



The Philosophy in Schools Association of New South Wales

9 St. Albans St., Abbotsford NSW 2046
4th December, 2020

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell MLC
Minister for Education and Early Childhood
GPO Box 5341 Sydney NSW 2001
&
Paul Martin, Executive Officer of NSW Education and Standards Authority
GPO Box 5300, Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Ms. Mitchell and Mr. Martin,

It is with great concern and disappointment that I write to you in my capacity as an executive and long-standing member of the Philosophy in Schools Association of NSW to question and express opposition to an announcement communicated to NESA accredited organizations on 30th November, 2020. That announcement cancelled the endorsement of all currently NESA Endorsed Providers and de-registered Registered Courses effective immediately.

Members of the Philosophy in Schools Association NSW have spent countless hours recently and over many years developing and refining our professional development courses for teachers, in collaboration with experienced teachers and academics with relevant expertise from a number of Australian universities. Consequently, we cannot understand what would justify the disparaging and dismissive implication in the NESA letter that all currently offered courses are of insufficient quality, effectiveness or rigor. I believe this implication is unwarranted in our case and I suspect in the case of many other PD programs offered by our colleagues in other professional associations. The courses for which we had received accreditation were developed to respond to the requirements of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, contrary to the implication in the letter of 30/11/2020. Despite the worth of our courses for helping facilitate and stimulate best practice in the classroom in relation to the development of intellectual inquiry skills, independent and higher order thinking, collaborative dialogue, and socially supportive and ethically aware classroom milieus, our courses will become less attractive to teachers if they no longer have the imprimatur of NESA.

Dates for our 2021 courses have been set, the courses are ready for delivery to teachers and we already have commitments from teachers who were planning to register for these courses in 2021. Given the disruption that Covid-19 restrictions have placed on our capacity to deliver professional development programs in 2020, we are particularly surprised and disappointed to face another challenge. The decision to repeal endorsement of our courses seems hasty and ill-considered, if not arrogant. Its consequences for the ongoing growth and development of teachers, their opportunities to broaden their own learning and to enhance their practices through professional development and mentoring should have been in the foreground of the minds of those who have made this decision, but the announcement gives little indication of any such concern.

My colleagues in the Philosophy in Schools Association of NSW and I ask that this decision be revisited and that concerns that you might have about the nature, rigour or conduct of professional

development programs offered by providers be made explicit and discussed with the relevant associations in the interests of quality assurance.

I know that you will be aware of research that indicates the importance of extensive opportunities for ongoing professional learning in producing great teachers.¹ This research would seem logically to suggest that substantial dialogue and collaboration with those experienced in the delivery of such professional development training would be both wise and likely to be efficacious, since any real or perceived shortcomings could be addressed and acted upon.

A 2014 ACER study also notes the importance of providing continuing professional development for teachers, as well as providing supportive resources, if we are to ensure the quality of educational experiences in Australia. In addition, that study indicates that Australia does not compare well with high achieving countries in relation to many of its current arrangements for assuring a high-quality teacher education system. This might also lead one to conclude that collaboration with all stakeholders to investigate professional development programs, in the interests of ensuring they are of high quality and responsive to need, would be a particularly important element in addressing this shortcoming.²

One of the aims of using the Philosophy in Schools methodology in primary and secondary school classrooms is to impress upon students the educational and social value of collaborative, substantive and rigorous investigative discussion; and to train them in the skills requisite to that kind of discussion. We train teachers to develop in their students the skills and dispositions that will assist them in coming to understand ideas and issues, and to assess their own perspectives and those of others on those ideas and issues. These are the skills requisite to participation in a democratic and ethically robust society. The way in which NESA has approached dealing with the request of the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning to review its processes for endorsing professional development providers and courses seems to me to be the antithesis of such a methodology. To reiterate my request above, my colleagues and I hope that this decision can be reconsidered precipitously. We are willing to meet with you to discuss our concerns and we look forward to your response to our request.

Yours faithfully



Sandra Lynch

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¹ Darling-Hammond, L., Wei, Ruth Chung, and Andree, A. "How high achieving countries develop great teachers" Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education ~ Research Brief, August 2010.
<https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/how-high-achieving-countries-develop-great-teachers.pdf>

² Ingvarson, L., Reid, K., Buckley, S., Kleinhenz, E., Masters, G., Rowley, G. (Sept, 2014). *Best Practice Teacher Education Programs and Australia's Own Programs*. Canberra: Department of Education.