



12 November 2024

To The Minister For Education,
The Hon. Prue Car, MP
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Re: Concerns with NESAs process and HSC DRAMA syllabus reform

Dear Minister

We are writing as a group of concerned academics to express serious concerns regarding the proposed changes to the HSC Drama syllabus by the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESAs), particularly concerning the Group Performance component.

The HSC Drama program has long been distinguished by its emphasis on performance-based assessment, which has proven instrumental in



developing students' creative, collaborative, and communication skills.

Currently, HSC Drama students present a carefully developed 10-minute performance before visiting examiners, representing months of dedicated preparation and refinement.

The proposed draft of the Drama syllabus downgrades and sidelines this aspect of the subject preferring a token written task. This leaves us in the absurd position of having a performing arts syllabus without an emphasis on performance. Similarly, research tells us that live performance is critical to studying theatre craft and live in-person assessors are the only way to accurately assess live performance. Removing the external examination, and therefore its importance and focus within classroom pedagogy, means that the knowledge and skills developed in this capstone devising task will not be demonstrated or assessed in a high stakes context. The review also limits the options for student's Individual projects and removes the practical and tangible elements of some that remain.

The changes contained in the proposed syllabus are at odds with the intent of the review process.

Emphasising written reflection rather than embodied performance in assessment is a failure to meet one of the key syllabus review intentions and obligations. The review committed to 'strive to meet the needs of a

wide range of students, including those who are Aboriginal, or from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, or living with disabilities'^[1].

The second goal of the NSW Curriculum review emphasises developing students' skills in applying knowledge, with collaboration and creative thinking specifically highlighted ^[2].

The draft syllabus also appears to contradict the goals and outcomes of the newly endorsed Drama 7-10 syllabus which maintains the centrality of devising and recognises the embodied nature of drama knowledge. The review also stressed the importance of 'listening' to teacher voices in the process, something that appears not to have occurred. The proposed syllabus for Year 11 and 12 represents a regression in complexity and rigour.

Research cited within NESA's own syllabus documentation including our own substantiates the unique capacity of drama to enhance collaborative skills, foster creativity, and develop advanced communication abilities. The Group Performance component has been exceptionally effective in achieving these educational outcomes while providing students with authentic opportunities for creative expression and agency—increasingly rare commodities in contemporary education.

We have concerns over the transparency of the process. While NESAs maintain that their consultation process remains ongoing, there is no indication that the significant concerns raised by experienced educators are being adequately considered. This pattern unfortunately mirrors recent experiences with changes to the English syllabus, where pedagogical expertise was seemingly subordinated to administrative considerations. The current trajectory risks diminishing the vibrancy and effectiveness of performing arts syllabus. The systematic reduction of opportunities for students to demonstrate skills beyond narrowly defined assessment criteria is particularly concerning. To ensure our education system continues to serve all students effectively, we urge you to do the following:

1. Undertake a public audit into NESAs' processes into performing arts syllabus revision.
2. Direct NESAs to genuinely and transparently engage with the feedback provided during the consultation period from teachers, students and curriculum experts
3. Provide a new draft syllabus that adequately respects teacher and academic expertise and meets the intentions of the review process regarding skills and inclusivity and open a new consultation



4. Give appropriate weight to the expert opinions of experienced drama teachers

The integrity of the performing arts is at stake in NSW schools and beyond. At the moment we have an un teachable draft syllabus that disregards teacher expertise. While the consultation is ongoing we have no faith in NESAs process as they have developed a syllabus that does not adequately support students in drama in NSW Schools.

We look forward to your response.

Regards

Prof Michael Anderson (corresponding signatory)

Professor of Arts and Creativity Education and Co-Director of the Create Centre, The University of Sydney

Prof Michael Balfour

Professor of Theatre and Performance and Head of School of the Arts and Media, University of NSW

Dr Natasha Beaumont

The University of Sydney



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Dr Gavin Beck

The University of Newcastle

Prof Robyn Ewing AM

Co-Director CREATE Centre and Professor Emerita, The University of
Sydney

Prof Kelly Freebody

Head of School, School of Education and Social WorkThe University of
Sydney

Dr Paul Gardiner

The University of Wollongong

Dr Matthew Harper

The University of Newcastle

Dr Christine Hatton

University of Newcastle



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Dr Rachael Jacobs

The University of Western Sydney

Professor Jacqueline Manuel

Professor of English Education, The University of Sydney

Dr Alison Grove O'Grady

Chair Initial Teacher education, The University of Sydney

Dr David Roy

The University of Newcastle

Dr John Saunders

Australian Catholic University