

Professor Geoff Masters
Review Lead
NSW Curriculum Review Taskforce

Society and Culture Association of NSW (SCANSW) Response to the Interim Report of the NESA Curriculum Review

Dear Professor Masters,

The Society and Culture Association (SCA) supports teaching and learning in Stage 6 Society and Culture throughout rural, regional and metropolitan New South Wales. We represent 254 individual and Institutional members across all school systems and are active in providing quality professional development, educational resources and dynamic events (live and webcast) for Society and Culture students and their teachers to access. The SCA is committed to promoting a love of learning and enhance their educational achievements for both teachers and students. Further information on our diverse programs can be viewed on our website: www.sca.nsw.edu.au/

We have conducted a questionnaire to our membership specifically focused on key issues in the Interim Report which pertain to Society and Culture and the broader curriculum review process. The questionnaire was open for responses to be submitted over a period of four days, and the number of responses generated within that short time is a clear indication of the vested interest, and value of our subject to both students and teachers. We would also like to raise our concerns related to the limited amount of time allocated by the taskforce for submissions to be organised, gathered and provided to the review taskforce, especially in consideration of the fact that many teachers were HSC marking, assessing and writing reports and undertaking additional significant tasks which add to their regular workloads due to end of year requirements.

Responses from our members provided feedback from 201 individuals including teachers, current and graduate students from regional and metropolitan NSW with respondents from Department of Education, Catholic and Independent sectors. This feedback provides both qualitative and quantitative data which has been applied to the responses in this communication. Our responses to the Interim Report are targeted to address issues that our Committee have identified as the most pertinent to questions raised and the reform directions and feature evidence and considerations related to:

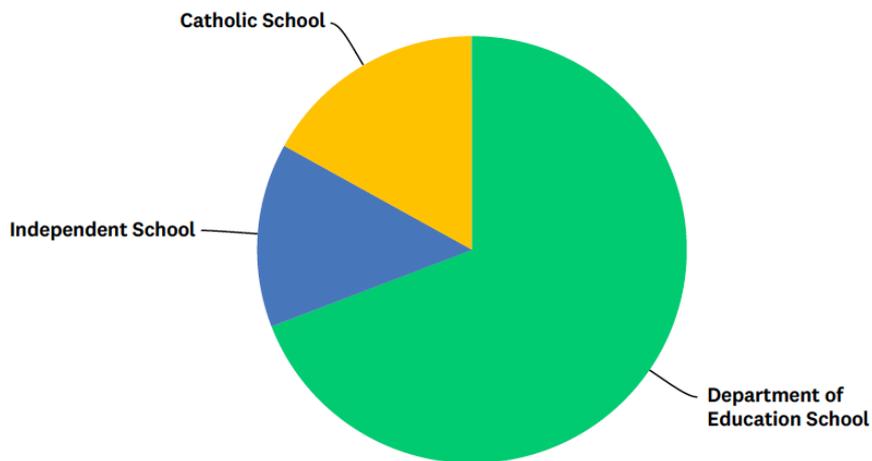
1. **Notion of the 'crowded curriculum'**
2. **Integrated Learning**
3. **Range of skills**
4. **Single major project**
5. **Student agency**
6. **Conceptual understandings**
7. **Integrated approach to both theory and application.**

Our respondents were:

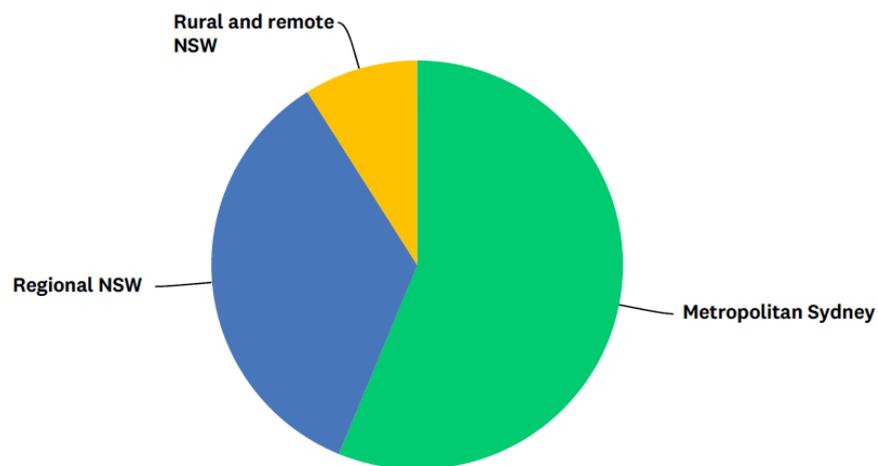
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A teacher	65.67%	132
A current student	28.36%	57
A graduate student	4.98%	10
Other (please specify)	1.00%	2
TOTAL		201

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Parent of graduate student	12/8/2019 10:39 PM
2	Past year 11 student	12/4/2019 11:49 PM

Representing the following sectors:

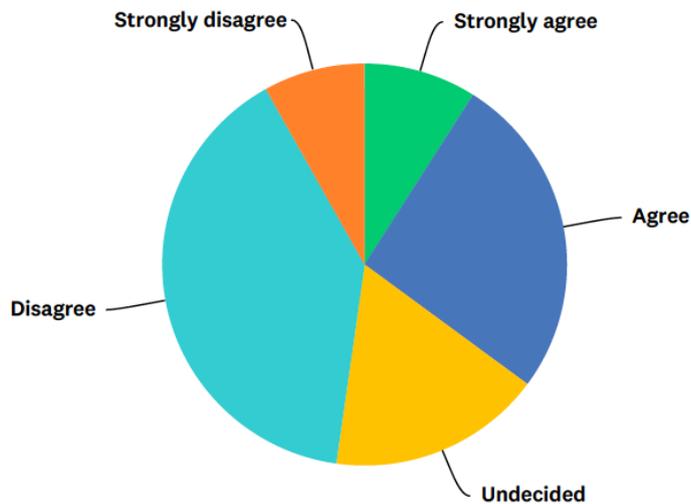


Within these regions of NSW:



1. Evidence and responses to questions regarding the notion of the 'crowded curriculum'

Q4. The Interim Report identifies that there is an overload of content in many syllabuses. To what extent do you believe this applies to the S&C syllabus?



Question 4. Please explain reasons for your response and if you have identified 'agree' please detail which dot points/sections of the syllabus you would want removed.

The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:

- Respondent 5 *Society and culture is conceptually based and comprises of a research project and thus has struck a perfect balance of rigour and content without overloading it with content.*
- Respondent 7 *The non-prescriptive nature of the course is actually perfect for addressing the 'overload' in other courses. It allows the teacher the professional judgement to create a unit of work that addresses the syllabus but also gives plenty of flexibility.*
- Respondent 12 *I don't believe that the course is as content heavy as other subjects such English, Legal Studies and Business Studies. The Personal Interest Project does place pressure on teachers to establish a balance between providing enough time for students to work on the major project while still progressing through the course at a sufficient pace. I believe that students also struggle with establishing this balance.*
- Respondent 24 *Syllabus dot points are flexible and intersect with each other. There's a real emphasis on learning skills and concepts and building on how students apply them across the course. Content can sometimes be as much or as little as your class demands. Our syllabus is not too content heavy. However, it is an issue with the curriculum in general.*
- Respondent 26 *I enjoy the rigour of the current syllabus. It may be a demanding course, but there's nothing in the syllabus that students don't need to know. Challenge them with as much as possible about this complex world, I say.*
- Respondent 35 *As a concepts-based course, Society and Culture naturally involves deep discussions with students that can result in lessons going over time allowances. I feel that these discussions are vital to ensure students develop social and cultural literacy. However, due to the plethora of dot points to 'tick off', I often find myself cutting these important discussions short in order to finish content.*
- Respondent 41 *I feel that this is the only syllabus that I teach that isn't overloaded. I think it is well balanced.*
- Respondent 42 *The combination of the content requirements for the core study, two depth studies and PIP can be untenable for students, especially those within limited or distant access to resources.*
- Respondent 53 *In my experience we had a lot of content given to us, which for a standard subject I would see fit but because we had the major work comprising 40%, I think it would have been more manageable to have a slightly lower workload which we get a deeper understanding of rather than a surface level of a number of topics. In saying this, the workload was doable but required a lot of work at home to keep up (student response)*
- Respondent 58 *I am a relatively new teacher to the subject, but at times it does feel as if you are rushing though the content to ensure you cover all the dot points in the syllabus. I feel that you cannot address them all adequately*

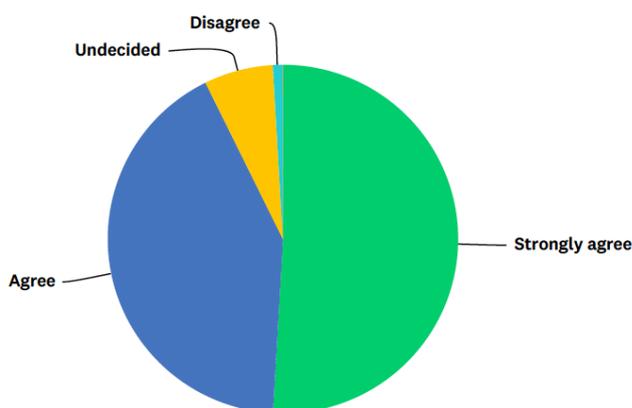
and in depth. As in the Exam there are two 15 mark questions, that may only address a couple of dot points, student can be at a disadvantage if all dot points are not covered equally.

- Respondent 66 *There is little room for depth due to the content required, especially in the 'depth studies' and elective topics. We always run out of time. Because this course is unique to senior years there is a lot of terminology and conceptual understanding that takes time to develop in the preliminary course. This results in too much content there.*
- Respondent 74 *I feel, compared to other subjects, SaC has an appropriate level of content*

In conclusion: There is evidently some divided opinions in our community regarding idea of content overload in Society and Culture. There is evidence to discern that teachers new to the subject do find that the syllabus focus on conceptual understanding rather than prescriptive content requires some adjustment and may encounter some difficulties addressing the range of required learning. However, the more experienced teachers are well adjusted to the course requirements and actively embrace the conceptual learning model that is undertaken within a contemporary context. Society and Culture provides a template for innovative courses of the future which are driven by conceptual understandings instead of a reliance on content focus.

2. Evidence and responses to questions regarding Integrated Learning

Question 5. The Interim Report gives emphasis to 'Integrated Learning' which is identified as combining knowledge, skills, theory and its application. Does the S&C syllabus allow for these elements of learning within the course?



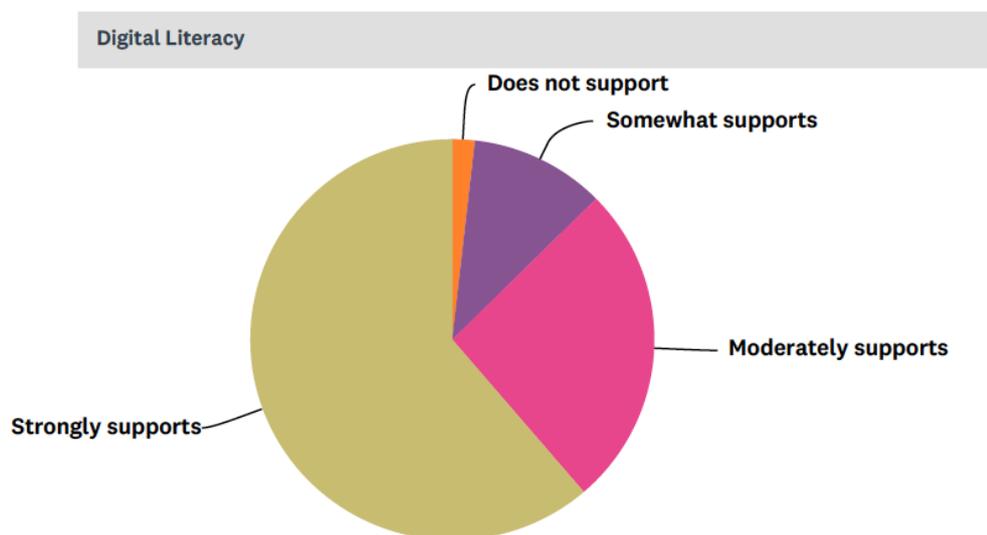
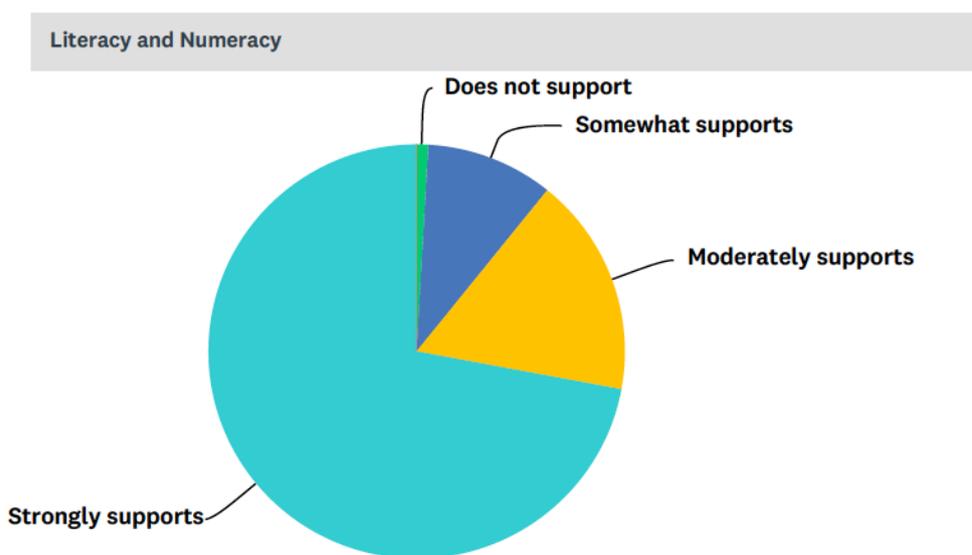
The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:

- Respondent 1 *The PIP, most particularly when students are highly engaged with the process of undertaking and completing it, is probably the best example of Integrated Learning (combining knowledge, skills, theory and its application) taking place in the S+C course. Having said this, the current syllabus provides endless opportunities for integrated learning, for instance when looking at the theory and operation of social constructs, nature vs nurture, communication theories, social change theories, elements of popular culture (commodification, commercialisation, mythology), the adaptations of belief systems and ideologies to modernised society, reasons for conformity and nonconformity, and finally pluralism within Social Inclusion and Exclusion.*
- Respondent 4 *Integrated learning is at the heart of the Society and Culture course. Take for example the concepts which are consistently integrated throughout all topics, and applied in new situations. The PIP allows for students to combine their knowledge of contemporary sociological issues, skills and theory and create an original work. Furthermore, the preliminary course is extremely important for setting up the foundations for the HSC course and transference of knowledge, skills and theory. The Society and Culture course should be considered a shining example of the HSC when it comes to integrated learning.*
- Respondent 12 *Society and Culture as a course is an amalgamation of many different theories of study and academic subjects; in its essence, it represents integrated learning. Coupled with the PIP, the subject allows broad cultural understanding through applied knowledge that represents not only the Society and Culture course, but multiple fields of study.*
- Respondent 34 *Society & Culture is a unique course due to its variability. While students learn theories (and develop knowledge) about social processes in the classroom, it is a course requirement that they then go and investigate these in a practical context. I feel that this feature of the subject enhances its relevance to students who can apply their learning to their own experiences as they make sense of the world.*
- Respondent 61 *Theories of change are learnt and then applied to a case study in class and applied again by the students in the PIP, in a practical manner.*
- Respondent 64 *My ex-students often tell me how well S and C prepared them for university and other learning*

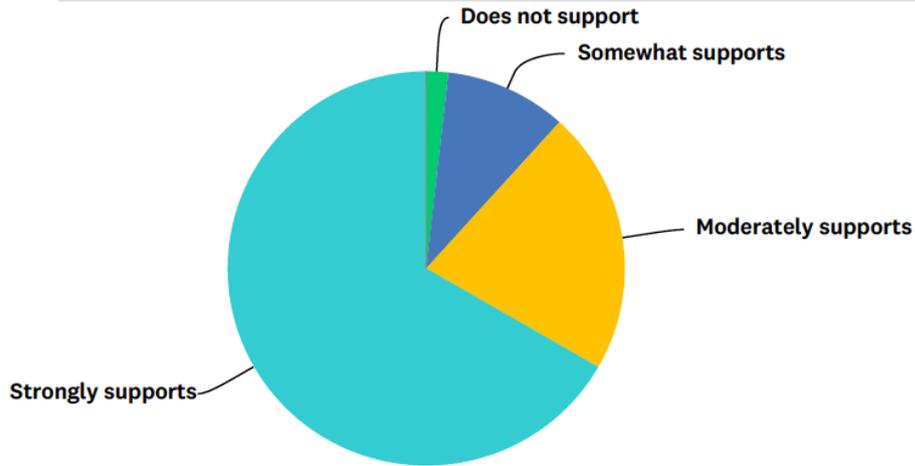
In conclusion: There is an overwhelming positive response to how Society and Culture combines knowledge, skills, theory in its application of meaningful 'Integrated Learning'. The achievements of this course must not be lost in potential revisions of the NSW curriculum.

3. Evidence and responses to questions regarding skills

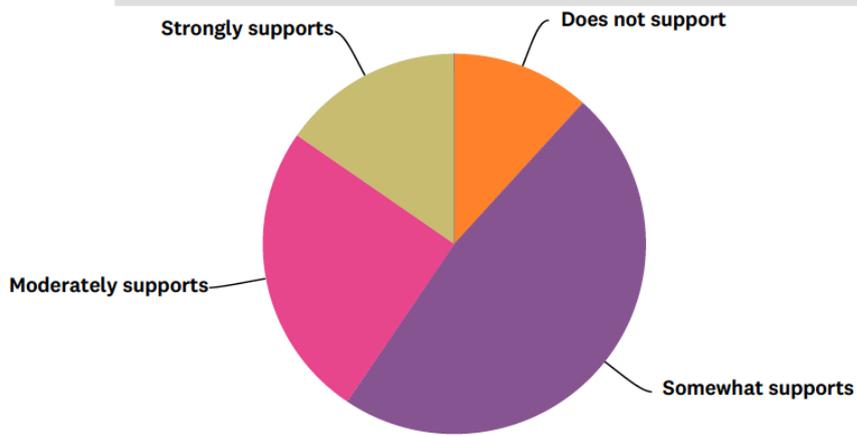
Questions 6-9. The Interim Report identifies need for a range of skills in a variety of areas (listed below) which need ongoing support in the curriculum. Please respond to each in context of how the PIP supports development of these skills.



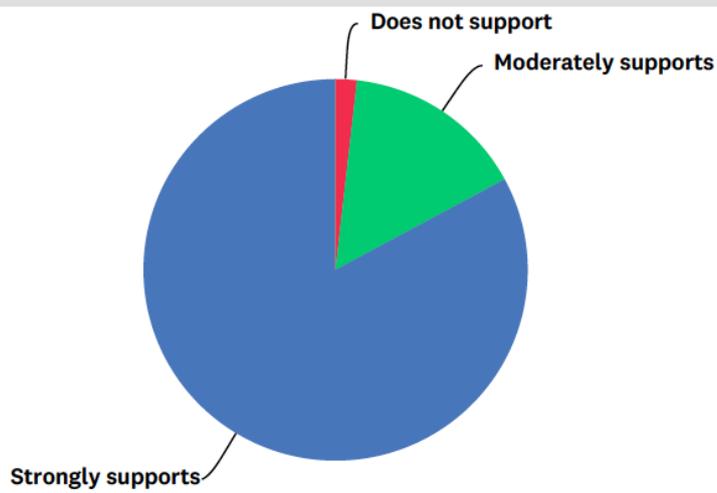
Problem Solving



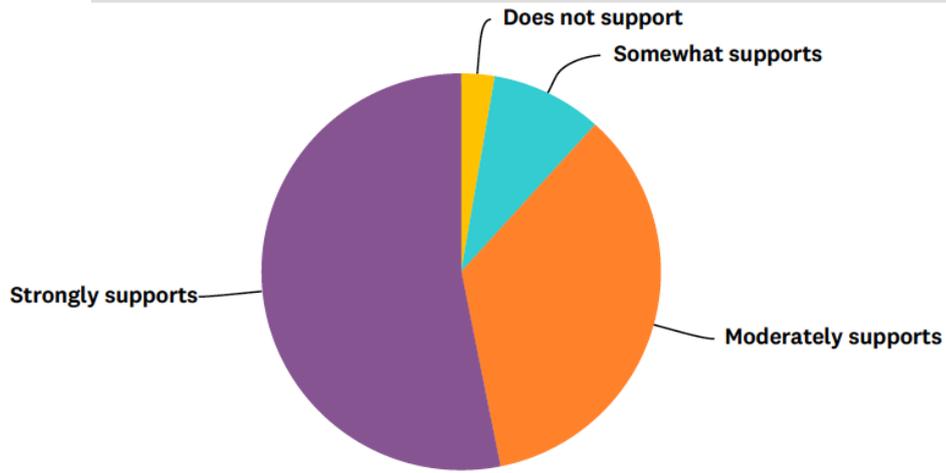
Teamwork



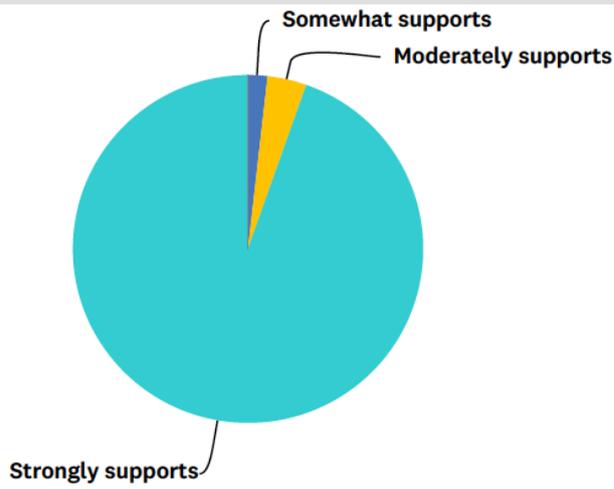
Critical thinking



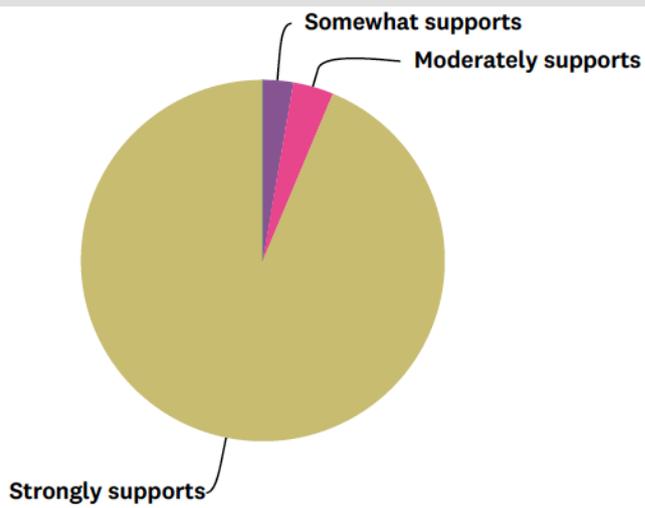
Creative thinking



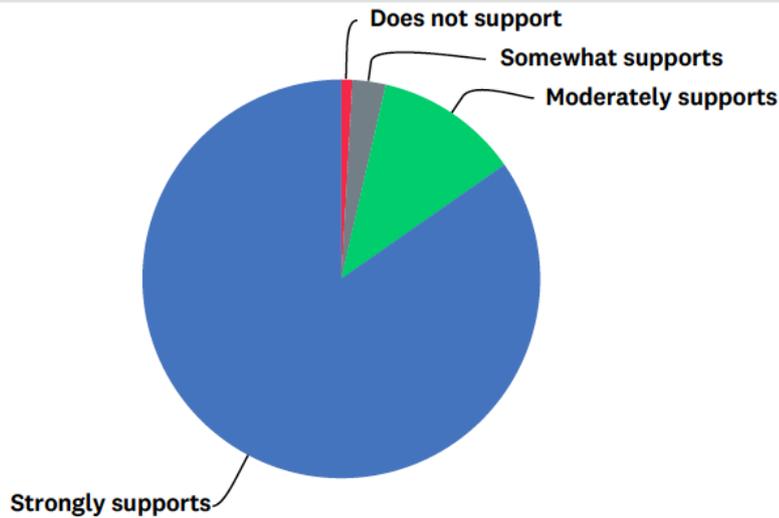
Research skills



Interpreting information and data



Communication skills



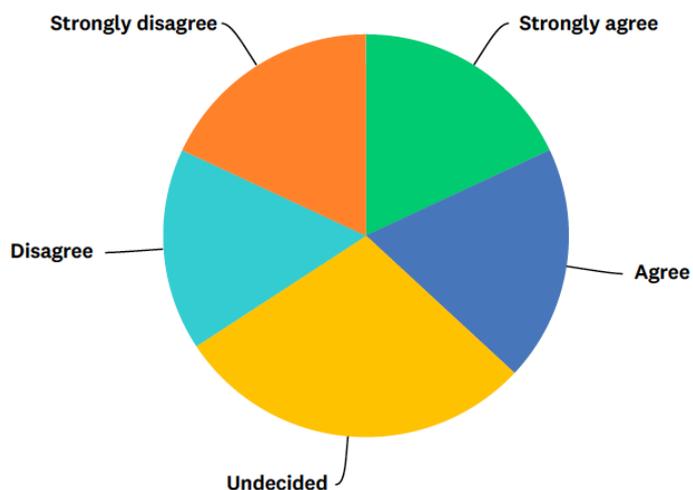
The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:

- Respondent 4 *S&C is a highly skills driven course. The skills developed in S&C help students with their other subjects, and is wonderful preparation for tertiary study, and life in general.*
- Respondent 15 *The PIP enables students to show a wide range of abilities from designing focus questions, primary research, analysing secondary research and interpretation and analysis of data.*
- Respondent 20 *The PIP is fundamental to the course and underpins its approach to integrated learning and critical thinking. It gains tremendous credibility as an externally marked project and provides students with a range of 21st Century learning opportunities.*
- Respondent 26 *Society & Culture requires students to discuss societal issues, understand the actions of others, conduct theoretical and practical research, and navigate ethical discussions in an appropriate and respectful manner. It is for these reasons that the subject caters to all these skills to a high degree.*

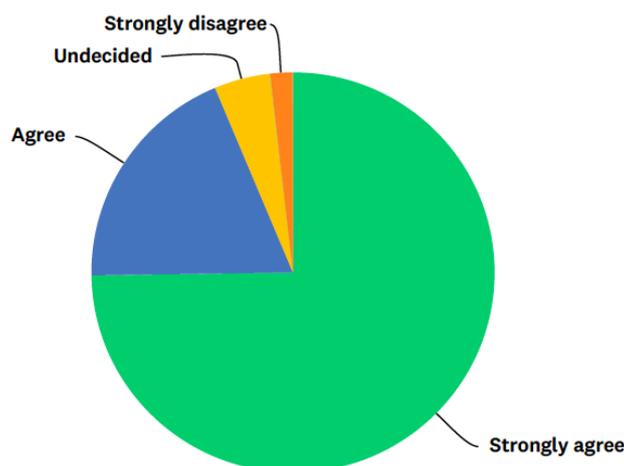
In conclusion: Our teaching community has identified a thoroughly positive response to how the Society and Culture Personal Interest Project develops the full range of skills (except Teamwork - due to the nature of the project). This should not be lost in the planning for change in a curriculum review, as these skills are inherit to the work requirements of a successful research project. The PIP process typically takes nine months to complete. The unique skill set required for the PIP necessitate long term commitment, and are embedded across all aspects of the Society and Culture course in order to encourage a continuum of growth and development.

4. Evidence and responses to questions regarding the undertaking of a single major project

Question 10. The Interim Report identifies need for additional contexts for developing and assessing students’ skills in applying knowledge. The Review is proposing the introduction of a single ‘major project’ as a standalone component of the senior certificate. Students will choose the principal learning area for their project, which will be assessed by teachers using centrally provided criteria. Do you, in principle, support this recommendation?



Question 11. The Personal Interest Project fulfils the requirements of the proposed 'major project'.



Question 12. What would be your response if the PIP were to be replaced by the proposed 'major project' and removed from the S&C syllabus?

The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:

- Respondent 6. *Very unhappy - I feel that the fact the PIP is externally marked adds a strong element of 'seriousness' to the project for students. There is a wide array of fantastic events, resources and discussion surrounding the PIP in its current form which not only encourage and support students in undertaking and completing the PIP, but also provides an excellent professional development base for teachers new to S+C. Also, we have such a great corporate marking process for the PIP which I thoroughly believe, very importantly, results in fair marks being given to every student, as well as significant professional development for all markers, which goes straight into adding value to students.*
- Respondent 14 *I think that this would be terribly disappointing and harm the integrity of the course. The PIP is integral to the course and gives students skills they gain nowhere else in a structured and scaffolded environment. The external marking of the PIP is important, it gives it extra merit in the eyes of the students and keeps the process fair.*
- Respondent 58 *I would be disheartened as I believe the Personal Interest Project is an excellent task which fulfils, as you suggested above, the idea of the "Major Project". This also demonstrates that Society and Culture as a course represents some of the best curriculum design as it allows students to explore their own interests and critically analyse and assess knowledge in the creation of their project. Even though the PIP is a large and complicated project, I am a strong advocate for it and would like to be remain as part of the syllabus.*
- Respondent 77 *Not supportive. The PIP is the foundation of the course as social and cultural literacy and many other skills are taught through this. I have had MANY past students say the PIP is the sole part of the HSC that prepared them for university studies, workplace and life. I would not support its removal.*
- Respondent 94 *The benefit of Society and Culture is that the PIP allows students who may struggle with exams to have access to achieving higher because it is worth 40%. If this is removed does this mean that it will become part of the internal assessment and thus some school with reduce the meaning and the workload that is attached to this. I feel that having the PIP as part of the syllabus, shows students the skills of research and analysing data something that they will need in University*

In conclusion: The extraordinary capacity of Personal Interest project within Society and Culture that successfully drives so many students in their skill acquisition is to be heralded. We are concerned that the significance of this project may be impacted by the curriculum review, as it encourages the development a generic project, which may lose the depth and breadth of achievement evident in the Personal Interest Project. We strongly encourage the taskforce to consider these perspectives and retain this unique and distinctive aspect of the NSW curriculum with the Society and Culture syllabus.

5. Evidence and responses to questions regarding student agency

Question 13 The Interim Report has a focus on student agency to promote opportunities for students to build on their strengths and pursue personal interests and passions in order to improve student motivation and engagement. When students have a level of control over what and how they learn they are also supported to develop skills in self-regulation and independent learning and are likely to develop higher level. Please comment of the level of student agency evident in your S&C classroom.

The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:

- Respondent 1 *When students are passionate about what they are learning you are able to witness a different level of engagement. The PIP allows students to understand what their own learning motivations are which will help them succeed at university and their further careers.*
- Respondent 8 *Student agency is very high in my Society and Culture classroom. Students are given much choice about the topics that they explore and the style in which they choose to learn. The PIP process has an extremely high level of student agency that is evident from the moment students choose their research topics to the day they submit them for their HSC.*
- Respondent 12 *The Personal Interest Project is a prime example of student agency as it is a PERSONAL INTEREST Project - by its very nature it promotes opportunities for students to build on their strengths and pursue personal interests and passions in order to improve student motivation and engagement. When students have a level of control over what and how they learn they are also supported to develop skills in self-regulation and independent learning and are likely to develop higher level.*
- Respondent 30 *I agree that students are more motivated when they feel an engagement in what they are doing but this does not exclusively come from their own choices, I feel it is incredibly important in how the material is taught. Knowing your students' strengths/interests/passions and being able to use that to deliver content with scope to extend into student directed learning is a better combination. My concern is the assumption that all students in my S&C class are independent learners – some are, but others need a little more help, while some are far from this and may never become so.*

In Conclusion: The level of student engagement and agency evident in the typical Society and Culture classroom is an inspiration to behold and a vital aspect if this is how the syllabus requires learning to synthesise *personal experience* and *public knowledge*. This distinctive quality ensures students grow to appreciate the relevance of their own lives and the lives of others of what they are studying, building sociocultural literacy skills such as empathy and concern for the rights of others, the ability to view the media with critical discernment and to research ethically and effectively.

6. Evidence and responses to questions regarding conceptual understanding

Question 14. The Interim Report identifies “Deep conceptual understanding is essential to problem solving and to the creation of new ideas, products and solutions. As Bialik and Fadel note, ‘by internalising the most important concepts... students are better equipped to deal with multifaceted problems and have a more diverse set of tools with which to interpret the world”. Please comment on the importance of conceptual learning evident in your S&C classroom.

The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:

- Respondent 1 *The S&C classroom utilizes conceptual learning better than any other course in the HSC. The fundamental and additional course concepts give students a framework to build their analysing and critical thinking upon. A S&C students' ability to apply course concepts in an abstract way is one of the most rewarding parts of teaching the S&C course.*
- Respondent 5 *The importance of conceptual learning in S+C cannot be overstated. In my everyday classroom, consistent use of concept definitions alongside applicable examples form the keystone for students to be able to develop and apply their understanding of society and culture and thus interpret all of its facets as they operate in the world around them.*

- Respondent 12 *S&C is a highly conceptual course by its very nature, as is evidenced by the syllabus and HSC marking guidelines. Deep conceptual understanding is essential to problem solving and to the creation of new ideas, products and solutions. As Bialik and Fadel note, 'by internalising the most important concepts... students are better equipped to deal with multifaceted problems and have a more diverse set of tools with which to interpret the world'. This is what S&C does.*
- Respondent 25 *My Society and Culture experience was almost entirely conceptual learning. We developed a deep understanding of the society and culture concepts in order to be able to genuinely understand and interpret questions and situations around the world*
- Respondent 47 *Society & Culture is a concepts-based subject. Each topic begins with lessons around associated concepts. This can make the subject challenging for students who prefer more black and white content. However, it is evident when watching a student develop throughout this course that their understanding of the concepts allows them to become open-minded citizens of a global world. The concepts taught in this topic prepare students to navigate political, cultural and ethical issues they may come across outside of the classroom (especially in the workplace).*
- Respondent 83 *Concepts are obviously central to S&C and they are a constant reference point for understanding content and case studies. However, having HSC exams frames this in a reductionist and abstract way instead of giving student the opportunity to apply skills to real problems/issues/topics. E.g. students could apply their research and communication skills through journalism and media production for publication.*

In conclusion: The structure of the Society and Culture syllabus is built around a conceptual context. At the time of the Society and Culture syllabus development in the 1980's, this was seen as an incredibly innovative approach to teaching and learning. Today, this subject continues to hold a unique and vital place within the NSW curriculum. This focus allows for student to launch into analysis and critical thinking in a distinctive way and fosters a capacity to understand the social and cultural world, their world, in powerful ways. The Society and Culture course must be retained to ensure these unique qualities are not lost.

7. Evidence and responses to questions regarding an integrated approach to both theory and application

Question 15. The Interim Report identifies “Commitment to a long-term agenda to develop a more integrated approach to learning in the senior years through the development of a limited set of rigorous, high-quality ‘advanced courses’, each of which incorporates both theory and application. Please comment on the importance of S&C to the NSW curriculum.

The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:

- Respondent 1 *The S&C course already does all the things that have been listed as important in the interim report. The S&C course should be used as a model for others courses to learn how these things can be embedded into their pedagogy.*
- Respondent 5 *The overall importance of S+C to the NSW curriculum is again something that cannot be overstated. No other course on offer to NSW students provides a deeper, more engaging or more skills-enhancing approach to the knowledge and practice associated with the study of anthropology. With its tenet of teaching students 'social and cultural literacy', in my experience this course more than any other equips future society with knowledgeable and empathetic students who have the skills to investigate and report back on any aspect of society which concerns or interests them.*
- Respondent 8 *Simply put, no other course in the HSC is more worthy of the title 'rigorous, high quality and advanced' as the Society and Culture course. S&C is vital to the NSW curriculum as it is relevant to our learners, deals with current real world issues and equips students with an incredible array of knowledge, and skills that can be applied beyond the school gates. We must ask ourselves 'What is the purpose of schools and learning'? Society and Culture ensures our students have an understanding of themselves and the world around them, equips them with the skills to solve real world problems and a sense of social justice that is unparalleled in the NSW curriculum. This is surely part of the purpose of an education.*
- Respondent 17 *Society and Culture is a unique part of the HSC. It provides an opportunity for students to undertake a subject that opens their eyes to new societies and cultures, in addition to preparing them for their future interactions. It is of vital importance to offer a subject such as Society and Culture to support the elimination of*

prejudices, racism and exclusion. The course supports the building of cohesion, acceptance and harmony in a diverse and multicultural society.

- Respondent 18 *Society and Culture is the most influential course in shaping young people. It empowers, encourages, educates and excites students and allows them to actively engage in the world around them. It allows students to develop their own personal branding and awareness of social issues. It provides a platform to create change and promote empathy. It is a well-rounded course that encourages different perspectives and respect. Every student who has graduated this course has graduated as a better human who is more engaged with the world around them. Society and Culture is the most powerful tool students can have to help equip and support them once they graduate high school.*
- Respondent 34 *S&C is the only course which allows students the freedom to explore their world in an independent and self-directed way. It is the only course where their microworlds genuinely connect to the curriculum framework. Student choice is at the heart of them, as is the responsibility to challenge their personal experience with rigorously researched public knowledge. Rather than deconstructing S&C and destroying it, why not make S&C mandatory like English, such is the value of this wonderful course. Students who complete this course are measurably better global citizens as a consequence. What is teaching actually about if not this? Data can't measure intrinsic goodness, compassion and tolerance but teachers can, and S&C teachers witness the transformative nature of our subject every day.*
- Respondent 50 *I feel that S&C is one of the best courses as it is a high-level and advanced course, but still accessible by all students. It allows for student choice and many students return after completing the course stating that it really helped prepare them for life after school - particularly at University level. I feel that the course should remain as part of the curriculum and I would be incredibly disappointing if it was removed.*
- Respondent 77 *S&C is one of the most important courses in the NSW curriculum. Not only does it encourage a student to recognise their self-concept and personal and social identity, it also allows them to empathise with different cultures and ask meaningful and respectful questions about different cultures and environments. A lot of students I have taught have gone on to join the UN or Amnesty in a bid to improve the plight of people worse off than themselves. The PIP is the finest example of the application of the theory of S&C.*

In conclusion: The words of our students, teachers and wider community are a clarion call for the qualities of this course. Many of the innovations called for in the Interim Report are already being attained by Society and Culture. This course is a cornerstone for innovative teaching and learning and preparing students for the future.

Thank you for your time in considering this submission to the Curriculum Review Taskforce.



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13th December 2019