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# Teaching Writing

## Report of the Thematic Review of Writing

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## Executive summary

The ability to write clearly and purposefully continues to be a critical ingredient for educational success. At school, writing is the principle means by which students both learn and demonstrate what they have learned. Many NSW students are very good writers; they possess mastery of the craft and can write sophisticated, purposeful texts. But for many other students, a lack of writing ability means they struggle to show what they know, and their learning remains untapped or unseen.

Conclusive assertions about the quality of student writing in NSW are difficult to make, but there is evidence emerging that it is not all it could be. Data from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) shows student writing performance in NSW and nationally has remained static since 2011, with a marked decline consistently evident as students move through the junior secondary years.

To date, efforts to scrutinise these trends have been hindered by the lack of any systematic account of what education authorities, teacher educators and the teaching profession itself are doing to ensure NSW students become effective writers. There is a need to address this gap in our knowledge, regardless of any trends observed in the performance data.

This Thematic Review into the teaching of writing begins this important work. It is the first attempt to gain a clear picture of the current teaching of writing in NSW schools, including an assessment of the system-wide efforts to support effective writing instruction. Its work is informed in large measure by two ground-breaking studies that ascertain the state of writing instruction in classrooms and how teachers are prepared for this important task.

The findings of the *Report of the Australian Writing Survey: How is writing taught in classrooms?* (Australian Writing Survey) and *Preparation to teach writing: Report of Initial Teacher Education* (ITE Review) are strongly in alignment, with recommendations that overlap and trend in an agreed direction.

The two reports reveal great diversity in teaching practices and the practices of teacher educators. In part, this is befitting the teaching of such a complex skill to an increasingly diverse student body. But it also reflects gaps in the knowledge, skills and confidence of teachers to teach writing across primary and secondary years.

These gaps are consistent with weaknesses identified in education programs preparing teachers to teach writing as well as the quality of materials produced by education authorities to support teaching. System authorities could also provide greater clarity on the standards teachers should use to judge the quality of student writing, and authoritative and evidence-based guidance on effective instructional practice. In short, while schools and teachers will always do the heavy lifting, stronger system and sector-wide coordination could better support the teaching of writing.

This review proposes a series of practical and decisive measures aimed at strengthening the focus on the teaching of writing within the NSW curriculum. The recommendations will consolidate the evidence base for effective practice in teaching writing; clarify and strengthen writing content in NSW syllabuses; establish a coherent framework that links the teaching of writing to assessment and reporting; and provide better preparation of and support for teachers from initial teacher education programs to ongoing professional learning.

In developing these recommendations, the review has been concerned to build on recent efforts, both state and federal, to support the teaching of writing, and to draw on the outstanding practice already taking place in NSW schools. The 2018 ACARA National Literacy Learning Progression provides a useful reference point in efforts to establish 'line of sight' for teachers from the syllabus content to a clear description of the skills students are expected to develop as they learn to write from Kindergarten through to Year 10.

As much as possible, where new resources are recommended, the aim is to facilitate the use of existing materials rather than add to the documents and reporting demands currently competing for a teacher's time.

Ultimately, whether or not student writing improves will depend on what happens in schools and classrooms. To this end, this review is predicated on the assumption that teachers must lead this work, and each of the planned actions acknowledges the profession as the essential implementing agent.

# Recommendations

## **Recommendation 1: Establish an evidence base for teaching writing by identifying existing effective practice grounded in research**

NESA should use NAPLAN and relevant HSC data to identify high-performance schools across systems and sectors in NSW, and investigate the strategies used to teach writing. The investigation should target the different stages of schooling and levels of student development, as well as whole-of-school and individual subject approaches. The findings should be published and available for use by all sectors, schools and teachers, and inform the development of sample teaching materials and professional learning modules.

This review presents an opportunity to share effective writing instruction practices taking place in NSW, and assist schools and teachers to tackle issues they face in their daily work, such as:

- How are the mechanical elements of writing best taught, and how are these elements developed in students to write in more sophisticated creative, analytic and expressive ways?
- How can the teaching of writing be supported across Years 5–8 in the transition from primary to secondary school?
- What is the place of the explicit teaching of grammar, and teaching grammar at the point of need?
- What is the place for instruction on handwriting and keyboarding?
- What is effective instructional practice to improve students' writing across the range of student ability, from remediation strategies for struggling students to the extension of gifted students?
- What is effective whole-of-school programming with regard to the teaching of writing? Should there be a specific role for English teachers?

## **Recommendation 2: Clarify and strengthen writing content in syllabus documents**

NESA will analyse the K–10 syllabuses in all key learning areas to better identify existing and implicit writing content, and make explicit the writing expectations for students where they are lacking.

Explicit content in NSW syllabuses related to the teaching of writing is a minimum requirement for the effective teaching of writing in schools.

The quality of writing expected of NSW students at each stage of schooling across all subjects and key learning areas means teachers need to devote significant time and effort to teaching and assessing student writing in any given subject. Given the key role writing has in student

assessments throughout all years of schooling, advice about how to develop the specific kinds of writing required in each of the key learning areas should be more explicitly set out in syllabus documents.

While writing is clearly identified as core content in the English syllabus, it could be presented in a way that better supports teaching.

Clear direction on assessment standards and guidelines is also critical if teachers are to measure student writing ability and progress. It is plain from the work of this review that teachers require further clarity from authorised documents related to the teaching and learning of writing.

### **Recommendation 3: Provide coherent direction for teaching writing in English and subjects other than English**

NESA should review the range of frameworks on teaching and assessing writing that are used by teachers in NSW, and develop support materials that provide clear direction and guidance.

The support materials should include a framework that has regard to the National Literacy Learning Progression, describes students' writing skills and provides links to the corresponding syllabus content to teach those skills.

The research conducted as part of the Thematic Review identifies a need to provide better support for the teaching of writing in all subjects in secondary school. The Australian Writing Survey shows that teachers' confidence to teach a number of aspects relating to grammar diminishes as the stage of schooling progresses along with a decline in the explicit teaching of writing through Years 7–10. Teachers need to be able to address a student's literacy needs regardless of their stage of schooling.

Teachers would benefit from advice on the teaching of writing, relevant to their subject area, and based on syllabus content. This advice would have regard to the National Literacy Learning Progression, which provides a reference point for the development of writing skills across all syllabuses.

This advice will give direction to teachers at all stages, and of all subjects. It will seek to provide clarity for teachers and create a common language for the teaching of writing between primary and secondary schooling, and across all key learning areas. The documents will have regard to appropriate early childhood learning outcomes and preschool pedagogy.

In developing support materials, consideration will be given to how existing documents and frameworks can be coalesced rather than added to.

All outputs of this exercise will be available to initial teacher education providers, establishing expectations of the schooling systems and the teaching profession in this area. The advice and support materials will also inform professional development for new teachers in their induction period and professional development more generally.

## **Recommendation 4: Develop minimum content specifications for the teaching of writing in initial teacher education courses**

NESA, in partnership with teachers, teacher employers and initial teacher education providers, should develop minimum specifications for content knowledge and pedagogy in the teaching of writing. The minimum content specifications should form the basis of accreditation requirements for initial teacher education programs in the NSW Elaboration of Priority Area of Literacy.

The ITE Review identifies considerable variation across initial teacher education programs regarding teaching writing, in terms of content coverage, depth of treatment of content and in what initial teacher education students learn about effective teaching practice.

About 49 per cent of teachers who responded to the Australian Writing Survey report that their initial teacher education did not prepare them to teach writing.

While both the Australian Writing Survey and ITE Review acknowledge that graduate teachers continue to develop their skills in teaching writing after university, graduates are expected to enter classrooms ready to apply the knowledge and skills developed as part of their training.

Therefore, this review supports in full the recommendation of the ITE Review that NESA works with teacher employers and initial teacher education providers to develop minimum specifications for content knowledge and instructional practice for teaching writing.

## **Recommendation 5: Identify and promote professional development in effective practice for the teaching of writing**

Building on Recommendations 1 to 4, NESA should develop content specifications for professional development in teaching writing, at different phases of schooling, in English and other key learning areas. NESA should review existing professional development courses to identify exemplary courses, and work with employing authorities, professional associations and unions to commission additional courses to meet areas of need.

Regardless of the writing instruction received in an initial teacher education program, it cannot be the sole opportunity for professional learning in this area. The Australian Writing Survey indicated that favourable effects of initial training for early teachers can be quickly diluted by their lack of experience. The instructional skills and mastery of writing content are developed over the whole career cycle of a teacher through beginning teacher induction to classroom experience and ongoing professional development.

Teachers need access to targeted professional learning experiences to address identified gaps in confidence and preparation, to promote evidence-based effective practice, and to support them across the entirety of their careers.

## **Recommendation 6: Declare the teaching of writing a NESAs priority**

NESA will ask the Board to consider declaring the teaching of writing a priority area for professional development and school registration.

As a priority for professional learning, exemplary courses on teaching writing would be identified and promoted to schools and teachers. As a focus requirement for school and system registration by random inspection, the quality of writing pedagogy within selected schools would come under NESA scrutiny.

With the establishment of an evidence base of effective practice, and having identified a range of exemplary professional learning opportunities, the NESA Board may consider declaring the teaching of writing a priority for professional development and school registration.

The BOSTES Review recommends that high levels of scrutiny be applied to professional development in areas identified as state priorities.

Under the NESA random inspection program for school registration, schools provide evidence of current practice in areas identified as NESA annual priorities and quality of student learning requirements.

The NESA Board could consider recommending that the Minister for Education make the teaching of writing a priority for teacher professional learning in a future Statement of Expectations for a period of five years. Exemplary professional learning courses would be identified and promoted to schools and teachers.

The NESA Board may also consider recommending that the teaching of writing be made a focus requirement for school and system registration by random inspection. The Minister's 2018 Statement of Expectations sought an increased focus on the teaching of Stage 6 and preparation of students for the HSC. A future statement could build on this to cover the teaching of writing.



# The forgotten R

Our culture places enormous emphasis on the visual. We watch more movies and we read fewer books. Corporations plough millions into video metrics because photos and moving images are more readily and reliably digested than sentences. But writing still matters. Much of the visual content that swamps us and that we produce as part of our daily working lives still begins with writing. Films have scripts, ideas have written proposals, Bill Gates carries a notebook and Twitter has increased its word limit to 280 characters. How we write and what we write on will always be changing, but it is difficult, at least for now, to imagine any aspect of modern life that is not affected by writing.

The literacy demands of modern labour markets are increasing. In addition to the traditionally literate professions such as law, technology sectors require workers to produce a variety of texts in the form of presentations and reports, as well as possessing the ability to communicate effectively across an ever-widening range of digital platforms. Indeed, in a world so overwhelmed by information as ours, some researchers describe the ability to read, comprehend and write as a 'survival skill'.<sup>1</sup>

But writing is more than a vital communications technology. It is a way of thinking and learning. It engages high-level cognitive processes that organise our thoughts, work through concepts and make connections and help retrieve other things we know. It is both a way of demonstrating what we know *and* a way to help us understand what we know.<sup>2</sup>

This review adopts an uncomplicated understanding of the term 'writing'. Writing is forming thoughts and ideas through letters or characters in a comprehensible and coherent way into texts that can be read. Writing is a specific discipline with an agreed terminology for classification and analysis that teachers need to master. A piece of writing can be understood in terms of the elements used to analyse a text, including grammar, syntax, vocabulary, structure and ideas. It can also be understood more holistically in terms of how effectively it conveys meaning without regard to one or more of these elements.

Writing is needed for school. The ability to write is critical for educational success, and the standard of writing expected of students in NSW is high. The ability to write effectively is an aspiration of the NSW curriculum and a critical skill for successful participation in schooling at all levels. It is the skill that students draw on to engage with curriculum content in day-to-day classroom activities, projects and assignments, and it is the key means by which students are assessed on their knowledge and understanding throughout their schooling.

A student's HSC performance is determined in large part through school-based assessment of written work and, with few exceptions, HSC candidates will produce several or more sustained pieces of writing for their final exams. Achieving the highest performance bands requires a mastery of writing and ability to hierarchically process concepts and knowledge that are expressed in essays, extended responses and imaginative writing tasks.

The importance of writing for school may be self-evident but the strong public policy focus on literacy over recent decades has focused largely on reading instruction. It is not clear why writing has not been accorded greater importance. Writing is complex. The cognitive processes

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<sup>1</sup> Graham, S & Perin, D 2007, *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools – A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York, Alliance for Excellent Education, Washington DC.*

<sup>2</sup> The National Commission on Writing 2003, *The neglected 'R': The needs for a writing revolution*, College Entrance Examination Board, New York.

are awesome in their complexity. To write well requires a simultaneous control over a wide range of cognitive and social aspects related to language, content and communicative intent.

We should not expect the teaching of writing to come naturally even for teachers who themselves are good writers. Before stepping foot into a classroom, teachers need to know the constituent elements of the writing process and have a sound understanding of the mechanical aspects of language at the sentence level – including grammar, syntax and punctuation – that are deployed in different kinds of texts. Teachers need detailed knowledge of the writing ability expected of students at different stages of schooling, and strategies to assess that writing.

## Supporting writing instruction in schools

Teaching writing is hard but we have made it harder. Teachers may be individually responsible for their own continuing professional learning and development, but there are certain goods an education system should collectively provide. Teachers – and the wider community – should expect their training to prepare them to be effective teachers when they start working in a school. They should expect clear direction for teaching and learning in curriculum and support documents. And because teachers are not experienced professionals upon graduation, they should expect opportunities to improve their instructional practice and be confident that those opportunities are informed by evidence of what works.

This review has found that we are not doing these things as well as we should. The quality of programs training teachers to teach writing is variable; content for teaching writing in syllabuses and support documentation is challenging to implement; teachers encounter mixed and competing messages about the national, state-level or school-based standards used to judge the quality of student writing; and schools and professional learning providers have not been given the authoritative guidance to develop quality courses in teaching writing.

There is much good work to build on. NSW has led efforts to promote a more structured and systematic approach to literacy instruction.<sup>3</sup> In 1997, NSW introduced the first criterion-referenced writing test in Australia with the English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) – the forerunner to NAPLAN. More recently, in 2016, NSW led the development of an umbrella approach for classroom-based diagnostic assessment and teaching writing called the ‘writing progressions’. These progressions were adopted by ACARA as the foundation to the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions, published in late 2017. In May 2018, *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, popularly known as Gonski 2.0, was released and endorsed the work on the progressions developed by NSW.

A sustained effort is now required to embed effective writing instruction in system-wide practices.<sup>4</sup> The system practices that are the primary focus of this review are those within NESA’s direct policy influence. These include:

- direction on instructional practice informed by evidence of what works
- direction on teaching and assessment of writing from NESA, including NSW syllabus and

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<sup>3</sup> Wasson, D 2009, ‘Large cohort testing: how can we use assessment data to effect school and system improvement’, paper presented to Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Research Conference 2009, Assessment and Student Learning: Collecting, Interpreting and using data to inform teaching, Perth, 16–18 August 2009, accessed 20 July 2018, [https://research.acer.edu.au/research\\_conference/RC2009/18august/4/](https://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference/RC2009/18august/4/).

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2013, Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: What does the evidence tell us about effective teaching? NSW Department of Education, Sydney.

support documentation

- pre-service preparation in initial teacher education, including professional experience placements
- the quality and coverage of professional learning to support quality teaching of writing.

While the range of influences on teaching goes beyond these domains, they are minimum requirements for the effective teaching of writing to take place. Teachers, teacher educators, and professional development providers require clear direction from system authorities on what to teach, how to teach it and standards expected of teachers.

# Overall research findings

Prior to this review, there was little knowledge about how writing is being taught at different stages of schooling and across different subjects. Nor had there been any thorough effort to understand the systemic practices that support quality writing instruction and what teachers think about those practices.

Two research projects undertaken for this review present a valuable opportunity to compare writing instruction content in initial teacher education programs with teacher practices reported by the Australian Writing Survey. While some findings were unanticipated, many affirm existing impressions held by education stakeholders about the state of writing instruction in schools and the quality of support provided by initial teacher education providers and system authorities. Taken together, the two research reports reveal significant gaps in the knowledge, preparation, skills and confidence of teachers to teach writing across primary and secondary years.

Responses to the Australian Writing Survey largely reflect the priorities given to teacher preparation around writing and the curriculum demands across subjects and stages of schooling. These include:

- a significant decrease in teaching writing in the early years of high school
- significantly less time devoted to writing instruction across secondary schooling
- variable-to-low capability to teach the different elements of writing among secondary English and non-English teachers.

The Australian Writing Survey reveals a discrepancy between the time teachers appear to devote to teaching aspects of writing in classrooms and the adequacy of the support currently provided. With few exceptions, teachers report that their initial teacher education and professional development left them minimally prepared in all aspects of teaching writing. The figures contrast sharply with the frequency with which these aspects of teaching writing are practiced in classrooms.

These findings are supported by the data from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which show student writing performance in NSW and nationally has remained static since 2011. A marked decline is consistently evident as students move through the junior secondary years.

While this review has used NAPLAN data as an indicator of student performance, it acknowledges longstanding stakeholder concerns about the NAPLAN test. This review takes place in the context of an ongoing debate about the merits of the NAPLAN writing tests. Some stakeholders have expressed concern that NAPLAN narrows the teaching of writing and therefore limits the range of writing skills students develop. For similar reasons, some stakeholders question whether NSW NAPLAN writing scores are a reliable measure of student writing ability in NSW.

The use of NAPLAN as an indicator of writing ability invites discussion about what constitutes a quality piece of writing and how it can be properly assessed. But strident claims that NAPLAN assesses all the wrong things about writing have been unhelpful and have likely done a disservice to teachers looking to improve their writing instruction. There are technical disagreements to be had over the weighting given to separate writing traits and the place of judging the meaning of a text more holistically. But this review considers as settled the

question of whether writing instructors need the ability to break down writing into its constituent elements for instruction and assessment purposes.

This review regards the existing NAPLAN data to be a reliable indicator for some key elements of student writing ability. It is the largest aggregation of student performance data available and a critical guide to inform further enquiry, and that will continue to be the case in whatever future form it takes.

While the trend in NSW NAPLAN writing performance is important, it is not the only – or indeed the most critical – piece of evidence informing this review. It is possible that the quality of student writing is underappreciated and not properly captured by current assessment regimes. It is also highly probable that much student writing is not all that it could be. What is clear from this review is that we could be doing more to embed quality teaching of writing in our schools.

# Teaching writing: what is effective practice?

The legacies of competing theories and approaches to writing instruction are evident, to greater and lesser degrees, in the diverse practices of teachers, teacher educators and the materials produced by education authorities to support teaching.

Evidence of diverse practice is not in itself a cause of concern. Each discipline has its own body of knowledge and ongoing debates. Teachers are professionals, trusted to make choices based on the needs of their students within their educational contexts. But there is a risk that varied practice does not always reflect evidence-based teaching.

Precisely how students acquire the ability to write may be unclear, but we know it does not come naturally.<sup>5</sup> For some it will come more easily, but most will require someone to teach it or it will not come at all. Unlike speaking and listening, reading and writing are purely cultural achievements.<sup>6</sup> As evolutionary psychologist David C. Geary explains, writing is a 'biologically *secondary* cognitive domain' whose acquisition is 'slow, effortful, and occurs only with sustained formal or informal instruction'.<sup>7</sup>

This will be plain to anyone who has committed to the sustained practice that is required to develop expertise in other domains, such as music and athletics. It is not always obvious with writing. In some classrooms, students' interests and desire to communicate can drive learning forward. These students seem to learn to write by writing and, quite critically, by reading. By upper-primary and junior secondary school, these writers may have largely internalised grammar and syntax, and their writing can flow without conscious control of the different elements. Problems encountered in sentence construction, paragraphing, spelling or punctuation can be addressed incidentally or at the point of need by the teacher or even their classmates.

This approach does not work for all students. The students who struggle with writing may be talented and imaginative and able. Some may read well and others may be semi-literate; many will write in the same way they speak. Classrooms entirely or partially composed of students like these require teachers with a different set of skills. They require teachers who can explain with some precision what is being taught and why. They require teachers who can help students master some skills in isolation, such as handwriting and the word-ordering principles of a sentence, before they can properly exercise language possibilities. Encouraging these students, providing the right conditions and a sense of purpose combined with good motivational strategies will improve writing for some. The rest require someone to teach it.

In the absence of evidence-based direction, teaching writing will be informed by on-the-job experience or teaching lore. Teaching lore refers to 'knowledge, ideas, insights, feelings, and understandings of teachers as they reveal their guiding beliefs, share approaches, relate consequences of their teaching, offer aspects of their philosophy of teaching and provide recommendations for educational policy makers'.<sup>8</sup> Many of the good things that happen in schools are the product of teaching lore and much of it is based on evidence. But relying solely on teaching lore to improve students' writing is not without significant risks. As Graham and

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<sup>5</sup> Geary DC 1995, 'Reflections of evolution and culture in children's cognition: implications for mathematical development and instruction', *American Psychologist*, vol 50, no. 1, pp 24–37.

<sup>6</sup> Kellogg RT 2008, 'Training writing skills: A cognitive developmental perspective', *Journal of writing research*, vol 1, no. 1, pp 1–26.

<sup>7</sup> Geary DC, *op cit.*, p.66

<sup>8</sup> Schubert, WH and Ayers, W (eds) 1999, *Teacher Lore: Learning from Our Own Experience*, Educators International Press, New York.

Harris note:

*... there are many things a teacher does while teaching. As students' writing improves, they may single out one or more practices as responsible for the positive changes they observe. These may be valid choices, but it is also possible that these selections are incorrect or just correct for some students, but not for others. Academics who study teachers in action are not immune to this selective bias, as they may overestimate the effectiveness of practices that are consistent with their philosophical views on writing and its development.*<sup>9</sup>

To date, the instructional practices with strongest evidence for developing students into better writers broadly align with the more settled research consensus that effective teaching involves monitoring and feedback, having strong subject knowledge, and use of explicit teaching techniques.<sup>10</sup>

The review acknowledges that stronger assertions of the teacher's instructional role, particularly for whole-of-class teaching strategies, are not always well received. Many teachers, as well teacher educators, continue to be influenced by more progressive, child-centred theoretical perspectives. But much has been learned about teaching writing over the past 40 years. The contemporary research picture, while not comprehensive, has largely moved beyond the bifurcated theoretical landscape that in the past saw advocates of rival approaches talk past each other.

The Australian Writing Survey helped to map out the extent of teachers' recognition of what needs to be taught in developing students' writing, in identifying their capacity to teach specific skills and in pointing to significant gaps in teachers' practice. The next step is to use the available data on writing to identify high-performance schools, in terms of growth and overall achievement, across systems and sectors in NSW to learn which practices are effective in improving writing outcomes.

NESA, in collaboration with school-sector partners and appropriate research bodies, should commission a large-scale independent study of the effective teaching of writing in NSW schools. It is envisaged that the outcomes of this research will be used to update other initiatives generated as part of the Thematic Review.

The call for strengthened evidence should not signal a reluctance to take action based on the best available evidence. Furthermore, the fact that research in the social sciences is frequently less definitive than in the hard sciences is not a reason to abandon our best attempts to shed light on difficult problems. The challenge for policy makers is well formulated by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation in *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: What does the evidence tell us about effective teaching?*

*It is important to recognise the opportunity presented by policy-making to contribute to the ongoing development of a robust evidence base. Initiatives and interventions undertaken on the basis of the best available evidence (especially where this evidence is inconclusive or contradictory) can produce valuable insights if subject to well-designed evaluations.*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Graham, S, & Harris, K 2014, 'Conducting high quality writing intervention research: Twelve recommendations', *Journal of Writing Research*, vol 6, no. 2, pp 89–123.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2013, *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: What does the evidence tell us about effective teaching?*, NSW Department of Education, Sydney.



Therefore, while this review accepts there is a need to improve the evidence, it also regards the existing evidence sufficient to presuppose that:

- writing can be taught and improved by quality instruction
- quality writing instruction can be identified
- the quality of writing instruction can be improved by applying evidence-based practices.

This knowledge alone is a suitable basis to develop more authoritative direction around teaching writing at every point along the teacher career cycle as recommended by this review.

**Recommendation 1: Establish an evidence base for teaching writing by identifying existing effective practice grounded in research**

NESA should use NAPLAN and relevant HSC data to identify high-performance schools across systems and sectors in NSW, and investigate the strategies used to teach writing. The investigation should target the different stages of schooling and levels of student development, as well as whole-of-school and individual subject approaches. The findings should be published and available for use by all sectors, schools and teachers, and inform the development of sample teaching materials and professional learning modules.



# Clear direction on content and assessment standards for teaching writing

Both the ITE Review and the Australian Writing Survey report significant issues with support and guidance for the teaching of writing provided across the education system. To teach writing effectively, the system authorities should, at a minimum, provide:

- clear content for teaching writing in NSW syllabuses
- clear direction on assessment standards to measure student writing ability and progress.

The task of navigating the 'document maze' is unnecessarily challenging for teachers.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the presentation of syllabus content is – or ought to be – a key influence on the program content of initial teacher education programs. The clearer the directions, the better it facilitates incorporation into initial teacher education programs.

In NSW, the principle sources of teaching content are NESA's syllabus documents. These describe, among other things, the knowledge, understanding and skills students are expected to develop in different learning areas from Kindergarten to Year 12.

Writing is not a separate subject in NSW but, given the quality of writing expected of NSW students at each stage of schooling, it is reasonable to assume that teachers devote significant time and effort to teaching and assessing student writing. Consistent with Standard 2 and Standard 5 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers,<sup>13</sup> it is presupposed that there is writing content to teach and more or less effective ways to teach, assess and provide feedback to students.

While syllabuses are technical documents designed to be implemented by professional teachers, it is reasonable to expect references to writing and the process of writing to be clear and largely consistent with a common understanding of the term.

Literacy, including writing, is a general capability to be taught across all key learning areas. But the only detailed direction on writing content is in the K–10 English syllabus, which also acknowledges the critical role that English teachers play in establishing and developing writing skills.

The early stages of the K–10 English syllabus focus on learning the basics and mechanics of text construction, as students learn to write. These foundations are developed through the primary years as students learn to apply their knowledge of sentence structure, grammar, punctuation and vocabulary to compose clear and cohesive writing.

Secondary English also assumes a mastery of the basics as students begin to produce increasingly sophisticated, creative and analytical writing as well as developing a greater degree of agency.

In the English syllabus itself, writing is not treated as a distinct topic across the stages of learning. The syllabus is structured to support a holistic model for teaching literacy, with language and literature integrated throughout. Where writing is identified as an explicit

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<sup>12</sup> The Australian Writing Survey found that teachers 'need clear policy direction to help navigate the curriculum document maze, especially as it concerns standards and expectations about quality in writing'.

<sup>13</sup> Under Standard 2 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, teachers must 'know the content and how to teach it'. Under Standard 5, teachers must 'assess, provide feedback and report on student learning'.

objective in the primary syllabus, it is paired with the mode of ‘representing’.

As with all NSW syllabuses, the K–10 English syllabus does not specify instructional strategies. NESA’s principles of syllabus development and implementation provide a flexible structure within which schools and teachers can develop programs, structures and teaching practices that meet their students’ educational needs.<sup>14</sup> The English syllabus rationale asserts its facility for implementing different theoretical perspectives and models for teaching.

The separation of content and pedagogy, however, is rarely straightforward and this is particularly the case for teaching English. Historically, the English syllabus is the document through which contests over writing pedagogy are played out.

The current syllabus is the product of iterations and likely includes residual aspects of various theories that have prevailed at different times. For its part, the ITE Review contends that:

*The current Australian Curriculum: English and the recently revised NSW English K–10 Syllabus are informed by a functional view of the way in which language works and within that model the use of traditional grammar in learning how to write is fully reinstated.*<sup>15</sup>

The relevant question for the review is whether the presentation of syllabus content supports explicit teaching of writing in the classroom. The review has encountered a range of positions: some stakeholders contend that attempting to isolate writing content is ill-conceived as writing is taught holistically with other English content; others have questioned whether the current English syllabus provides adequate direction about what writing content is to be taught and whether it is covered in sufficient detail.

Given the enduring influence of theories that emphasise the incidental learning of what are sometimes referred to as ‘lower-order’ writing skills (eg spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, and grammar), this review has concluded the writing demands in both English and non-English secondary syllabuses should be identified, clarified and strengthened.

## Writing demands in secondary syllabuses other than English

In secondary school, the demands on student writing reconfigure in a critical way. The time allocated to student writing in primary school is anchored by English with other key learning areas providing context. In secondary school, these demands fragment across the curriculum. The secondary syllabuses for key learning areas other than English assume that students have mastered the basics of writing in the primary years. Secondary syllabus documents include general capability statements outlining each subject’s particular literacy demands.<sup>16</sup>

Secondary syllabuses for non-English key learning areas include few explicit references to the writing demands of their specific discipline area. Indeed, if one was to interpret the content and outcome statements in their broadest sense, it would be technically possible, if unlikely, to structure a learning program without any writing at all.

The writing requirements are only broadly addressed through the general capability

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<sup>14</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority 2002, K–10 Curriculum Framework, NESA, Sydney.

<sup>15</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority 2018, Preparation to Teach Writing: Report of the Initial Teacher Education Review, NESA, Sydney.

<sup>16</sup> The descriptions of the literacy general capability for different NESA syllabuses can vary significantly from the Australian curriculum. The Australian curriculum’s literacy general capability also includes a detailed literacy continuum covering text knowledge, grammar knowledge, and word knowledge.

statements, and, in both the NSW syllabuses and the Australian Curriculum, the definition of literacy has broadened far beyond a common understanding of the term. Literacy is commonly defined as the ability to read and write, but in recent years the definition of literacy has expanded to include an ability to comprehend communication and express oneself in a specified field<sup>17</sup>, hence the proliferation of multiple literacies such as scientific literacy, digital literacy, or visual literacy.

The focus of this Thematic Review is on the common understanding of writing, as the printed form of language using alphabetic letters, including the teaching of handwriting as well as keyboarding and other digital editing skills.

It is widely accepted that styles of writing demanded by different disciplines vary and are best taught in the context of particular subject content. The NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017–2020 states that:

*Teaching writing is most effective when writing is integrated rather than isolated from the rest of the curriculum, and is used as a tool to promote content learning.*<sup>18</sup>

The strengthening and clarification of writing expectations in the NSW syllabuses should be addressed as part of the syllabus review cycle. However, there are broader issues that will impact on efforts to substantially amend or modify current syllabus content.

Stakeholder concern regarding crowded curriculum is well documented. Furthermore, incorporating additional content into the syllabus documentation does not guarantee the material will be taught. The issues of curriculum crowding and mandatory versus optional teaching content were addressed in the 2016 BOSTES Review and will be further investigated in the NSW Curriculum Review throughout 2018 into 2019. The review is an opportunity to consider the place of writing in NSW syllabus documents as well as the efficacy of the general capability of literacy in its current formulation.

## Assessment advice

Assessing writing is a multifaceted skill that is essential to effective writing instruction. There is currently no way to determine the degree to which syllabus writing content is assessed and how it is assessed.

In principle, a balanced teaching program of the K–10 English syllabus should include assessment of the outcomes linked to writing content. In practice, the range of strategies available to teachers for achieving syllabus outcomes means it is unlikely that writing content will be assessed in a systematic way. Some stakeholders have also indicated that NESA's current assessment advice, which is generally non-prescriptive, can mean that school programs and sequences of learning activities can be constructed with significantly fewer sustained writing activities than are considered optimal for a student's ongoing learning.

Where teachers are attempting to apply assessment standards to student writing in a systemic way, they find myriad frameworks competing for their attention. The Australian Writing Survey asked 4306 teachers what standards framework they employed to arrive at a judgment of the quality of their students' written work. They gave a variety of responses, including:

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<sup>17</sup> Macquarie Dictionary 2018.

<sup>18</sup> NSW Government 2016, NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017–2020, NSW Department of Education, Sydney.

- school-based writing standards and related targets
- state and territory standards provided by curriculum assessment authority
- standards on a five-point reporting scale (A to E reporting)
- NAPLAN benchmarks
- Australian curriculum achievement standards
- standards used by external testing companies
- commercial program benchmarks.

Additional frameworks for teachers to navigate are ACARA's National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions, and the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). According to ACARA's explanatory material, the ACSF has been used to 'guide decisions on the scope of the progressions' while the progressions themselves are designed to assist students to reach proficiency in literacy to at least ACSF level 3.<sup>19</sup>

The Australian Writing Survey suggests that teachers would benefit from a policy that establishes which standards should be used for judging student writing. The report recommends a systematic audit of existing state and national policy, curriculum and assessment documents expected to inform teacher practice in teaching and assessing writing, including:

*...a review of the messages that the documents present to teachers about the relationship of discipline knowledge and literate capabilities. The review could usefully identify the knowledge and capabilities to be explicitly taught and those that are to be assessed and reported.<sup>20</sup>*

*This would go some way to achieving consistency in both language and application across schools and sectors, and some consistency in expectations of quality within and across schools.<sup>21</sup>*

The National Literacy Learning Progression describes the development of a student's literacy learning in impressive detail. Both the Australian Writing Survey and the ITE Review regard the National Literacy Learning Progression as a positive development that can support explicit teaching and assessment of writing in non-English key learning areas. As configured, however, the progression provides teachers with a large amount of new information with little guidance on how to use them.

The National Literacy Learning Progression presents an opportunity for the literacy aspects of writing to be more rigorously applied. Their success will hinge in large part on what support is provided for teachers to use them. NESA should produce a resource that enables teachers to make explicit connections between the learning content of their subject to the relevant indicators on the writing progression.

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<sup>19</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2018, National Literacy Learning Progression, ACARA, Sydney.

<sup>20</sup> Wyatt-Smith, C, Jackson, C, Borooah, K & Whalley, K 2018, How is writing taught in classrooms? Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education, Australian Catholic University.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## **Recommendation 2: Clarify and strengthen writing content in syllabus documents**

NESA will analyse the K–10 syllabuses in all key learning areas to better identify existing and implicit writing content, and make explicit the writing expectations for students where they are lacking.

# Supporting writing in junior secondary school

Challenges associated with middle years' schooling are complex, various and in some respects chronic. Issues around the poor handling of the transition from primary to secondary school have long been acknowledged. The structure of schooling tends to focus on upper-secondary credentials, hollowing resource allocation in early high school as more experienced staff are deployed across key learning areas in Years 11 and 12.

Until recently, initiatives for literacy, in NSW at least, have largely focused on outcomes in early primary. The introduction of the HSC minimum standard as well as the trialling of the Best Start Program for Year 7 is, in part, a response to the identified need to sharpen the focus on literacy in secondary schooling.

The range of middle years' issues requiring sustained policy effort goes beyond the scope of this review. Nonetheless, evidence from all three pieces of research indicates the teaching of writing in upper-primary school to junior secondary demands special attention.

The NAPLAN data reveals a significant slowing of mean growth scores in writing after Year 5. This trend is less pronounced in other NAPLAN domains. The Australian Writing Survey identifies a corresponding decrease in the priority teachers give to writing instruction through Years 7–10, which is followed by a marked increase in the focus on the explicit teaching of writing in Years 11 and 12.

The Australian Writing Survey also reveals that secondary teachers' confidence to teach the basics and mechanics of writing decreases as the level of schooling progresses. Confidence to teach a number of aspects relating to grammar (eg teach grammar effectively, teach grammar in context) falls between Years 3–6 and Years 7–10, with a further fall between Years 7–10 and Years 11–12. In short, at least for some aspects of writing instruction, 'teachers' confidence shrinks as the level of education increases',<sup>22</sup> and a decrease in capability occurs as substantial numbers of students commence high school underprepared for secondary school writing.

Effective implementation of actions arising from the other focus areas of this review will help meet the middle years' challenge. Ultimately, however, the improvement of writing across the curriculum depends on the effectiveness of collaborative approaches at the school. Systemic policies to support these practices are less obvious. Recommendation 7 of the Australian Writing Survey asserts 'that all subject area teachers need to take responsibility for the teaching of writing as integral to the teaching of curriculum knowledge'. In support of this objective, system authorities are asked to:

*... endorse the principle that all teachers have responsibility for the development of student writing as it pertains to their subject specialisations ... with clear direction provided in policy, curriculum and assessment documents to inform teaching and assessment practice.*<sup>23</sup>

The review supports this principle but notes that curriculum advice to this effect already exists. In secondary schooling, syllabuses and support materials assert that literacy education

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<sup>22</sup> Wyatt-Smith, C, Jackson, C, Borooah, K & Whalley, K 2018, How is writing taught in classrooms? Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education, Australian Catholic University.

<sup>23</sup> Wyatt-Smith, C, Jackson, C, Borooah, K & Whalley, K 2018, How is writing taught in classrooms? Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education, Australian Catholic University.



requires collaborative effort across the curriculum. The Graduate Standards and the NSW Elaborations in National Priority Areas further underline the expectation that literacy is the responsibility of all teachers.<sup>24</sup>

Stakeholders have noted the mixed success of previous attempts by school systems to foster cross-curricular ownership of literacy, with primary responsibility often defaulting to English faculties in schools. This review highlights two potential obstacles to effective leadership by English teachers in writing instruction in secondary school. Firstly, a high proportion of secondary English teachers report they currently do not have the skills to teach the mechanics and basic building blocks of effective writing. A key casualty of pedagogical debates on the teaching of writing has been a balanced view on the role of grammar. Media-driven discussions about grammar routinely cast these differences in terms of the back-to-basics crusade against the sins of progressive educators.

The pedagogical literature on grammar is more nuanced and sophisticated as is much existing practice among teachers. Nonetheless, there remains great sensitivity among many educators around any moves that signal a return to traditional grammar instruction, when grammar was a stand-alone subject where students parsed sentences as teachers drilled them through decontextualised exercises.

There is a pressing need to move past these caricatures. Teachers need a vocabulary to describe the different components of writing. They need it for themselves and they need it to share with students to build their understanding and develop their writing. Few educators believe that the teaching of grammar should replicate past practice – real or imagined – but most now report grammar has a place in writing instruction.

There is also a perception among some secondary teachers that they have limited responsibility to address primary school elements of writing development. This review has encountered stakeholder sentiment that the teaching of writing skills at these levels is remedial and therefore the responsibility of intervention rests with specialists. While it is true that the secondary syllabus assumes students have mastered the basics and mechanics of writing, primary English is not a separate subject. The hard separation of content knowledge between primary and secondary English is an obstacle to early high school teachers being able to identify the learning needs of students as they transition from primary to secondary school.

To meet the needs of the entire cohort entering high school, secondary English teachers need to know and teach writing skills from primary to secondary school. A resource that properly establishes the continuity of writing content and skills expected at different stages of schooling is a critical first step. The resource will provide further explicit direction for teachers, and teacher educators.

NESA should develop advice for teachers on the teaching of writing in English and other key learning areas. The advice should seek to provide clarity for teachers and create a common language for the teaching of writing between primary and secondary schooling, and across all key learning areas.

This advice may include a scope and sequence for English teachers to explicitly detail the writing content in the English syllabus that should be taught and assessed at each stage of schooling. As the ITE review notes:

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<sup>24</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority 2014, NSW Supplementary Documentation: Elaborations in Priority Areas, NESA, Sydney.

*The intent should not be to separate out the teaching of writing from other aspects of literacy, especially reading and responding to literary and other texts, but rather to ensure that within an integrated model a sequenced developmental approach to teaching writing can be maintained.<sup>25</sup>*

It is envisaged that this resource would sit alongside – but not in place of – the writing element of the recently published National Literacy Learning Progression. As stated explicitly by ACARA, the progressions do not replace the curriculum,<sup>26</sup> and in the NSW context, syllabus content and outcomes would continue to be the focus for planning, programming, teaching, learning and assessment.

Support materials for subjects in key learning areas other than English should make explicit the writing demands of those syllabuses, and provide advice on teaching and assessing writing across different disciplines. This may include annotated work samples and assessment tasks with advice on how students' writing skills may be assessed alongside knowledge of syllabus content.

In developing any support materials, careful consideration will be given to how existing documents and frameworks, including the National Literacy Learning Progression and the Australian Core Skills Framework, can be coalesced rather than added to.

All outputs of this exercise will be available to initial teacher education providers, establishing expectations of the schooling systems and the teaching profession in this area. They will also inform professional development for new teachers in their induction period, and professional development more generally. The documents will have regard to appropriate early childhood learning outcomes and preschool pedagogy.

NESA will refer the consideration of learning progressions for writing in subjects other than English to the NSW Curriculum Review.

### **Recommendation 3: Provide coherent direction for teaching writing in English and subjects other than English**

NESA should review the range of frameworks on teaching and assessing writing that are used by teachers in NSW, and develop support materials that provide clear direction and guidance.

The support materials should include a framework that has regard to the National Literacy Learning Progression, describes students' writing skills and provides links to the corresponding syllabus content to teach those skills.

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<sup>25</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority 2018, Preparation to Teach Writing: Report of the Initial Teacher Education Review, NESA, Sydney.

<sup>26</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2018, National Literacy Learning Progression, ACARA, Sydney.



# Preparing and supporting teachers to teach writing

Consistent with Graduate Standard 2 – *Know the Content and How to Teach It*, it is reasonable to expect initial teacher education programs to include explicit coverage of teaching writing content. Research conducted in 2004 by the Australian Council of Education Research found that making teacher education programs highly ‘practical’ and ‘school-based’ will not compensate for a lack of content knowledge.<sup>27</sup> The Australian Writing Survey also found that preparation in how to teach writing carries forward to the classroom. What happens in initial teacher education matters.

Unfortunately, too few teachers indicate that their initial teacher education prepared them well enough to teach writing. While both research reports acknowledge that developing skills to teach writing continues after university, graduates are expected to enter classrooms ready to apply the knowledge and skills developed as part of their training.

In the Australian Writing Survey, primary teachers reported they are better prepared than secondary teachers and English teachers better prepared than their colleagues in other key learning areas. But the numbers of respondents in all three categories are low. Of the teachers responsible for developing students’ writing skills to meet the demands of high school, almost half of respondents report they were minimally prepared. The results were less unexpected for the secondary teachers, but still surprisingly low given the writing demands of their subject. For example, more than half of Human Society and its Environment (HSIE) teachers report having no exposure to writing teaching during their training and only 8 per cent of science teachers consider themselves well prepared.

The survey data strongly supports the findings of the ITE Review, which found significant issues with content coverage required of English initial teacher education students. With few exceptions, English programs reflect a reluctance to teach approaches that include breaking writing down into discrete elements, preferring ‘contextual’ treatment of sentence-level grammar. Coverage in primary programs of the forms and features of the types of texts covered in the K–10 English syllabus is more comprehensive although their treatment is often elementary.

The inconsistencies in core content coverage, particularly in primary programs, are striking. A turbulent theoretical environment can account for some of the variation in instructional approaches offered across initial teacher education programs. But there are also indications that the choices made by some programs to exclude certain approaches to teaching writing are grounded in theory rather than evidence. For example, some respondents to the ITE Review questionnaire cast doubt on the underlying premise, that specifics of preparation to teach writing and time spent on it can be described in detail and quantified:

*This is due to the holistic, integrated nature of program approaches where content areas of literacy, language and literature are treated in relation to one another.*<sup>28</sup>

Other responses were critical of the ‘simplistic use of generic scaffolds’ derived from functional

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<sup>27</sup> Ingvarson, L 2016, ‘Training Great Teachers’, *Professionally Speaking*, vol 1, iss. 1, pp 8–10.

<sup>28</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority 2018, *Preparation to Teach Writing: Report of the Initial Teacher Education Review*, NESA, Sydney.

linguistic pedagogies that are seen to be ‘increasingly present in schools in response to NAPLAN results’ and that apparently do not work as quick fixes to improve writing. Others do not support what they describe as ‘isolated mechanical knowledge for didactic teaching and learning treatment’.<sup>29</sup>

This review does not accept that writing content, however integrated, cannot be identified for the purposes of ensuring that key knowledge and skills are being adequately covered. Nor is it reasonable to conclude from the current state of evidence that there is no place for instruction that focuses explicitly on what can be described as ‘isolated’ and ‘mechanical’ aspects of writing.

The ease with which writing content in the K–10 English syllabus could be identified and therefore incorporated is also an issue. Nonetheless, the ITE Review identifies about 20 pages of writing across four modes: Writing and Representing; Grammar, Punctuation and Vocabulary; Spelling; and Handwriting. Specific elements of writing content in the K–10 English syllabus include:

- sentence-level grammar from simple to complex syntactic formulations
- the structures, grammatical and rhetorical features of the main kinds of texts used in schooling (eg informative, persuasive, imaginative)
- punctuation, spelling, handwriting and keyboard skills
- increasing agency and autonomy in student writing to suit differing purposes, creative intentions and audiences.

Against the core content for teaching writing in primary school, the number of teachers in the Australian Writing Survey who report adequate preparation never exceeds 50 per cent. Handwriting – a critical skill developed in the early stages of primary – receives variable coverage and in two programs receives no treatment at all.

Secondary English programs by and large do not cover the earlier stages of learning to write, typically covered in primary school, that would assist underperforming students entering secondary school. The ITE Review acknowledges that initial teacher education programs are constrained in their capacity to incorporate the basics and mechanics of writing. However, the ITE Review notes the current obstacles do not impact evenly on the programs examined:

*... around half of the primary and secondary programs examined are still able to at least provide coverage of each of the components of learning to teach writing, albeit in varying degrees of detail and through a variety of approaches.*<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, this review supports in full Recommendation 1 of the ITE Review, calling on NESA to work with teacher employers and initial teacher education providers to develop minimum specifications for content knowledge and instructional practice for teaching writing. The minimum specifications will support initial teacher education providers to make informed choices about writing content to prioritise in their primary and secondary programs.

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<sup>29</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority 2018, Preparation to Teach Writing: Report of the Initial Teacher Education Review, NESA, Sydney.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

#### **Recommendation 4: Develop minimum content specifications for the teaching of writing in initial teacher education courses**

NESA, in partnership with teachers, teacher employers and initial teacher education providers, should develop minimum specifications for content knowledge and pedagogy in the teaching of writing. The minimum content specifications should form the basis of accreditation requirements for initial teacher education programs in the NSW Elaboration of Priority Area of Literacy.

### **Supporting the teaching of writing in professional practice**

However adequate initial teacher education may be, it cannot prepare teachers for the ongoing and often rapid changes and challenges they will face throughout their career. Instructional skills and mastery of writing content are developed over the whole career cycle of a teacher, from beginning teacher induction through to classroom experience and ongoing professional development.

The findings of the Australian Writing Survey highlight the critical role professional learning needs to play. While teachers with the least number of years in teaching feel that their initial teacher education left them relatively well prepared for teaching writing, a lack of experience means that the benefits of this preparation are not sustained.

The Australian Writing Survey reports that in the past 10 years, 70 per cent of respondents had attended professional development on the teaching of writing, followed by 39 per cent of respondents who had attended professional development in the past 12 months. About 30 per cent of all respondents, and 40 per cent of secondary teachers, had never attended professional development on the teaching of writing. Handwriting and keyboarding were the least adequately provided for in professional development opportunities.

There are more than 40 professional development providers delivering content related to teaching writing, including the Catholic dioceses, the NSW Department of Education, the Association of Independent Schools of NSW, and the professional associations. Some tertiary institutions and unions offer courses in this area. Commercial providers such as *Teacher Training Australia* and *Seven Steps to Writing Success* are also prominent in this space.

Providers would benefit from content specifications for professional development in teaching writing, at different phases of schooling, and specific to English and other key learning areas. NESA could then review existing professional development courses on the teaching of writing against the specifications.

#### **Recommendation 5: Identify and promote professional development in effective practice for the teaching of writing**

Building on Recommendations 1 to 4, NESA should develop content specifications for professional development in teaching writing, at different phases of schooling, in English and other key learning areas. NESA should review existing professional development courses to identify exemplary courses, and work with employing authorities, professional associations and unions to commission additional courses to meet areas of need.

With the establishment of an evidence base of effective practice through previous recommendations, and having identified a range of exemplary professional learning

opportunities, the NESAs Board could consider declaring the teaching of writing a priority for professional development and school registration.

NESA has a number of existing mechanisms it can use to prioritise the teaching of writing, and monitor efforts to improve the teaching of writing across schools, systems and professional learning providers.

New functions granted to NESAs by the 2016 BOSTES Review include applying high levels of scrutiny to the approval of providers of professional development in areas identified as state priorities<sup>31</sup>; and to review declared priority areas to support a stronger focus on writing<sup>32</sup> through school registration mechanisms.

In 2018, the Minister for Education asked NESAs to carry out a risk-based approach to school regulation, including an increased focus on identifying HSC content to improve the effectiveness of the teaching of Stage 6 and preparation of students for the HSC<sup>33</sup> through random inspections. Similarly, a future Statement of Expectations could ask NESAs to focus on the teaching of writing as part of the school inspection program.

### **Recommendation 6: Declare the teaching of writing a NESAs priority**

NESA will ask the Board to consider declaring the teaching of writing a priority area for professional development and school registration.

As a priority for professional learning, exemplary courses on teaching writing would be identified and promoted to schools and teachers. As a focus requirement for school and system registration by random inspection, the quality of writing pedagogy within selected schools would come under NESAs scrutiny.

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<sup>31</sup> BOSTES Review Recommendation 9.1.

<sup>32</sup> BOSTES Review Recommendation 4.6.

<sup>33</sup> Minister's 2018 Statement of Expectations.