



19 April 2016

C/- The Review Secretariat

By Email: bostes.review@det.nsw.edu.au

NSW Business Chamber Limited
140 Arthur Street
North Sydney NSW 2060
Postal address
Locked Bag 938
North Sydney NSW 2059
DX 10541 North Sydney
t 13 26 96
f 1300 655 277
e businesshotline@nswbc.com.au

Dear Review Panel

Review of the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES)

NSW Business Chamber welcomes this opportunity to comment on issues related to the Review.

The NSW Business Chamber (the Chamber) is one of Australia's largest business support groups, with a direct membership of more than 19,000 businesses, providing services to over 30,000 businesses each year. Tracing its heritage back to the establishment of the Sydney Chamber of Commerce in 1825, the Chamber works with businesses ranging in size from owner-operators to large corporations, and spanning all industry sectors from product-based manufacturers to service provider enterprises.

The Chamber's education policy agenda has primarily been about improving outcomes for the 60% of school leavers who do not go to university immediately after school. Our suggestions cover the curriculum, the leaving accreditation, literacy and numeracy capability, careers advice, the structure of the final years of schooling and the integration of vocational education and training with schooling.

Two NSW Business Chamber reports, '[Could do Better](#)' (2010) and '[Paving the Pathway](#)' (2015), both authored by eminent experts in their fields, set out the Chamber's proposed reform agenda in detail.

The advocacy paper setting out key issues for the Chamber prior to the 2015 NSW Election, '[Unfinished Business](#)' (2014), included action on post-year 10 education and training as one of the five areas of 'unfinished business'. Over the term of the previous NSW Government and subsequently, it is probably the area in which the Chamber has been least successful in gaining the attention of decision-makers.

The following brief points are made based on the experience of prosecuting this education and training advocacy agenda over the last five or six years. Our commentary focusses on three of the four high level questions identified in the Review's Issues Paper:

- Are roles and responsibilities clear and appropriate?
- Are effective governance arrangements in place?
- Have the opportunities of the amalgamation been fully realised?

Are roles and responsibilities clear and appropriate?

Looking at the education system as a whole, it is difficult to determine who is accountable for the educational outcomes of students. It seems logical that accountability is shared between those who set the standards and curriculum, BOSTES, and those who deliver education services, the Department of Education and ultimately, the Minister.

This shared accountability is not, however, directly acknowledged and, where outcomes are mentioned by the Board, it is in indirect terms. The focus appears instead to be on process and outputs, perhaps as a result of the complexity of the education system.

We suggest the review:

- Take the opportunity to clarify accountabilities, to balance the current focus on process and outputs with a focus on real outcomes. The desired outcomes from the education system should be identified in consultation with the stakeholders with a focus on consumers, including business, parent groups and with young people.
- Examine the concept of providing the Board and Department of Education with an annually revised charter to support this. The Charter should specify the deliverables the Government is looking for from the education system, and which body is responsible for delivering them. These should be measurable outcomes or problems to be solved, rather than a list of outputs.

Are effective governance arrangements in place?

The Board has very important executive responsibilities. Given this, the review should consider the best combination of expert input and decision-making processes and build this into the governance structure.

We recommend the Review Panel consider the following:

- **Composition:** While Board members must have knowledge of the issues the Board must also accept its share of responsibility for educational outcomes. Members need the life experience, skills and judgement to exercise their decision-making role. In other words, members of the Board should be appointed on the basis of their capacity to exercise executive responsibilities and to add value to its deliberations. We note the Board can already gather expert advice and develop proposals through its committee system: this is the appropriate avenue for obtaining the advice from the diverse array of stakeholders in education.
- **Size:** A Board of 23 seems unwieldy and unnecessary. This is illustrated by the more than 10 pages of the current annual report given over to profiling Board members. The Chamber recommends reducing membership to ensure the Board is sufficiently nimble to be decision-making and strategic.

- **Focus on the consumer:** The review should explore how the 'consumers' of the education system could be empowered via the committee system. This would support a better balance between providers and the users of the system. At the moment, the balance is too far in favour of the provider: for example it appears of the 21 people appointed to Board curriculum committees only two are parents.

Have the opportunities of amalgamation been fully realised?

The Chamber welcomes attempts to rationalise the machinery of Government. We note BOSTES was established with the objective of bringing together the educational cornerstones of curriculum, teaching, assessment and educational regulation.

The Chamber is of the view that there may be further synergies that could be achieved in the education system. Rather than maintaining a separate Board to coordinate expert educational, teaching, academic and broader community input in formulating curriculum and syllabuses, this could be obtained through consulting experts. Final proposals would be recommended by the Department for approval by the Minister. This seems to be the way it is done in the UK for example.

Why there is a separately constituted Board from the Department, when both contribute to ultimate educational outcomes, is not clear.

This case needs to be made out.

Conclusion

We ask the Review Panel to consider these issues in their assessment of the role, functions, structure and membership of BOSTES. Please contact Rebecca Burdick on rebecca.burdick@nswbc.com.au or 9458 7267 if you would like to clarify any aspect of our submission.

Yours sincerely



Paul Orton
Director, Policy & Advocacy