

straight Talk

hear every voice, know where you stand



Strengthening the future provision of secondary education in the inner Sydney area

Issues summary 2 – ‘Invited’ P&C representatives workshops

August 2014

1 Background

The inner Sydney area and its surrounds are experiencing urban renewal through the construction of new infill housing developments, the movement of families back into inner Sydney and increasing numbers of families remaining in the area.

As a consequence, the growth in the number of school-aged children living in inner Sydney will place increasing pressure on public education services in the area.

NSW Department of Education and Communities (the Department) is responsible for planning for and reviewing public education to ensure it meets the needs of students in relation to both educational offerings of schools and the learning environment. Needs and capacity analyses are undertaken on an ongoing basis to assist in strengthening the future provision of public education across the State.

In late 2012 the establishment of the Inner City Schools Working Party was announced to assist the Department with its ongoing review of public primary and secondary education in the inner Sydney area. The initial task of the Working Party was to consider the public education needs for growing numbers of primary-aged school students in the Ultimo/Pymont area. The Working Party recommended that a new school be built in the area.

Membership of the Working Party was reconfigured at the end of 2013 for its new focus on considering demand and possible options for addressing the provision of public secondary education in the inner Sydney area. Membership of the Working Party includes senior Departmental officers with educational, assets and communications expertise and selected secondary school Principals.

Initial needs and capacity analyses identified that in the:

- Short term there are some schools in the area with higher enrolments than others and that there is additional teaching and learning space available within the majority of existing public secondary schools; and
- Longer term there is a shortage of teaching and learning spaces to meet the projected demand.

On 16 May 2014 the Inner City Schools Working Party launched its six week community consultation period to gain community feedback on the provision of public secondary education in the inner Sydney area to assist the Department in its ongoing consideration of public education.

The consultation was designed using a variety of strategies to encourage as wide a range of individuals, stakeholder group members and the general community to explore and provide input on possible educational solutions for addressing the predicted growth in the number of public secondary school-aged children living in inner Sydney including:

- Principals, teachers, 'invited' P&C representatives and primary and secondary school students;
- NSW Teachers Federation, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), local interest groups; and
- The broader inner Sydney community.

This is one of a series of issues summaries that presents the outcomes of the community consultation. The focus of this issues summary is the outcomes of the 'invited' P&C representatives workshops.

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The Department will consider the feedback from the community consultation, along with the needs and capacity analyses, to help shape its recommendations on how to strengthen the provision of public secondary education in the inner Sydney area.

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2 Approach

Consultation purpose and objectives

The consultation was designed to seek community input on three discussion areas:

1. Options for managing public secondary educational needs in the short term (1-4 years).
2. Options for managing public secondary educational needs in the medium to long term (5-10 years).
3. The best way to create public secondary schools that meet current and future educational demands, in a highly urbanised environment with finite resources.

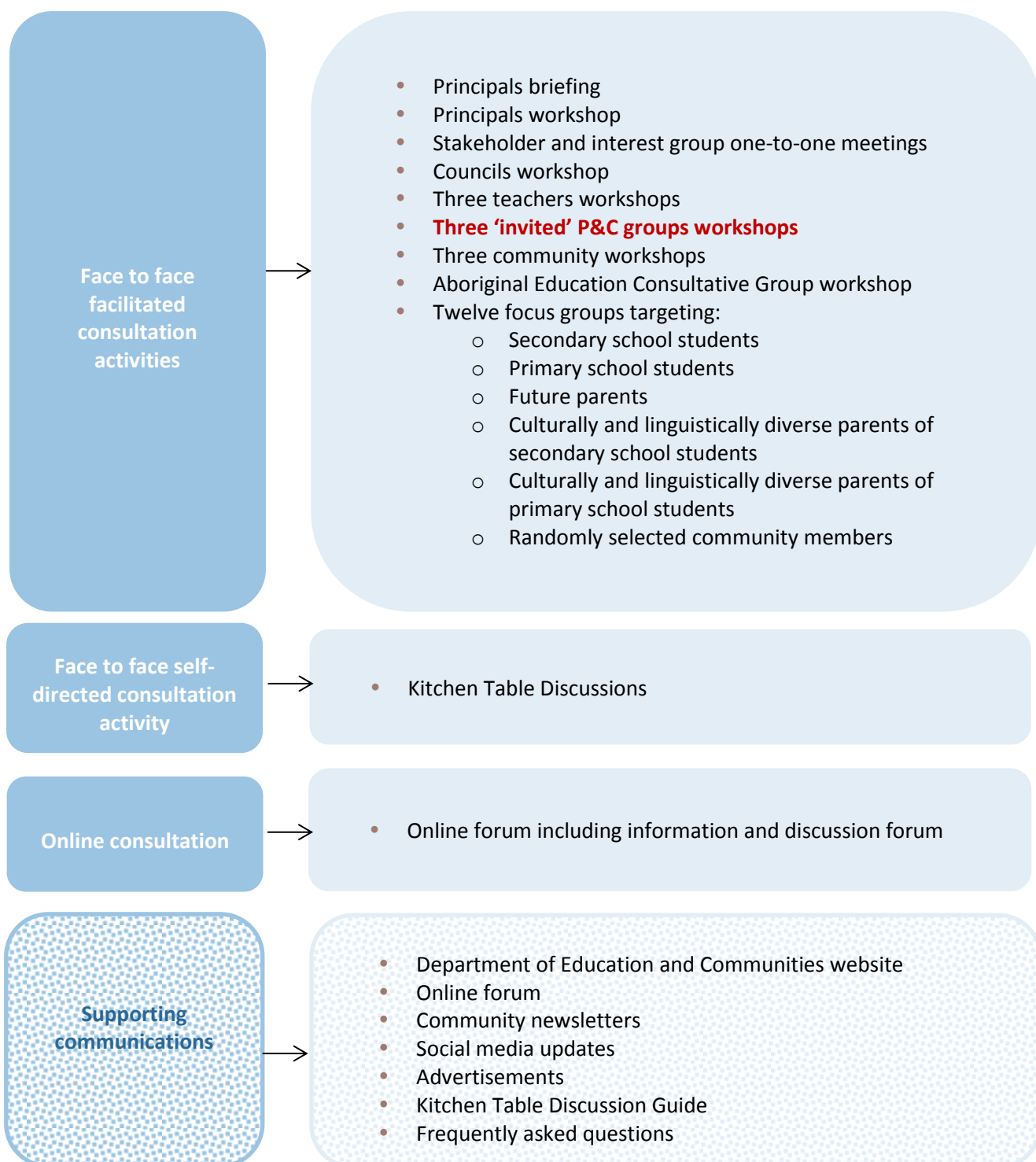
The objectives for consultation for planning for public secondary education in the inner Sydney area were to:

- Introduce the consultation process and invite participation from stakeholder groups and people who had an interest.
- Provide a number of different ways in which stakeholder groups and the community could participate in consultation activities.
- Facilitate feedback and consultation from key stakeholder groups and the community so that the full range of issues, concerns and ideas could be heard and considered.
- Ensure that the conversation about planning for public secondary education in the inner Sydney area was broadly representative of wider community expectations and priorities.
- Identify and acknowledge the breadth of issues, concerns and ideas and demonstrate the challenges for the Department in considering and weighing up each option.
- Provide feedback to participants, stakeholder groups and the wider community on what was raised, how it was considered and how it influenced the final recommendations.



Consultation activities

There was a wide range of opportunities for stakeholders and the wider community to participate.



This issues summary presents the outcomes of the activities highlighted in **red**.



Workshop details

The P&C President, office bearers and two or three co-opted and interested parents from the P&Cs of each of the public secondary schools and partner primary schools in the Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Marrickville Principal networks were invited by the Chair of the Inner City Schools Working Party to one of three 'invited' P&C workshops. The 'invited' P&C groups could opt to attend an alternative workshop if they preferred. Principals were advised they were welcome to nominate their P&C to participate in an 'invited' P&C workshop if they thought they would be interested. In addition to the initial list of 15 P&C groups an additional five groups were invited at Principal request.

Overall 37 P&C representatives attended one of the workshops.

Details of the workshops are provided below.

Name	Date and Time	Location
Invited P&C representatives workshop 1	Monday 26 May 2014 6.30 - 8.30pm (2hours)	Sydney Secondary College – Leichhardt Campus Balmain Road, Leichhardt
Invited P&C representatives workshop 2	Tuesday 27 May 2014 6.30 - 8.30pm (2hours)	Sydney Secondary College – Leichhardt Campus Balmain Road, Leichhardt
Invited P&C representatives workshop 3	Wednesday 28 May 2014 6.30 - 8.30pm (2hours)	Alexandria Park Community School Park Street, Alexandria

Workshop approach

The workshops were independently facilitated by Straight Talk.

Each event commenced with an introduction by a member of the Inner City Schools Working Party to provide the context, followed by input from an officer from the Department's Assets planning group showing the projections for public secondary schools demand in the inner Sydney area. Generally following this input Department representatives left the workshop to ensure all participants felt at ease giving their honest and open opinions.

The majority of the workshop time was spent working in small groups or as one group where numbers were small, to discuss the three consultation questions in depth:

1. Options for managing public secondary educational needs in the short term (1-4 years).
2. Options for managing public secondary educational needs in the medium to long term (5-10 years).
3. The best way to create public secondary schools that meet current and future educational demands, in a highly urbanised environment with finite resources.

Unless time was limited, small groups were given the opportunity to feed their ideas back to all workshop participants to enable an understanding of the synergies and differences in ideas and possible solutions raised.




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3 Issues analysis

Feedback has been collated, analysed and coded to enable an understanding of the key issues, opportunities and solutions raised at the workshops. A summary of the key issues is included in the 'At a glance' section, with 'More detail' provided from page 7 onwards.

At a glance

<p>Short term</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider building a new school immediately • Spend more on maintenance, improvement, redesign and refurbishment of existing school sites • Introduce specialist streams to the under-utilised schools, like business, language immersion and technology • Investigate why students from outside of the area are enrolling at some schools, replicate this at under-enrolled schools • Introduce local intake quotas at selective schools • Change school hours by creating a '2 shift day', possibly on gender lines
<p>Medium to long term</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a new school or buy adjacent land and extensively redevelop existing schools • Introduce local intake quotas at selective schools • Change the selective system so selective students go to the nearest selective school
<p>Future demands</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use virtual classrooms and online classroom participation by students from their homes to increase capacity • Teach information technology generally but also as a specialist stream at Alexandria Park Community School • Add more flexibility and responsiveness to the curriculum • Consider a multi-school 'campus' model • Remove under-performing Principals, pay a high performing Principal extra to create a centre of excellence • Provide better information about school choice and catchments etc to parents

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In more detail

Question 1: What should be done in the short term (1-4 year period)?

Capital works

Capital works was a very popular theme when considering what should be done in the short term. Suggestions included building a new school, along with a number of potential sites, spending more money on maintenance and improvement of existing schools sites, as well as calls both for and against using demountables in order to meet demand in the short term. Other suggestions included using architects and designers, as well as the suggestions of students, on how to better utilise available space and buildings.

Representative comments:

- 'Need physical space now.'
- 'Reclaim existing rooms on sites e.g. those being used for preschools.'
- 'Invest money to maintain physical schools.'

Enhance and expand educational offerings

Enhancing and expanding educational offerings was discussed in length. Suggestions included introducing selective or specialist streams to the under-utilised schools, including subject based streams such as business, language immersion and technology, increasing curriculum offerings at under-utilised schools, using virtual classrooms, giving employment support to senior students, such as CV writing and interviewing skills. It was suggested that the reasons so many students from out of area enrol at some schools should be investigated and then these attractions replicated at the under-enrolled schools to encourage more balanced enrolments.

Representative comments:

- 'Why are twice as many students coming into the area? The Department shouldn't be taking enrichment students from out of area.'
- 'There should be greater flexibility with curriculum to attract people.'
- 'Invest in virtual classrooms to utilise small learning spaces not big enough for traditional classes.'

Administrative and policy changes

There were many and varied suggestions for addressing the issue in the short term by making administrative and policy changes. These included increasing the emphasis on local enrolments, introducing a local student quota at Sydney Boys High School and Sydney Girls High School, changing the selective school system to make it local-selective, staggering school times into shifts to increase space utilisation, gender splitting co-ed schools due to the perception that boys and girls study better separately and then staggering school times, and making boundary changes.

Representative comments:

- 'Change the way the selective school program works. Students could take a test to get into the selective stream and then go to whichever selective school is nearest to them.'
- 'Take a quota of local students into Sydney Boys High School and Sydney Girls High School.'
- 'Gender splitting classes and staggering based on gender.'

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Influencing parent choice

There was a general consensus that socio-economic issues play a part in parental school choice and that middle-class parents want the schools their children go to, to have a variety of subject choices, including extension courses. There was also the suggestion that marketing, branding and logos as well as uniform policy make an impact on parent choice, as does the leadership structure and Principal. Many suggestions on this theme were very specific to particular schools and why the schools weren't attracting enrolments.

Transport

There was a small number of suggestions around transport, including that travelling from Kings Cross to Balmain isn't practical; all schools should be on bus routes, that there should be more school specials and that the buses need to run on time.

Collaboration

There were two suggestions on this theme – that bigger and more popular schools should be placed in charge of under-enrolled schools in order to counter their reputations and to investigate a 'college model' for schools in the Marrickville area.

Other comments

There were three other comments that didn't fit into the themes above.

- 'The focus on education from other cultures should be embedded across schools.'
- 'What is the definition of 'local' for primary schools?'
- 'Living in Kings Cross is very different to living in Balmain.'

Question 2: What are the best options for addressing the longer term situation (5-10 year period)?

The overwhelming response on this issue was around capital works, specifically suggestions to build a new school or to purchase more land adjacent to existing schools and expand. There were very few suggestions on other themes.

Capital works

Numerous suggestions were made about sites for new schools or school expansions. There were also suggestions that existing buildings could be expanded and that schools need to be well maintained. If a vertical school was built, there was concern that it would need to be a green building and designed to high standards. Some participants suggested that if a new school wasn't built, parents would send their children to other, over-subscribed schools further away in preference to the under-utilised local schools. Others suggested that the money that could be spent on a new school should be shared between the existing schools.

Suggested new sites included:

- Cockatoo Island.
- Convention Centre at White Bay.
- Barangaroo.

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- Harold Park.
- Inner South Sydney.
- Within the city perimeter.
- The Department building on Bridge Street.
- Domain car park.
- National Art School.
- Goulburn Street car park.
- Vertical option near Town Hall or Wynyard.

Suggested Sites for expansion/re-development:

- Ultimo Public School.
- TAFE Colleges.
- Sydney Distance Education High School.
- Cleveland Street Intensive English High School.
- 'Wilkins' near Marrickville High School, Park Road.
- The 'tramshed land' next to the Leichhardt Campus of Sydney Secondary College.

Administrative/Policy Changes

Suggestions on this theme included introducing a local intake to Sydney Boys and Sydney Girls High Schools, making the selective school system localised, enforcing boundaries and splitting of Years 7-10 and 11-12 into separate schools.

Representative comments:

- 'Change the border so 'city' people need to go somewhere else. Demand could be capped by limiting out of area kids.'
- 'Make Sydney Boys and Girls into one school and use the other building for a local school. Or have each school be ½ and ½.'
- 'Change the selective system so kids go to their local catchment selective school.'

Other Comments

Other comments that didn't fit into one of the themes above are provided below.

- 'Why are some schools operating under capacity? Do more of what does work (learning from schools that are over-subscribed) and less of what doesn't work.'
- 'Half of growth isn't on page. There might be a school under-capacity, Sydney LGA, Surry Hills.'
- 'Concerns that very superficial decision making is taking place.'

Question 3: What ideas do you have for helping to create public secondary schools that meet the demands of a modern education system and prepare students for their lives ahead?

Answers to this question were mainly spread across suggestions for changes to teaching techniques, school structure and influencing parental choice.

Techniques

Using more innovative teaching techniques ranked very highly amongst responses to this question. Using virtual classrooms to increase capacity was suggested as well as teaching information

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technology both generally and as a specialist stream at Alexandria Park Community School that could include graphic and computer aided design technology as well as software development. A more flexible and responsive curriculum was suggested. An enrichment class for Year 5 girls to help them make a more informed high school choice and feel more comfortable in the transition was suggested. Other suggestions included community gardens, international education, looking at the Scottish system as an example to use classroom spaces creatively and introducing a 2-shift day.

Representative comments:

- 'Introduce new ways of learning - not talking about smart boards!'
- 'Kids learning how to do things using the net.'
- 'Look at virtual classrooms to widen educational/subject choice for specialist areas.'

Structure

There were numerous and diverse suggestions for changing the structure of schools. Suggestions included using the 'college model' currently implemented by Sydney Secondary College, the Department using less of a 'cookie cutter approach' (having a single set of policies that doesn't account for local conditions), corporate investment to grow schools, moving away from a HSC focus and increasing the relative importance of sport and vocational subjects, tying in after school care with underperforming schools, re-evaluating the benefits of the selective school system, paying a Principal more to build a better school and allocating new Principals to underperforming schools.

Representative comments:

- 'The Department has a cookie cutter approach and many opportunities have been lost as a result.'
- 'Give someone a decent salary to build a centre of excellence.'
- 'Really look closely at existing selective system. Does it do the job? Are the places where the students live? Do we need thousands of kids criss-crossing Sydney twice a day?'

Influencing parent choice

There were numerous suggestions around making schools more attractive to parents. These included the uniform, how students from the school behave out of school, how children feel about the school and rumours about closures. There were also suggestions for providing better information to parents about schools, by publishing catchment boundaries online and sending letters to parents with information to guide their choices.

Representative comments:

- 'The uniform makes a difference.'
- 'Rumours effected intake – threats to close make people make other choices away from that school.'
- 'We have perfectly placed schools – why aren't people going to them? How do we make it better?'

Funding

There were three comments about funding of schools.

- 'Change FOEI - Needs based funding.'

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- ‘Implement Gonski and spend the money on the kids and schools in need.’
- ‘Stop funding elite non-government high schools and put this money into public education.’

Capital works

There were three comments about the Department’s assets.

- ‘If the Department wants to use more assets out of hours, it needs to create flexible spaces that cater to more of the community than just students.’
- ‘The way a school looks makes a difference.’
- ‘Don’t like demountables at one school, at least one Principal is dead against it – temporary solution only, shouldn’t be permanent.’

Other Comments

Other comments that didn’t fit into one of the themes above are provided below.

- ‘More programs to help Aboriginal kids finish school.’
- ‘Glebe Outreach Program – protect the catch-all.’
- ‘Students cannot use their transport passes on the light rail.’

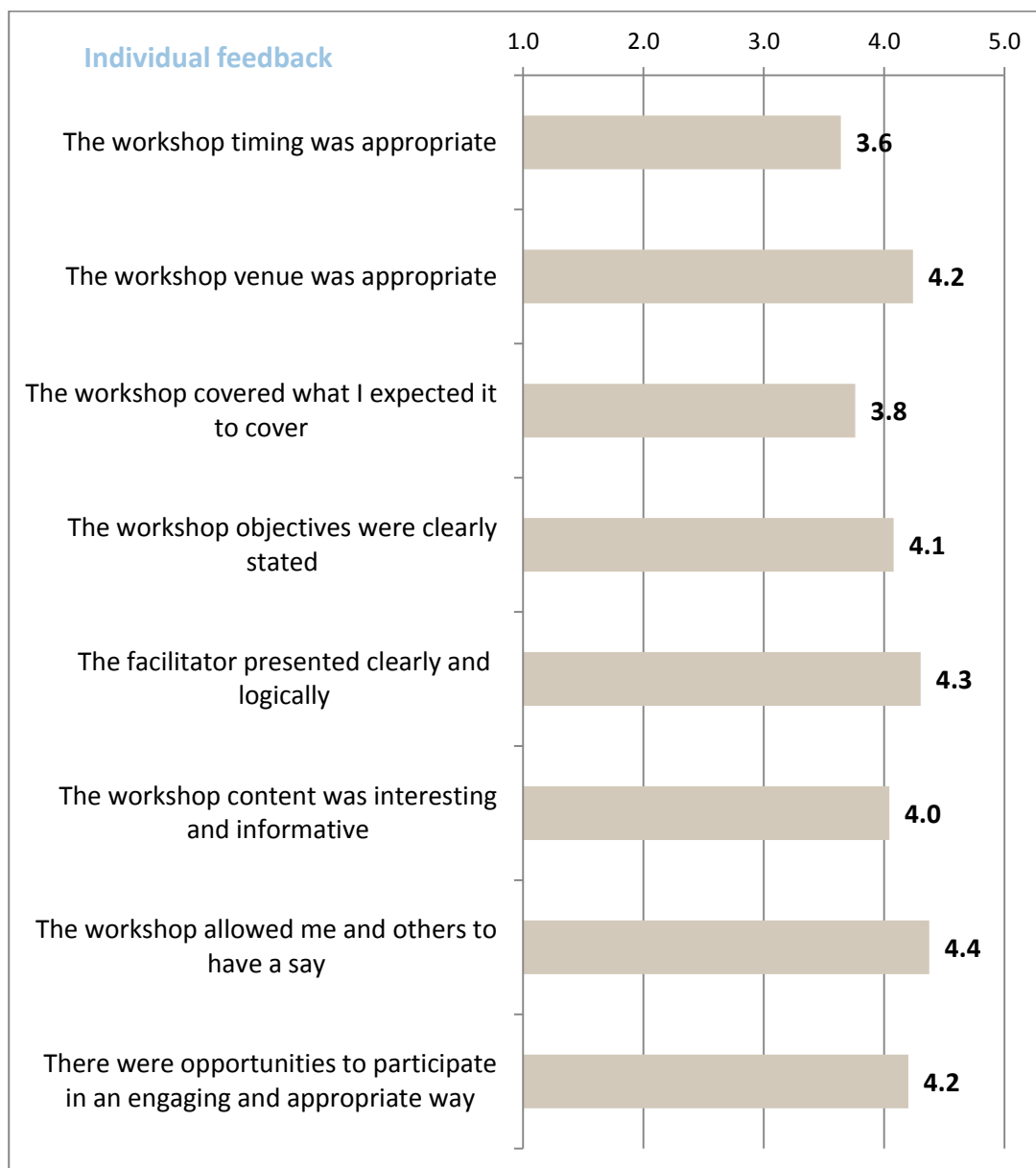


Individual feedback

Feedback form analysis

At the end of each workshop individual feedback was obtained using a feedback form to explore participant satisfaction with the workshop including suggestions about how the session might be improved. Of 37 participants, 25 completed the feedback form.

Overall there was a high level of satisfaction with the workshop process. This is demonstrated by the graph below.



Participants were largely complimentary about the workshop and were most impressed by the opportunity to have their say, and the clear and logical facilitation. Participants also agreed that the workshop had clearly stated objectives and covered interesting content. The timing of the workshop was of most concern. One of the workshops was held on the same evening as the State of Origin.

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The average ratings for all the statements were all above 3.5 in a 5 point rating scale where 5 equalled 'strongly agree' and 1 'strongly disagree'. The scores ranged from 3.6 – 4.4 and the majority of scores were above 4.

Improvements

When asked whether they had any suggestions about how the workshop could have been improved participants mentioned the following:

- 'Target potential stakeholders and ensure they are informed and included rather than wait for word-of-mouth or rely on a Principal's say-so.'
- 'Needs a longer time. The questions asked were very vague – did not see how the responses will help the Department over and above what parents have already been saying. Still it was a start and welcome future engagement!!'
- 'The workshop timing was not appropriate because of State of Origin.'
- 'The data needs to be sorted, too much grandstanding – PowerPoint.'
- 'Better presentation of data at the beginning of the night. More in depth information for the participants' schools and their anticipated high school stream.'
- 'Some 'grandstanding' at beginning dragged things out a bit.'
- 'Data clarified in more detail and with more accuracy.'
- 'Keep to agenda and not allow too much diversion at the beginning.'
- 'Less talk at the start about the data.'
- 'Could be presented quicker and simpler.'
- 'Improve data presentation and anticipate questions that will be raised by participants to be more knowledgeable.'
- 'I think a range of views could have been explored better.'
- 'The views of the facilitator were influential on the group.'
- 'The data was incomplete. Growth in LGA vs growth in the school's catchment needs to be aligned. Surveys on why twice the number of students are coming in from out of area than are going out needs to be done.'
- 'Certainly the culture of a school affected my choices and the provision of extra-curricular activities.'
- 'There were opportunities to participate in an engaging and appropriate way - just a time issue.'
- 'If more concise data was available up front some of the time wouldn't have been taken up with the set up and more time available for discussion. Very good otherwise.'
- 'Great use of group thought.'
- 'Background info clearer esp. b/w slides.'
- 'Data to be comprehensive, appropriate, accurate.'
- 'A larger group – more diverse.'
- 'Excellent conversation!'
- 'Considerations to gather the non 'self-opt-in' interest groups i.e. those especially keen turning up but this is about every family.'
- 'No – very open, friendly, informative.'
- 'Have water on offer as well as tea and coffee.'

