



Radical push to destroy senior curriculum

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Over the summer break, *The Sydney Morning Herald* exposed an attempt by the powerful and well-connected private school lobby to deregulate the HSC as an exit credential, and to allow for a plethora of commercial tests imported from overseas to replace it.

There was little regard for just how destructive this would be to a common, shared stage 6 curriculum across all sectors, let alone the impact this will have on disadvantaged communities within the public system.

In response, I offered *The Sydney Morning Herald* the following opinion piece, which was published on January 30.

It was headed, "Disaster awaits if state deregulates the HSC".

"The latest push from the private school lobby to secede from the shared HSC should set off alarm bells for parents, teachers, educational leaders and students.

"The *Herald* revealed yesterday that a coalition of private school groups is pressuring policymakers to deregulate the HSC and calling for the creation of a smorgasbord of credentials and curriculums for schools and systems in this state.

"This would effectively create a market and a hierarchy of school exit credentials that would prove, as it has overseas, to be divisive and corrosive of educational standards.

"It is almost identical to the Thatcher government's ill-fated radical approach to educational standards and social cohesion. England now has a melange of exit credentials and curriculums across its schools.

"The private school coalition here is suggesting we should similarly allow the International Baccalaureate (IB), the Cambridge Assessment Program or interstate credentials and curriculum to be let loose upon our schools and systems.

"It is a remarkably colonial approach to schooling and has the effect of seeking deregulation as the guiding principle in a matter so vital to the welfare of children.

“The IB makes for an interesting case study. It has been flogged around Australian schools for more than 40 years and still only 70 schools see any use for it. Only 14 of those schools are in the public system and less than 1 per cent of students in NSW undergo it.

“The IB is a fee-for-service credential. It is governed by a privately appointed board that submits to the Swiss Civil Code. Its governors meet in Geneva and the default language of its deliberations is French. Good luck in pursuing appeals.

“The Cambridge Assessment Program emanates from offices mainly in the English Midlands. It is also a private outfit.

“No country comparable to Australia has outsourced major authority over curriculum and credentialing to a foreign country and private consortiums. Issues of transparency, accountability and remedy are monumental.

“The private school proposal to deregulate, stratify and outsource essential parts of schooling is perilous. A common curriculum and credential has unified our systems and schools in shared purpose, goals and standards.

“It has played a vital socially unifying role. Having a common curriculum and exit credential has allowed direct input from local educators, parents, academics and deeply affected social groups into the content of syllabuses and the consequent creation of assessment and examination processes.

“Certainly, let us have a vigorous debate about the future of education. Indeed, we can do so because education is locally governed and has shared, transparent institutions and milestones. And we can investigate any further means whereby we can add flexibility to the curriculum and HSC processes to respond to the needs of children facing a world of change and challenge.

“However, throwing those kids into a competitive educational market with stratified, privatised curriculums, a hierarchy of credentials and secession by elites would be a sustained act of neglect.”

Maurie Mulheron, President.