the McGowan Report by clicking [here](#).