



THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION 2015

Responding and adapting

Report of the Senior School Curriculum and Certification Committee

December, 2012

Our Ref: Ex1168; 2012/37408

Hon Peter Collier MLC
Minister for Education; Energy; Indigenous Affairs
10th Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Minister

Please find attached the report of the Senior School Curriculum and Certification Committee established by you to review the current Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) and provide advice and recommendations for change.

The Committee has reviewed the WACE and the extent to which it is achieving its intended goals and meeting the expectations of its many stakeholders – students, parents, employers, post-secondary education institutions and the broader community. The report *The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015: Responding and adapting* identifies a number of issues associated with the current WACE which need to be addressed in the immediate future. The Report includes a set of seven principles to underpin the proposed changes, a design brief and a proposed concept plan for an amended WACE. The changes that are proposed are compatible with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum, and will assist in the alignment of the WACE with the Australian Curriculum. The proposed amendments to the WACE are designed to resolve the issues associated with the current WACE and provide a senior secondary school certificate which better meets the needs of its stakeholders.

The Committee proposes that the amended WACE becomes operational for Year 11 students in 2015 and for Year 12 students in 2016.

The Committee recognises that the proposed changes to the WACE cannot be implemented successfully without additional resources. Separate from this report, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority, in conjunction with other agencies, has developed cost estimates for implementing the proposed changes.

The Committee is grateful to all those who have provided input to the review including staff from the School Curriculum and Standards Authority, the Department of Education, the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. Valuable input from senior university and vocational education personnel is acknowledged together with extensive advice from the Secondary Principals' Forum which meets regularly with senior management from the School Curriculum and Standards Authority.

The Committee supports the principles, design brief and concept plan for an amended WACE which, once implemented, will lead to improved outcomes for Western Australian senior secondary students.

Yours sincerely



Emeritus Professor Patrick Garnett
Chair

On behalf of the Senior School Curriculum and Certification Committee
Emeritus Professor Patrick Garnett, Chair, School Curriculum and Standards Authority (Chair)
Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education
Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education
Ms Debra Sayce, Assistant Director, Learning and Teaching, Catholic Education Office
Ms Valerie Gould, Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of WA
Mr Allan Blagaich, Chief Executive Officer, School Curriculum and Standards Authority
Dr Bruce Matthews, Chair, Standards Committee, School Curriculum and Standards Authority
Ms Margaret Herley, Chair, Curriculum and Assessment Committee, School Curriculum and Standards Authority

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
Why is a review timely?	1
Issues with the current WACE	1
Principles that underpin changes to the WACE	2
Design brief for an amended WACE	2
Concept plan for an amended WACE	3
How the proposed amendments to the WACE address the issues identified with current WACE arrangements	5
Timelines and financial considerations	7
1. WHY REVIEW THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (WACE)?	8
1.1 Reasons for reviewing the WACE now.....	8
1.2 Culmination of recent senior secondary school reforms in WA.....	8
1.3 Increase in the compulsory school leaving age in WA.....	9
1.4 Enrolment patterns within the WACE	9
1.5 Stakeholder concerns about a number of features of the WACE.....	9
1.6 Need for alignment of the WACE with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum	9
1.7 Identification by the Authority's Board and the Minister for Education of the need to review the WACE	10
2. CURRENT WACE REQUIREMENTS	11
2.1 The reform context in which the WACE was developed	11
2.2 General features of the WACE	11
2.3 Current structure of the WACE.....	12
2.4 Catering for diverse interests and educational pathways within the WACE ..	13
2.4.1 WACE courses	13
2.4.2 VET within the WACE.....	14
2.4.3 Endorsed programs.....	14
3. STUDENT ENROLMENT PATTERNS WITHIN THE WACE.....	15
3.1 Participation and retention	15
3.1.1 Categories of educational activity	15
3.1.2 Student retention rates	15
3.2 Enrolments within the WACE	16
3.3 Enrolments within WACE course stages	16
3.3.1 Student enrolment patterns by stage: an overall picture	16
3.3.2 Student enrolment patterns by stage: breakdowns by school system/sector, socio-economic status (SES), location, Indigenous status and gender.....	18

3.3.3	Extent of progression to higher stages	19
3.4	Enrolments in VET programs	19
3.5	Enrolments in endorsed programs	21
4.	STUDENTS' POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS	23
4.1	Pathways to higher education	23
4.2	Pathways to further vocational education and training	25
4.3	Pathways to work.....	26
5.	ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN DEVELOPING A WACE FOR THE FUTURE	27
5.1	Stage 1 enrolments are much higher than envisaged and significant numbers of students are not undertaking courses commensurate with their ability.....	27
5.2	Low and declining Stage 2 enrolments have resulted in Stage 2 examinations being unviable.....	28
5.3	The current three stage design of WACE courses is incompatible with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum, which comprises Year 11 and Year 12 courses.....	28
5.4	Significant concerns have been raised regarding the standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by students who are currently graduating with a WACE	29
5.5	Some students graduating with a WACE are poorly prepared for subsequent educational pathways into university or vocational education and training.....	29
5.6	The Authority is currently unable to provide adequate information about students' standards of achievement in Preliminary course units, Stage 1 course units and endorsed programs.	29
5.7	Lack of clarity regarding the value and significance of achievement of a WACE	30
6.	PRINCIPLES AND DESIGN BRIEF FOR A WACE FOR THE FUTURE	31
6.1	Principles to underpin the development of an amended WACE	31
6.1.1	Proposed principles.....	31
6.2	A design brief for the development of an amended WACE.....	32
6.2.1	Design brief for an amended WACE.....	32
7.	CONCEPT PLAN FOR AN AMENDED WACE	33
8.	HOW THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE WACE ADDRESS THE ISSUES IDENTIFIED WITH THE CURRENT WACE ARRANGEMENTS	36
9.	TIMELINES FOR CHANGE	38
10.	FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS	38
	REFERENCES	38
	APPENDIX 1: Senior School Curriculum and Certification Committee Terms of Reference and Membership.....	39

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) has been fully implemented for three years and the Board of the newly established School Curriculum and Standards Authority (Authority) has been reviewing whether the WACE is achieving its intended goals and meeting the expectations of its many stakeholders – students, parents, employers, post-secondary education institutions and the broader community. Within this context the Minister for Education recently established the Senior School Curriculum and Certification Committee (SSCCC) to provide advice and recommendations for changes to the WACE.

Why is a review timely?

A review of the WACE is timely because:

- the reforms to the WACE have been in place for three years and student enrolment patterns and more general experiences with the WACE are now available for consideration;
- compulsory schooling until the end of a young person's seventeenth year, introduced in WA in 2008, is now well in place;
- data analysis undertaken by the Authority indicates that enrolment patterns within the WACE are a cause for concern;
- views expressed by stakeholders suggest that there are concerns about a number of features of the WACE; and
- the implementation of the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum will soon require an alignment of the WACE with that curriculum, providing an ideal opportunity to make other desired changes.

Issues with the current WACE

Several issues associated with the current WACE have been identified which should be addressed in proposing amendments to the WACE. These include:

- Stage 1 enrolments are much higher than envisaged and significant numbers of students are not undertaking courses commensurate with their ability;
- low and declining Stage 2 enrolments have resulted in Stage 2 examinations being unviable;
- the current three stage design of WACE courses is incompatible with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum, which comprises Year 11 and Year 12 courses;
- significant concerns have been raised regarding the standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by students who are currently graduating with a WACE;
- some students graduating with a WACE are poorly prepared for subsequent educational pathways into university or vocational education and training;
- the Authority is currently unable to provide adequate information about students' standards of achievement in Preliminary course units, Stage 1 course units and endorsed programs; and
- lack of clarity regarding the value and significance of achievement of a WACE.

The Senior School Curriculum and Certification Committee consider that the WACE requires fundamental changes in order to meet future needs. These changes are compatible with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum, and will assist in the alignment of the WACE with the national curriculum.

In making recommendations regarding changes to the WACE the Senior School Curriculum and Certification Committee has developed:

- a set of seven principles that should underpin the proposed changes to the WACE;
- a proposed design brief for an amended WACE; and
- a proposed concept plan for an amended WACE.

Principles that underpin changes to the WACE

The seven principles that underpin the proposed changes to the WACE are:

1. Learning is a lifelong process and schooling should prepare students for multiple educational pathways.
2. The WACE should be flexible and accommodate students with diverse backgrounds, interests and abilities and from different learning communities.
3. The WACE should embed both breadth and depth of learning.
4. Students should engage with courses that are personally challenging, that enhance their development and maximise their future study and career options.
5. Marks and grades awarded should be reliable and comparable across the State, and be respected as such by the Western Australian public.
6. After thirteen years of schooling, students should demonstrate a minimum level of literacy and numeracy.
7. After thirteen years of schooling, students should be prepared for further study in either training or university or entry to the workplace.

Design brief for an amended WACE

The design brief was developed to guide the task of amending the current WACE in a manner consistent with the principles stated above. Key aspects of the design brief are as follows:

1. Construct a system of certification and courses that encourages students to select courses that are personally challenging and reward student achievement;
2. Modify the current WACE structure to allow for the eventual integration of the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum;
3. Provide students, parents and the public with a clear statement of whether a student has met the minimum standards of literacy and numeracy required to enter training or the workplace;
4. Modify the current WACE so that most students completing thirteen years of schooling achieve either an ATAR or a Certificate II or higher;
5. Replace the current three stage course design with Year 11 and 12 courses which may involve either Authority examinations or school-based Authority-moderated examinations/tests;
6. Maintain a single WACE structure that is inclusive of all students and allows schools the opportunity to offer viable and appropriate programs to meet the needs of their students and community; and

7. Establish moderation processes to ensure that marks and grades are reliable and comparable across the State, and are respected as such by the Western Australian public.

N.B. These adjustments to the WACE do not overcome the problems associated with small senior school enrolments in some secondary schools – schools will still need to consider carefully what they can and should offer to their students and in their community.

Concept plan for an amended WACE

The following concept plan outlines the main features of the proposed amended WACE.

1. The WACE will comprise Year 11 courses (Units 1 and 2) and Year 12 courses (paired Units 3 and 4).
2. The structure of the WACE will be modified so that students undertake a minimum of ten courses (20 units) across Years 11 and 12 (typically five or more Year 11 courses and a minimum of five Year 12 courses); up to a combined maximum of two Year 11 courses and two Year 12 courses may be replaced by VET programs and endorsed programs (VET programs may replace up to two Year 11 courses and two Year 12 courses; endorsed programs may replace up to one Year 11 course and one Year 12 course).
3. The courses will be modified from existing WACE courses.
4. Year 11 courses will be introduced in 2015 and Year 12 courses will be introduced in 2016.
5. The courses in the WACE will be defined as:

ATAR Courses:

- Courses with external examinations in Year 12 set by the Authority.
- Courses will typically be based on current Stage 2 and Stage 3 course units.
- As Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum becomes available appropriate courses will be adopted as ATAR Courses with adaptation to suit Western Australian requirements.
- Only ATAR Courses will be externally examined from 2016.

General Courses:

- Courses with school-based tests/examinations and moderation by the Authority.
- Tests/examinations may include Externally Set Tasks (EST).
- Courses will typically be based on Stage 1 and Stage 2 course units but it is likely that modification will be required to the content and assessment in current units.
- As Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum becomes available appropriate courses will be adopted as General Courses with adaptation to suit Western Australian requirements.
- Course Advisory Committees will provide advice to the Board regarding the appropriateness of General Courses for some subjects.

Foundation and Preliminary Courses:

- Foundation courses will typically be based on Stage 1 course units and provide a focus on literacy and numeracy skills, practical work-related experience and the opportunity to build personal skills that are important for life and work.
 - Preliminary courses are focussed on providing a relevant option for students with special education needs, in particular those students who cannot access the ATAR or general course content with adjustment and/or disability provisions; students with an intellectual disability or who have had a severely disrupted learning pathway; and students who are unable to progress directly to training from school or who require modified and independent education plans.
 - Tests/examinations may include Externally Set Tasks (EST).
6. Students will be able to select across the suite of ATAR, General and Foundation and Preliminary courses offered appropriate to their educational pathways, needs and interests.
7. In order to achieve a WACE students will:
- complete literacy and numeracy tests to demonstrate a minimum standard.
 - achieve an ATAR¹ or complete a Certificate II (or higher).
 - complete two Year 11 English units and two Year 12 English units.
 - complete at least one pair of units from a List A course and one pair of units from a List B course in Year 12.
 - complete at least 20 units (or equivalents), including a minimum of 10 units at Year 12.
 - achieve a minimum of 6 C grades in 6 Year 11 units and 8 C grades in 4 pairs of Year 12 units (or equivalents).

Note 1: The achievement of an ATAR requires students to complete a minimum of four Year 12 ATAR Courses.

8. Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement (WASSA)
Every student who completes studies that can contribute towards a WACE will receive a Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement (WASSA) which will detail achievement in all courses, VET programs and endorsed programs completed by the student.
9. Literacy and numeracy tests will be provided that students are required to complete to demonstrate achievement at or above a minimum standard in order to receive a WACE.
- The tests will be mapped to the Australian Core Skills Framework. Achievement will be reported on a band scale with a minimum standard based on the skills regarded as essential for individuals to meet the demands of everyday life and work in a knowledge-based economy.
 - During their senior secondary schooling, students will have multiple opportunities to demonstrate achievement at or above the minimum literacy and numeracy standards. Students will be able to repeat the tests at semester intervals.
 - Students who have not demonstrated the minimum standards of literacy and numeracy will receive a WASSA.

10. Foundation English and Foundation Mathematics courses will be introduced within the Foundation suite of courses to prepare students for the various forms of writing and mathematics required in further training and employment.
11. Awards
 - A Certificate of Distinction and a Certificate of Merit will recognise student achievement dependent on the degree of difficulty of the courses and programs undertaken and their level of achievement.
 - These certificates will replace the current Certificates of Commendation and Excellence.
 - These certificates will be determined through the allocation of points.
12. From 2015, all courses (excluding Languages) with fewer than 100 students for two consecutive years will be placed on notice and if enrolments remain at or below 100 students for a third year, the course will be removed from the course list(s).
13. Syllabuses will be reviewed typically on a five-year cyclical basis, according to learning area.

How the proposed amendments to the WACE address the issues identified with current WACE arrangements

The proposed amendments to the WACE are designed to resolve the issues associated with the current WACE and provide a senior secondary school certificate which better meets the needs of its many stakeholders. A summary of how the proposed changes will address the issues identified previously is set out in the table below.

Issue with the current WACE	How addressed by the proposed amendments to the WACE
Stage 1 enrolments are much higher than envisaged and significant numbers of students are not undertaking courses commensurate with their ability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new WACE will be based on Year 11 courses (comprising two units) and Year 12 courses (comprising paired units), providing for greater continuity and depth of study. • Students must complete a minimum of at least 20 units (or equivalents) including a minimum of 10 Year 12 units. • A combined maximum of eight unit equivalents of VET and endorsed programs is permitted, but with endorsed programs being restricted to a maximum of four unit equivalents. • Enrolments in Foundation and Preliminary courses will be restricted to students for whom they are designed.

Low and declining Stage 2 enrolments have resulted in Stage 2 examinations being unviable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course stages will be discontinued and will be replaced by Year 11 and 12 courses. • Only Year 12 ATAR courses will be externally examined (from 2016). • All courses with low enrolments in two consecutive years will be placed on notice and, if enrolments remain low, the course will be removed from the course list(s).
The current three stage design of WACE courses is incompatible with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum, which comprises Year 11 and Year 12 courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The establishment of Year 11 and Year 12 courses is consistent with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum. • As Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum courses become available, appropriate courses will be adopted as ATAR, General or Foundation courses and adapted to suit WA requirements.
Significant concerns have been raised regarding the standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by students who are currently graduating with a WACE.	<p>Achievement of the amended WACE will require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completion of two Year 11 English units and a pair of Year 12 English units; • completion of literacy and numeracy tests demonstrating achievement of minimum standards of literacy and numeracy; and • literacy and numeracy skills will be a focus of Foundation English and Mathematics courses.
Some students graduating with a WACE are poorly prepared for subsequent educational pathways into university or vocational education and training.	<p>Achievement of the amended WACE will require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstration of minimum standards of literacy and numeracy; • achievement of an ATAR or Certificate II (or higher); and • completion of Year 11 and 12 courses that require greater depth of study than current Stage 1 units.
The Authority is currently unable to provide adequate information about students' standards of achievement in Preliminary course units, Stage 1 course units and endorsed programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ATAR courses will continue to be externally examined by the Authority. • School-based tests/examinations for General and Foundation courses will be moderated by the Authority and will include Externally Set Tasks to assist with moderation and the monitoring of standards.

<p>Lack of clarity regarding the value and significance of achievement of a WACE.</p>	<p>The new WACE will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • require demonstration of an adequate level of literacy and numeracy; • require the achievement of an ATAR or Certificate II (or higher) as preparation for further study or work; • involve greater depth of learning by requiring the completion of a minimum of 10 Year 12 units; • significantly reduce the potential use of lower level Foundation courses and endorsed programs; • more clearly differentiate on the WACE certificate courses taken at different levels of difficulty; and • replace current certificates of excellence and commendation with certificates of merit and distinction which reward students according to both the difficulty of the courses they undertake and their level of achievement (i.e. grades).
---	--

Timelines and financial considerations

The Committee proposes that the amended WACE becomes operational for Year 11 students in 2015 and for Year 12 students in 2016.

The Committee recognises that the proposed changes to the WACE cannot be implemented successfully without additional resources. In particular, curriculum and syllabus review and revision, the development and implementation of literacy and numeracy tests, expanded moderation activities, significantly expanded provision of access to VET Certificates II and above, and support for systems/sector professional development and change management will require additional funding. Separate from this report, the Authority, in conjunction with other agencies, has developed cost estimates for implementing the proposed changes.

1. WHY REVIEW THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (WACE)?

1.1 Reasons for reviewing the WACE now

It is an appropriate time to review the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) to determine whether it is achieving its intended goals and meeting the expectations of its many stakeholders – students, parents, employers, post-secondary education institutions and the broader community.

A review of the WACE is timely because:

- the reforms to the WACE, which had their origins some 10 years ago, have been in place for three years and student enrolment patterns and more general experiences with the WACE are now available for consideration;
- compulsory schooling until the end of a young person's seventeenth year, introduced in WA in 2008, is now well in place;
- data analysis undertaken by the Authority indicates that enrolment patterns within the WACE are a cause for concern;
- views expressed by stakeholders suggest that there are concerns about a number of features of the WACE; and
- the implementation of the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum will soon require an alignment of the WACE with that curriculum, providing an ideal opportunity to make other desired changes.

1.2 Culmination of recent senior secondary school reforms in WA

There have been significant reforms to senior secondary school curricula, assessment and certification in Western Australia over the past 10 years. These reforms were undertaken following the publication of *Our Youth, Our Future* (2002) and were designed to:

provide a post-compulsory system that is inclusive of all students and has sufficient flexibility to accommodate the diverse range of learning needs, interests and post-school aspirations of all students. (Our Youth, Our Future, 2002, p. 14).

The aims outlined in *Our Youth, Our Future* and the reforms flowing from that report are consistent with the national goals set out in the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Along with all other governments in Australia, the Western Australian Government has committed to action the goals of this Declaration.

The final phase of the WACE was implemented in 2010, and it is therefore in its third year of complete implementation. The WACE now provides:

- a much larger number of courses that can count towards university entrance (an increase from 32 courses under the previous TEE, to 52 WACE course and 12 VET industry-specific courses);
- courses offered at four stages (Preliminary, Stage 1, Stage 2, and Stage 3);
- a range of VET offerings, including VET industry-specific courses, VET credit transfer and VET integrated within a WACE course; and
- Endorsed programs that can be taken for credit towards the WACE.

Section 2 of this paper outlines in more detail the evolution and key aspects of the senior secondary school reforms which have taken place in WA over the past 10 years. It also describes the main features of the current WACE arrangements.

1.3 Increase in the compulsory school leaving age in WA

As of January 2008, young people in WA have been required to remain at school until the end of the year in which they turn 17. This reform has posed challenges in terms of providing educational offerings suitable for the needs, interests and abilities of a larger and more diverse senior secondary school population.

1.4 Enrolment patterns within the WACE

Data analyses (see Section 3) and discussions undertaken to date by the Authority suggest that, despite having a number of benefits, the current WACE is not achieving all of its goals and that some unintended adverse impacts are evident. In particular, there is concern that:

- enrolments in Stage 1 courses are much higher than envisaged. Combined with lack of progression from Stage 1 study to higher Stages, this suggests that many students are not being extended in their studies in a manner commensurate with their ability;
- enrolments in Stage 2 courses are low and declining, raising questions as to the functionality of this stage, as well as concerns about the cost to schools of providing these courses and the viability of the SCSA running Stage 2 external examinations for relatively small numbers of students; and
- a large proportion of students are undertaking studies that involve neither external examinations nor any other moderation processes, raising concerns that the WACE does not provide reliable and comparable assessments of differential student achievement.

Section 3 of this paper provides a more comprehensive analysis of enrolment patterns within the WACE.

1.5 Stakeholder concerns about a number of features of the WACE

Universities, vocational education and training (VET) providers and industry groups have expressed concern regarding:

- the lack of requirement for students graduating with a WACE to demonstrate adequate literacy and numeracy skills; and
- the inadequacy of most of the current Stage 1 courses as preparation for post-secondary educational pathways or employment.

1.6 Need for alignment of the WACE with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum

All Australian governments have committed to the implementation of an Australian Curriculum which identifies eight learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Social Science, the Arts, Languages, Health and Physical Education, and Technologies.

Development of Australian Curriculum courses is currently underway, under the auspices of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). For Years 11 and 12, ACARA anticipates the completion of 15 (Year 11 and 12) courses by the end of 2012. At this stage, it is uncertain how many additional courses will be developed.

While the proposed Year 11 and 12 courses are, for the most part, comparable with Stage 2 and 3 courses in the WACE, the architecture of the two curriculum frameworks is quite different. The Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum is based on Year 11 courses

(comprising two units) and Year 12 courses (comprising two paired units) whereas the WACE is based on courses offered at Preliminary Stage, Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3, regardless of the year of study. Alignment of the WACE with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum will therefore be required. This provides an optimal context in which to consider other desired changes to the WACE.

1.7 Identification by the Authority's Board and the Minister for Education of the need to review the WACE

The Board of the Authority has identified aspects of the present WACE arrangements which it considers require review. In the context of these concerns, and the Minister for Education's agreement to implement the Australian Curriculum, the Minister recently established the Senior School Curriculum and Certification Committee (SSCCC) to provide advice and recommendations for changes to the WACE. The Terms of Reference and Membership of the SSSCC are presented in Appendix 1.

2. CURRENT WACE REQUIREMENTS

2.1 The reform context in which the WACE was developed

The current WACE emanated from concerns expressed and recommendations made in *Our Youth, Our Future* (2002), a state-wide review of what was then known as post-compulsory education in WA.

The main concern of that review was that the existing TEE system did not cater adequately for all students eligible for participation in Years 11 and 12. *Our Youth; Our Future* emphasised the need for a system that was inclusive of all students and could accommodate the learning needs, interests and aspirations of all students.

In such a system, the courses were intended to:

- *enable students to participate more fully as adult citizens leaving school by providing further opportunities for them to build on their achievement...;*
- *enable students to pursue the achievement of learning outcomes in areas of study that will facilitate their transition to work, further vocational education and training or higher education on leaving school;*
- *provide a structure for assessment, moderation and certification for all students that meets national and State legislative requirements; and*
- *provide for the achievement of VET Units of Competency as an integral part of secondary certification.... (Our Youth; Our Future, 2002, p.14).*

Flowing from *Our Youth, Our Future*, a number of reforms were implemented in WA, including:

- restructuring the senior secondary school curriculum;
- raising the schooling leaving age by requiring students to remain at school until the end of the year in which they turn 17 (from January 2008);
- introducing new courses for senior secondary schooling, structured by stages;
- subsequently increasing, from two to four, the number of units offered at Stage 1 in 21 WACE courses, thereby substantially increasing the number of Stage 1 units available to students; and
- expanding VET and endorsed program provisions for senior secondary school students.

2.2 General features of the WACE

The current WACE evolved from the above reforms to take its present shape. The WACE requirements are outlined in detail in the *Western Australian Certificate of Education. WACE Manual. General information for senior secondary schooling 2012*, published by the Curriculum Council (now the School Curriculum and Standards Authority).

The WACE is awarded to those senior secondary school students who satisfy its requirements. It is a senior secondary certificate recognised nationally in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), and by universities, other tertiary institutions, vocational education and training providers and industry.

Generally, students complete two years of senior secondary study to achieve the WACE, although provisions enable students to meet the WACE requirements over an extended timeframe.

Achievement of a WACE is meant to signify that a student has successfully met specified breadth and depth requirements, achievement standards and English language competence requirements in their senior secondary schooling.

The requirements for receiving a WACE are:

- Breadth and depth
 - Complete a minimum of 20 course units or the equivalent.
 - The 20 course units must include at least:
 - four course units from English, Literature and/or English as an Additional Language or Dialect, studied during Year 11 and Year 12 (at least two of these units must be completed in Year 12).
 - one pair of course units from each of List A (arts/languages/social sciences) and List B (mathematics/science/technology) completed in Year 12.
- Achievement standard
 - Achieve a C grade average or better across the best 16 course units of which at least eight must be completed in Year 12.
 - P Stage units, endorsed programs and/or VET credit transfer can reduce the required number of course units by up to six units.
- English language competence
 - Achieve a C grade or better in any Stage 1 or higher course unit from English, Literature and/or English as an Additional Language or Dialect (except 1A and 1B for English as an Additional Language or Dialect).
 - For students who have not achieved a C grade in one of their English, Literature and/or English as an Additional Language or Dialect course units, schools will need to compare a selection of the student's work with the work samples provided by the Curriculum Council (now the Authority) to verify the student has demonstrated the required standard.

Schools are the main WACE providers for students. When working in partnership with other providers, schools retain sole responsibility for managing programs, reporting achievement to the Authority and maintaining a record of learning for all students.

2.3 Current structure of the WACE

The current WACE provides:

- 52 WACE courses offered at four stages of difficulty (Preliminary, Stage 1, Stage 2, and Stage 3) with the intention of catering for the full range of student abilities;
- a range of VET programs, including 12 VET industry-specific courses which are treated as WACE courses, VET credit transfer and VET integrated within a WACE course; and
- endorsed programs (including workplace learning programs, university studies, community organization programs and personal development programs) offered by some 140 providers in 2012.

There is substantial flexibility within the WACE in terms of the difficulty of the courses that students undertake. While a student is required to complete a minimum of 20 course units to

receive a WACE, there are no requirements regarding the levels of difficulty of the units that are studied in either Year 11 or Year 12.

2.4 Catering for diverse interests and educational pathways within the WACE

The WACE caters for students with diverse interests and preferred subsequent educational pathways (i.e. university or training). Students may be university-bound, have a specific vocation in mind involving further vocational education and training, or be planning to enter the workforce on leaving school.

A range of education and training courses and programs is available to provide all young people with the opportunity to develop knowledge, skills and understanding about themselves, their community and the broader world in which they live.

To cater for differences in students' interests and preferred educational pathways, the WACE can include a mixture of WACE courses, vocational education and training (VET) and endorsed programs. Up to 10 unit equivalents of the 20 required for a WACE may comprise VET and/or endorsed programs. Unit equivalence for VET credit transfer is based on the nominal hours in the VET program, while the unit equivalence for each endorsed program is determined by an Endorsed Programs Panel administered by the Authority.

All students who complete at least one WACE course unit, one VET unit of competency or one endorsed program receive a statement of results at the end of Year 12.

2.4.1 WACE courses

In 2012 52 WACE courses and 12 VET industry specific courses were available, grouped into List A (arts/languages/social science) and List B (mathematics/science/technology).

The four stages offered within WACE courses are designed with increasing levels of difficulty, thereby enabling students to study at a stage appropriate to their level of development:

- Preliminary (P Stage) units provide opportunities for practical and supported learning to develop the skills required to be successful upon leaving school or in the transition to Stage 1 units. Post-school pathways may include entry level training and the workplace.
- Stage 1 units provide bridging support and a practical and applied focus to develop skills required for students to be successful upon leaving school or in the transition to Stage 2 units. Post-school pathways generally include vocational education and training including apprenticeships, traineeships or the workplace.
- Stage 2 units provide opportunities for applied learning with more focus on academic learning for transition to Stage 3 or post-school options including vocational education and training, apprenticeships and traineeships, university and the workplace.
- Stage 3 units provide opportunities to extend knowledge and understandings in academic learning contexts. Typically, the post-school pathway is further study at university with some students opting for the workplace or enrolling in vocational education and training.

2.4.2 VET within the WACE

VET engages school students in work-related learning built on strategic partnerships between schools, registered training organisations, business, industry and the wider community. Up to 10 unit equivalents of VET and/or endorsed program credit transfer can be undertaken as part of the 20 units required for a WACE.

Completion of VET programs provides students with credit towards nationally recognised vocational qualifications within the Australian Qualifications Framework. A broad range of post-school vocational options and pathways is available through VET study.

VET study within the WACE can be undertaken in three ways:

- VET industry specific courses (full qualifications only);
- VET credit transfer; and
- VET integrated within WACE courses.

VET industry specific courses

VET industry specific courses include a full qualification from a training package and contribute to the WACE as a WACE course. A grade of 'C' is awarded for each of the course units aligned with the course.

Credit for a VET industry specific course is awarded upon completion of all course components. If any part of the course is not completed, the student does not receive course unit credits for any of the course units linked to the VET industry specific course. Instead, units of competency are awarded unit equivalence for the nominal hours that have been achieved.

VET credit transfer

VET credit transfer refers to VET units of competency that are delivered and assessed independently of a WACE course unit.

Students who study in this way and attain a nationally recognised VET unit of competency that leads to a full or partial AQF qualification can gain VET credit transfer towards the WACE. One unit equivalent is credited for every 55 nominal hours successfully achieved, up to a maximum of 10 unit equivalents.

VET integrated within courses

VET integrated within a WACE course involves students undertaking one or more VET units of competency concurrently with a WACE course unit. VET qualifications with units of competency that may align with the WACE course are identified in the course. No unit equivalence is given for units of competency attained in this way.

2.4.3 Endorsed programs

Endorsed programs provide access to areas of learning not covered by WACE courses or VET, and may contribute to the WACE depth and breadth requirements. Up to 10 equivalent units of VET credit transfer and/or endorsed program study can be undertaken as part of the 20 units required for a WACE.

A wide range of endorsed programs is available in a variety of settings by schools, training organisations and workplaces, universities and community organisations, with 140 providers making programs available in 2012.

3. STUDENT ENROLMENT PATTERNS WITHIN THE WACE

3.1 Participation and retention

The 2002 review, *Our Youth: Our Future*, was set within the context of WA State and Australian Government goals of increasing retention rates to Year 12, and providing opportunities for all students to obtain a post-compulsory secondary education which was relevant to their future (*Our Youth: Our Future*, 2002, p.2).

3.1.1 Categories of educational activity

The participation of 17 year olds is monitored by the Authority using the following categories:

- school enrolments – students involved in schooling;
- notices of arrangement – students who have made application to be exempted from enrolment in school to enable them to pursue full-time work or training; and
- non-participating and other – students who have left school, not re-enrolled, left WA, graduated or whose whereabouts are unknown.

Table 1 identifies the numbers of 17 year olds within each of these categories from 2009 to 2011. During this period the relevant total population increased by 720, school enrolments increased by 983, notices of arrangement decreased by 211 and the non-participating/other category decreased by 52 showing a marginal swing towards staying at school.

Table 1: Participation categories for 17 year olds, 2009 - 2012

Participation	2009	2010	2011
School enrolments	23944	24063	24927
Notices of arrangement	4099	4030	3888
Non-participating and other	2714	2714	2662
Total cohort number	30757	30807	31477

3.1.2 Student retention rates

Figure 1 shows the estimated population of 17 year olds and Year 12 enrolments in WA for the period 1996-2012. Year 12 enrolments increased quite markedly from 2009 to 2011.

Figure 1: WA Year 12 participation and retention data: 1996 - 2011

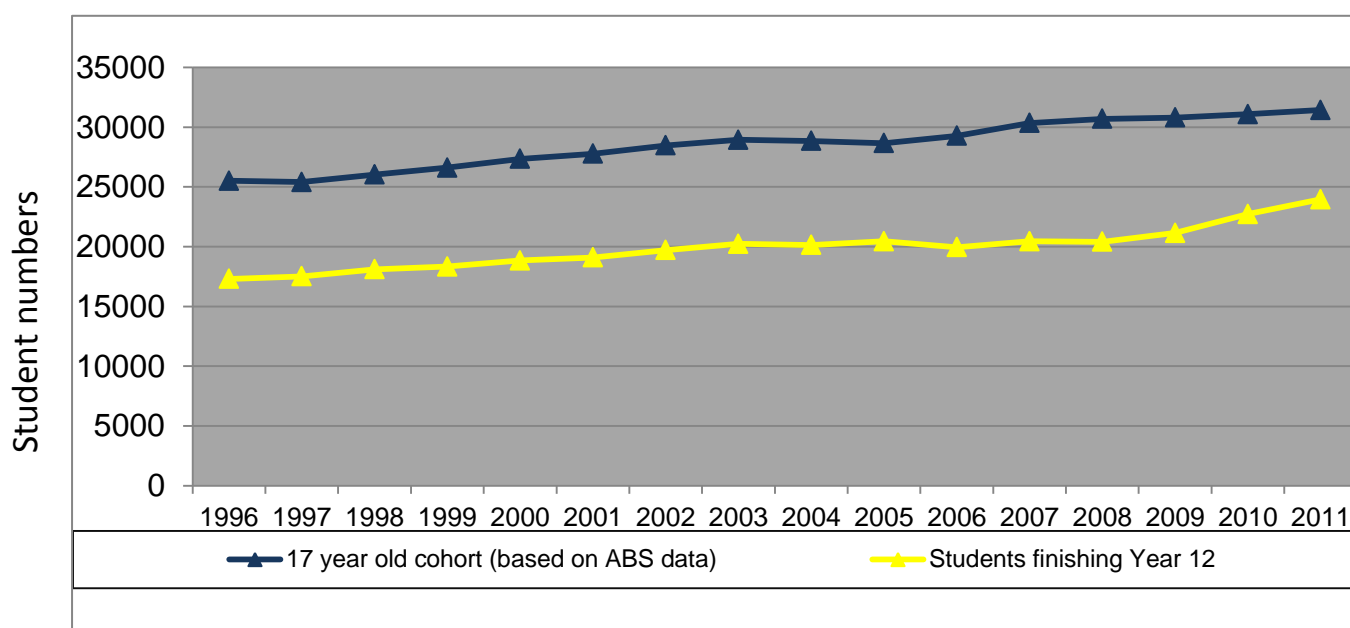


Table 2 presents Year 12 data regarding the numbers of eligible students who completed Year 12 and the numbers and percentages of students who successfully completed a WACE in the period 2009-2011.

Table 2: Year 12 completions as a percentage of the eligible 17 year-old cohort

Year	Number of eligible students who completed Year 12	Number of Year 12 students who completed the WACE	Percentage of eligible students who completed a WACE
2009	19,830	19,080	96.2%
2010	21,296	20,713	97.3%
2011	21,621	21,057	97.4%

Two factors are likely to have influenced the increase in Year 12 participation and WACE completion identified in Figure 1 and Table 2. The increased school leaving age in 2008 and some growth in the relevant-age population are factors of note.

3.2 Enrolments within the WACE

In order to achieve a WACE, students must complete a minimum of 20 course (semester) units or equivalent and meet various requirements relating to breadth and depth of study, achievement, and English language competence. Typically, a student would enrol in 20-24 units over two years of full-time schooling (five or six units per semester).

As part of providing for broad and diverse programs within the WACE, students can undertake studies in WACE courses, VET programs or endorsed programs. The number of courses available to students depends on their school, with schools typically offering from 15 to 40 courses.

Year 12 average student enrolments in 2010 and 2011 across the three main categories of offerings (WACE courses, VET programs and endorsed programs) are set out below.

Table 3: Year 12 average student enrolments in different categories of offerings (2010 – 2011)

Year	WACE Unit Equivalents	VET Unit Equivalents	Endorsed Programs Unit Equivalents
2011	10.25	1.71	0.39
2010	10.35	1.52	0.31

It is clear from Table 3 that the vast majority of unit equivalents taken by Year 12 students are in the WACE courses, followed by VET programs and endorsed programs. The unit equivalents taken in the latter two categories are well below the number permissible within the WACE (i.e. 10 VET and/or endorsed program unit equivalents out of the 20 units required over Years 11 and 12).

3.3 Enrolments within WACE course stages

3.3.1 Student enrolment patterns by stage: an overall picture

As noted previously, a feature of the WACE is that it enables students to study at different stages (i.e. Preliminary, Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3), to suit their levels of ability and development.

This flexibility is such that there is no prescription as to the stages of study required to be undertaken in Year 11 or Year 12 to obtain a WACE. To obtain an ATAR, however, four Stage 2 and/or Stage 3 WACE courses which require an external examination must be taken.

For Stage 2 and 3 courses, the Authority exercises quality control and monitors standards through prescribed syllabuses, moderation processes and external examinations. For Stage 1 courses, while syllabuses are prescribed, there are no moderation or external examination processes with which to monitor standards of student achievement.

Year 12 course unit completions at each stage are identified below for 2010 and 2011.

Table 4: Year 12 student unit completions by stage and by system/sector (2011–2010)

Year	System /Sector	Number F/T eligible Year 12 students	Total number of units completed	Units completed at each stage							
				P Stage		Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
				No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
2011	State	21621	226925	50	0.02	80847	35.63	33239	14.65	112789	49.70
	Gov't	11020	112890	29	0.03	53796	47.65	15167	13.44	43898	38.89
	Catholic	4753	53960	21	0.04	17675	32.76	7853	14.55	28411	52.65
	Independent	4959	51137	0	0.00	9232	18.05	9113	17.82	32792	64.13
	Other	889	8938	0	0.00	144	1.61	1106	12.37	7688	86.01
2010	State	21295	225237	65	0.03	79311	35.21	42450	18.85	103411	45.91
	Gov't	11059	113944	48	0.04	53268	46.75	19386	17.01	41242	36.19
	Catholic	4621	53401	12	0.02	17273	32.35	11736	21.98	24380	45.65
	Independent	4917	50765	4	0.01	8745	17.23	10235	20.16	31781	62.60
	Other	754	7581	0	0.00	24	0.32	1029	13.57	6528	86.11

These data indicate that:

- the percentage of Stage 3 unit completions is close to 50% across the State, increased by about 4% from 2010 to 2011, and is higher for independent and Catholic schools than for public schools;
- the percentage of Stage 2 unit completions is about 15% across the State, decreased about 4% from 2010 to 2011, and is higher for independent schools than for Catholic and public schools;
- the percentage of Stage 1 unit completions is about 36% across the State, remained fairly constant from 2010 to 2011, and is higher for public schools than Catholic and independent schools; and
- the percentage of Preliminary unit completions is very low (less than 1%).

The data suggest that there is a trend towards bifurcation of Year 12 enrolments into Stage 3 (for students with an interest in university entrance) and Stage 1 (for students who do not have an interest in university entrance).

The decline in Stage 2 enrolments is probably attributable to a range of factors including the 'increment' provided for students undertaking Stage 3 units; the relatively low scaled scores achieved by most students undertaking Stage 2 units; a continuing perception within Western Australia (unlike, for example, NSW and Victoria) that examinations are only appropriate/required for students seeking university entrance; and the impact of Stage 2 enrolments on schools' median ATARs and media ranking of schools in league tables. The

very low enrolments in Stage 2 courses brings into question the cost to schools of running these courses, and the viability of the Stage 2 external examinations run by the Authority.

The percentage of Stage 1 enrolments (generally considered as entry units for senior secondary education) is considerably higher than might have been expected. The data suggest that there is a substantial number of Year 12 students who are not undertaking courses at a level of difficulty commensurate with their ability. In addition, discussions the Authority has held with WA universities and VET providers indicate that Stage 1 courses are viewed as having insufficient rigour for students who wish to enter a university bridging program or many VET programs.

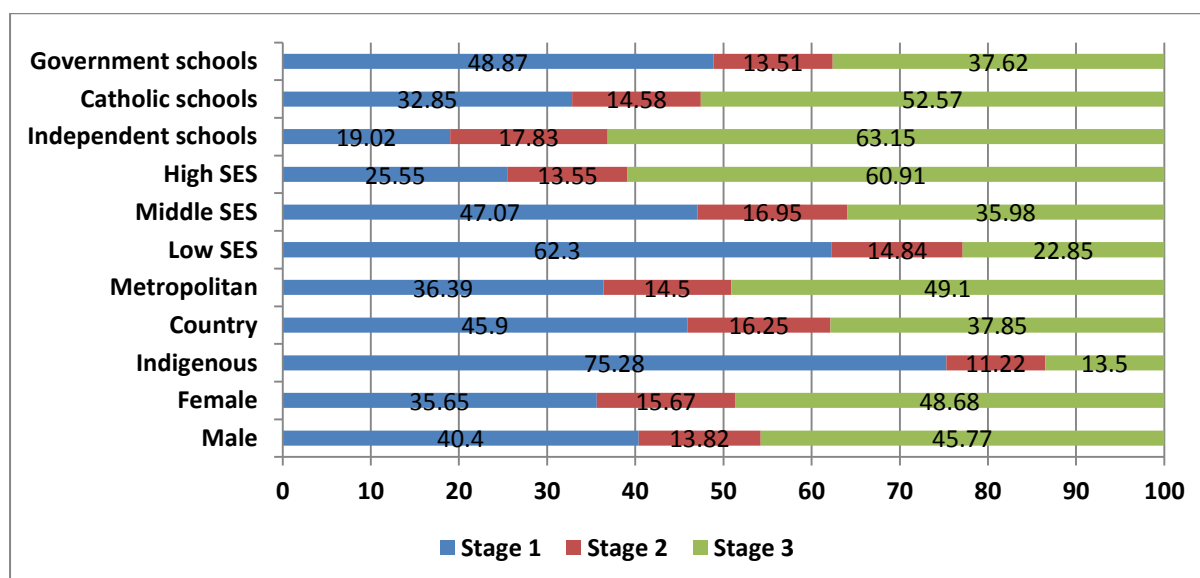
In considering a WACE for the future, the enrolment patterns for the different stages warrant close attention, as do the reasons which may underpin those patterns. These matters are discussed further in Section 5.

3.3.2 Student enrolment patterns by stage: breakdowns by school system/sector, socio-economic status (SES), location, Indigenous status and gender

Figure 2 identifies the percentages of Year 12 students enrolled in course units at each stage in 2011 in the following categories:

- School system/sector - government schools, catholic schools and independent schools;
- Socio-economic status – high, medium and low;
- Location – metropolitan and country;
- Indigenous status; and
- Gender – male and female.

Figure 2: Percentages of 2011 Year 12 students enrolled in course units at each stage in various categories



This data indicates that Stage 1 enrolments are particularly high for government and Catholic schools, low and middle SES students, Indigenous students, and are higher for country students than metropolitan students and higher for males than females.

The data also indicates that current WACE enrolments are perpetuating previous patterns of educational disadvantage. Students from educationally advantaged backgrounds are engaging more in higher and more demanding Stage 3 courses, while students from traditionally educationally disadvantaged backgrounds are over-represented in lower level and less demanding Stage 1 courses.

3.3.3 Extent of progression to higher stages

Given the sizeable proportion of Stage 1 unit completions (greater than 35% of all Year 12 course unit completions in 2011), and the original intention that Stage 1 course units were intended to provide a bridge to Stage 2 course units, it is of interest to examine the extent of progression from Stage 1 studies to Stage 2 from Year 11 to Year 12.

Earlier analyses undertaken by the former Curriculum Council have shown that for students who enrolled in Stage 2 units in Year 11 in 2010, most either advanced from Stage 2 to Stage 3 in Year 12, or enrolled in a more demanding unit pair in the same stage. In contrast, for students who enrolled in Stage 1 units in Year 11, approximately 76% enrolled in Stage 1 again in Year 12, either in the same or a different pair of units.

Lack of progression from Stage 1 to Stage 2 course units has been examined in some detail in relation to English and Mathematics. These subject areas are of special interest because of the importance of literacy and numeracy to further study and employment. These analyses indicate that in English and Mathematics, for many students who studied Stage 1 in Year 11 and again in Year 12, or who dropped from Stage 2 in Year 11 to Stage 1 in Year 12, this was an easy option which secured them reasonable grades in Year 12 but did not extend them as was the initial intent.

School Curriculum and Standards Authority data for Year 12 students in 2012 show that 6050 students are studying Stage 1 English, while 5700 students are studying Stage 1 Mathematics. These enrolments constitute about 25% of the Year 12 student cohort.

The poor rate of progression from Stage 1 to Stage 2 courses in English and Mathematics, as well as the lack of formal literacy and numeracy requirements in order to receive a WACE, may be important factors in limiting students' acquisition of skills in these important domains. In considering a WACE for the future, securing and confirming appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy for all WACE graduates is a matter warranting attention.

3.4 Enrolments in VET programs

VET in schools serves multiple purposes for senior secondary school students. These include:

- achieving senior secondary school graduation;
- exploring a possible career option;
- becoming competitive in seeking employment; or
- providing a pathway into further vocational education and training.

As described in 2.4.2 there are three ways in which VET study can be undertaken within the WACE. These are:

VET industry specific courses. These courses are nationally recognised VET qualifications that are packaged as WACE courses. They have been developed in close consultation with industry. If the student completes the full qualification and mandatory workplace learning, this is recognised as a WACE course. If the student does not complete the full qualification

or mandatory workplace learning, unit equivalent credits for completed units of competency are awarded based on nominal hours.

VET credit transfer. This is the most used method of getting credit for VET units of competency. Delivery and assessment of units of competency occurs independently of WACE course delivery. Unit equivalence is awarded on the basis of one unit equivalent for every 55 nominal hours successfully achieved, to a maximum of 10 unit equivalents.

VET integrated within courses. Where individual units of competency are directly aligned with content in a WACE course, the units of competency are achieved as part of a student's WACE course. No unit equivalence is awarded for units of competency achieved in this way as the student is already receiving credit for the WACE course units.

All VET, including industry-specific courses and VET transfer for WACE credit, requires registered training organisation (RTO) delivery, assessment and quality control under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). Schools providing VET options must therefore either become an RTO or work in a partnership arrangement with a RTO for delivery, assessment and certification.

Vocational education and training (VET) in school programs were introduced in Western Australia in 1997. Since that time, participation in these programs has grown from 3% of Year 11 and 12 students to an enrolment rate of 39% in 2011.

Table 5 identifies the enrolments of Year 12 students in different modes of VET program delivery for the period 2009-2011.

Table 5: Year 12 student enrolments in different modes of VET program delivery (2009 – 2011)

Method of VET delivery	2009	2010	2011
VET industry specific courses	95	830	646
VET credit transfer	5,158	6,756	7,157
VET integrated within courses	933	846	807

The data in Table 6 shows the steady increase in recent years in the numbers and percentages of Year 12 students completing VET units of competency and VET qualifications at Certificate II or higher.

Table 6: Number and percentage of Year 12 students achieving VET qualifications

Year	Number of eligible students who completed Year 12	Number of students completing VET units of competency	Percentage of students completing VET units of competency	Number of students with Cert II or higher	Percentage of students with Cert II or higher
2009	19,830	6,552	33.0%	3,437	17.3%
2010	21,296	7,785	36.6%	4,343	20.4%
2011	21,621	8,065	37.3%	4,905	22.7%

The numbers of Year 12 students who achieved specific VET qualifications in 2011 are set out in Table 7.

Table 7: The numbers of Year 12 students who achieved VET qualifications in 2011

Gender	VET qualifications achieved by Year 12 FT students				
	Cert I	Cert II	Cert III	Cert IV	Total
Female	1,244	2,042	468	83	3,837
Male	1,885	2,016	219	77	4,197
Total	3,129	4,058	687	160	8,034

In summary, VET offerings have provided an increased range of educational opportunities for students. There is a widely held view that these offerings are highly appropriate for a substantial number of students and that enrolments are likely to increase further in the future.

3.5 Enrolments in endorsed programs

Endorsed programs were approved by the Curriculum Council in 2006 for implementation in 2007. Students can claim up to ten unit equivalents (50%) from endorsed programs.

Endorsed programs are used for multiple purposes. These include:

- recognising and recording students' extra-curricular achievements such as AMEB music examinations, Duke of Edinburgh awards, etc.;
- gaining experience and skills from work-based learning in the workplace;
- gaining exposure to university studies;
- developing a range of life skills through involvement in personal development programs; and
- providing study options for students with special education needs and students at risk.

Endorsed programs may be delivered as part of the school curriculum or can be achieved through extra-curricular activities. They may be integrated into WACE courses or undertaken independently. Achievement in endorsed programs that are not integrated within WACE courses are awarded unit equivalence. Achievement in endorsed programs that are integrated within a WACE course are reported on a student's statement of results but are not awarded unit equivalence.

There are four categories of endorsed programs:

- Workplace learning programs;
- University studies;
- Community organisation programs; and
- Personal development programs.

There has been a proliferation of endorsed programs on offer, with 2622 programs available in 2011 (Table 8).

Table 8: Numbers of approved endorsed programs in four categories of programs (2011)

Category	Number of endorsed programs
Community organisation	2403*
Personal development	137
University studies	79
Workplace learning	3
Total	2622

* 2091 of these programs are Music and Speech and Drama as all grades of practical and theory examinations for all instruments for several examining bodies have separate codes.

For endorsed programs, the Authority's only quality assurance mechanism is through the initial approval (and renewal) processes for program registration.

As indicated previously, the mean Year 12 endorsed program enrolment for unit equivalence was 0.39 units in 2011. This was an increase from 0.31 units in 2010.

Table 9 shows the numbers of Year 12 student achievements in endorsed programs (over Years 10-12 of their schooling) reported by schools for the period 2007-2011. The data indicates strong growth in the number of endorsed program achievements reported in all categories except for that of university units.

Table 9: Reported student achievements in endorsed programs (2007–2011)

Endorsed program category	Numbers of students				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Community organisation	618	2,046	2,833	3,589	4,784
Personal development	1,904	4,899	6,566	10,615	13,969
University studies	156	158	111	117	168
Workplace learning	402	546	4,663	5,253	5,988
Total	3,080	7,649	14,173	19,574	24,909

The growth in endorsed programs, the potential to complete up to 50% of a WACE with these programs and the Authority's limited capacity to assure the quality of these programs are significant issues that require further consideration.

The School Curriculum and Standards Authority is currently undertaking a review of its endorsed programs with a view to clarifying the purpose of these programs and establishing in what form they may contribute to the WACE into the future.

4. STUDENTS' POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS

Students completing the WACE should, depending on their diverse backgrounds, interests and abilities, be well prepared for multiple post-secondary pathways including further study in either higher education or vocational education and training, or entry to the workplace.

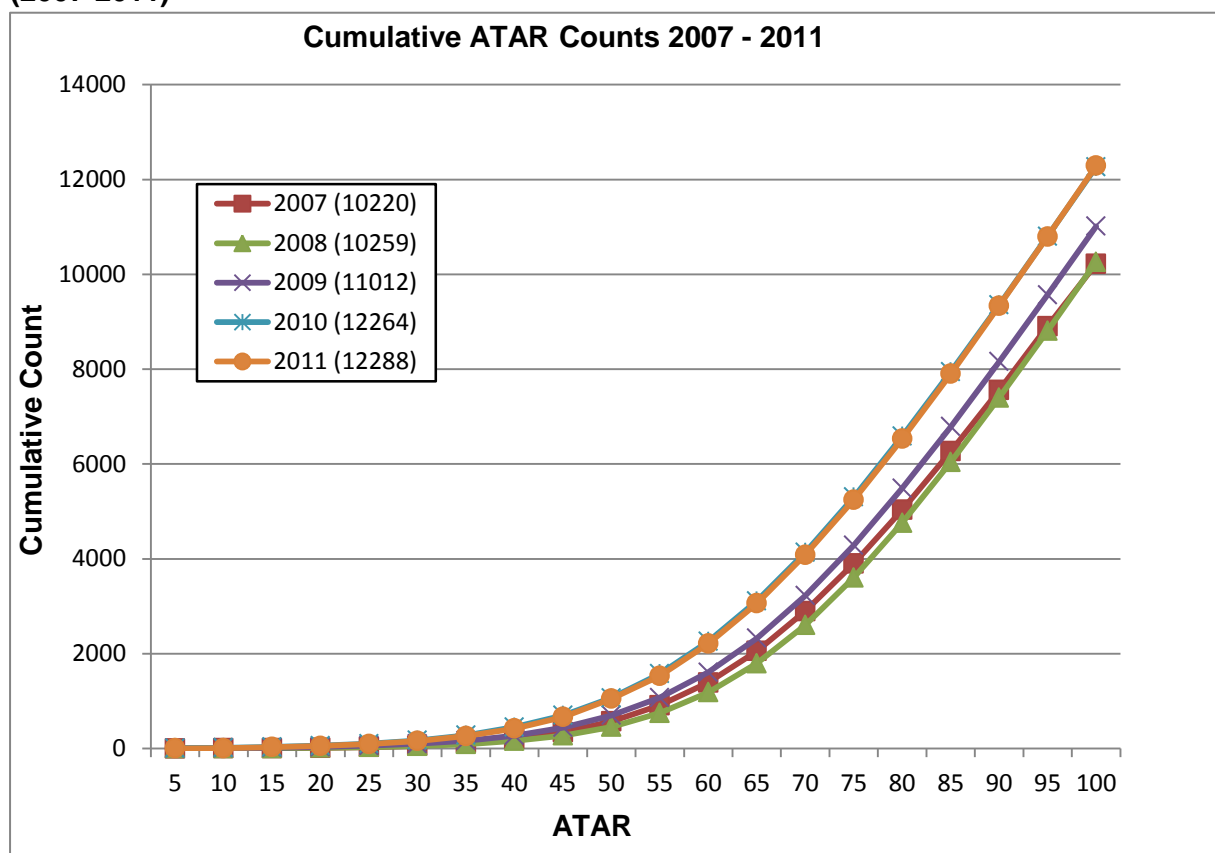
4.1 Pathways to higher education

The Australian Government has implemented a set of reforms aimed at: (1) increasing the percentage of 25 to 34 year olds holding a bachelor degree to 40% by 2025, and (2) achieving 20% of undergraduate enrolments from the lowest socioeconomic quartile by 2020.

In Western Australia the most common entry pathway to universities for school leavers is via the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). An ATAR (which ranges between 0 and 99.95) reports a student's rank position relative to the estimated total population of persons of Year 12 age. In WA the requirement for eligibility for an ATAR is four Stage 2 and/or Stage 3 WACE courses which require an external examination.

The numbers of students attaining an ATAR has increased in WA over the period 2007-2011 as shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Cumulative counts of students achieving an ATAR in Western Australia (2007-2011)



While the ATAR is the most common entry pathway to universities in WA that is not the case for all universities. Universities use several alternative entry pathways including VET qualifications, portfolio entry and a range of bridging/university preparation programs of variable length and intensity.

The requirements for calculating an ATAR are determined by the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC) and not the Authority. The percentage of Western Australian students who achieve an ATAR has been raised as an issue of concern by universities and in the media.

ATAR participation rates can be measured in different ways, for example, the percentage of the estimated population of persons of school leaving age (using the MCEETYA-endorsed method and Australian Bureau of Statistics population estimates)¹ or the percentage of students who achieve the relevant state education certificates issued at the end of Year 12 schooling². Table 10 includes a comparison of these two measures, using the 2010 Year 12 cohort, across several states.

Table 10: ATAR participation rates in selected Australian states (2010)

State	Percentage of students achieving an ATAR in the total population of the age cohort ¹	Percentage of students achieving an ATAR in the population of students achieving state certificates ²
Western Australia	40.7%	59.2%
New South Wales	56.3%	82.8%
Victoria	65.8%	94.9%
Queensland	75.3%	n/a

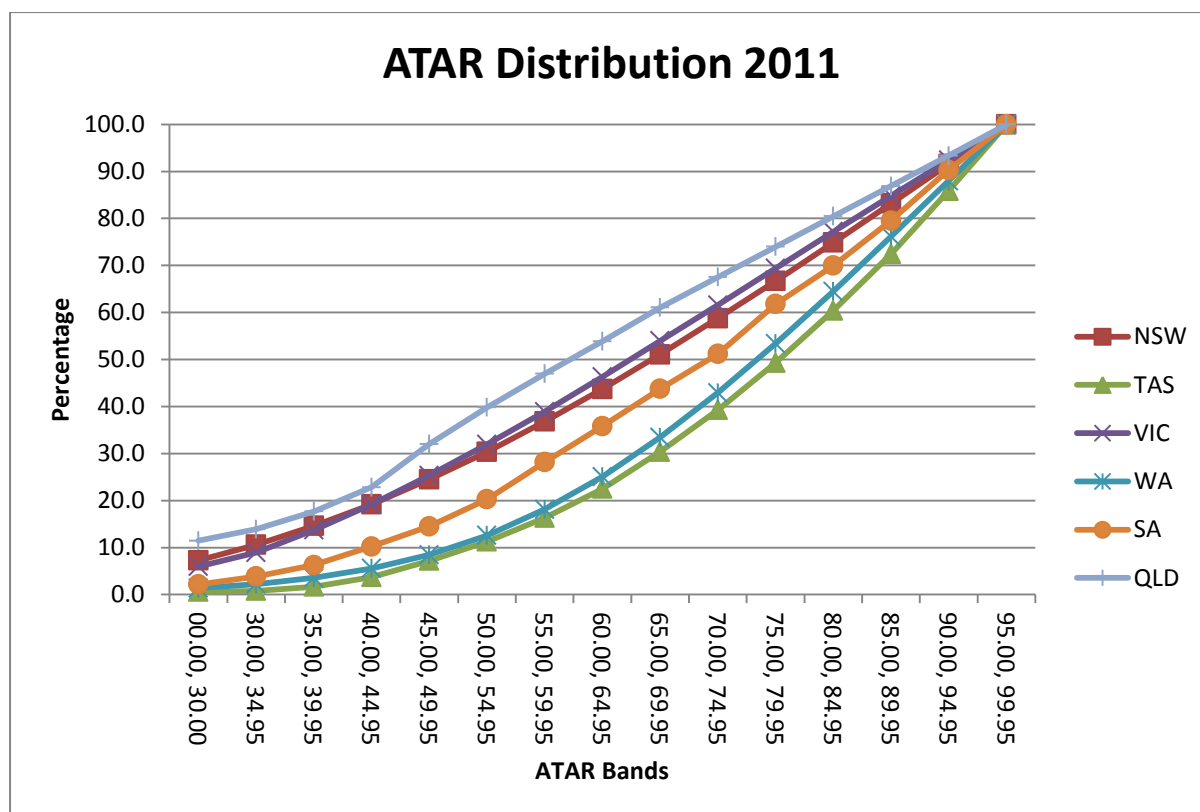
It is difficult to make meaningful comparisons of the percentages of students achieving an ATAR in the various states. This is because states have different requirements for the various state education certificates and different processes for assessing eligibility for an ATAR. In New South Wales, students undertake the Higher School Certificate and there is a culture of students sitting for examinations regardless of their post-school aspirations. Following the recent increase in the school leaving age, the NSW Board of Studies is now developing additional subjects that do not require examinations. In Victoria, students can undertake the Victorian Certificate of Education and/or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (which has a vocational education orientation). Victoria also has an established culture of examinations as a normal part of secondary education. In Queensland, the Queensland Certificate of Education does not require any external examinations. Queensland uses the Queensland Core Skills Test as part of its scaling processes to derive students' 'overall positions' which translate into ATARs.

The lower percentage of Western Australian students who attain an ATAR (on both measures) is because of the requirement that to be eligible for an ATAR students must complete four Stage 2 and/or Stage 3 WACE courses including sitting external examinations. Students who are enrolled primarily in stage 1 units, VET programs or endorsed programs are therefore ineligible for an ATAR.

The issue of WA's lower percentage of students achieving an ATAR in the total population of the age cohort is a somewhat misleading indicator and needs to be considered in context. Figure 4, below, plots the cumulative percentage of students achieving an ATAR as a function of the ATAR in the various states. The figure shows quite clearly that states with higher percentages of students achieving an ATAR at the end of Year 12 have much higher percentages of students achieving a very low ATAR. For example, in Western Australia over 80% of students who achieve an ATAR receive a ranking of 55 or above; in Queensland less than 55% of students who achieve an ATAR receive a ranking of 55 or above. In other

words, simply increasing the percentage of students who receive an ATAR will not necessarily greatly increase the numbers of applicants for university entrance who achieve a competitive ATAR.

Figure 4: Cumulative percentages of students achieving an ATAR in 2011



In general, the introduction of the WACE does not seem to have had much influence on the percentage of Year 12 students seeking to obtain an ATAR for the purpose of gaining university entrance. Discussions with university personnel suggest that Stage 1 courses have insufficient rigour for students who wish to enter a university bridging program. Furthermore, the wholly school assessed courses taken by many students prior to the introduction of the WACE were considered to be much better preparation for students seeking to enter university through alternative entry programs and bridging programs.

4.2 Pathways to further vocational education and training

Entry requirements for TAFE are course-specific and may include a particular level of schooling, a lower level VET qualification or specific levels of communication and mathematics skills. Communications and mathematics skills are assessed as basic, developed, well developed and highly developed. Selection criteria include the student's qualification pathway, work experience/employment and education/skills development. Sound language, literacy and numeracy skills are necessary when seeking entry to VET programs as students require these foundations to make effective transitions into training, apprenticeships and traineeships.

Discussions the Authority has held with state training providers indicate that Stage 1 courses are viewed as being inadequate preparation for students who wish to enter many VET programs.

4.3 Pathways to work

Students proceeding from school directly to work should have achieved adequate standards of literacy and numeracy, a Certificate II or better, preferably in an area relevant to their potential employment, and have acquired some workplace learning (such as that provided through WACE Workplace Learning courses). There is a widely held view that many students who currently graduate with a WACE do not have adequate standards of literacy and numeracy and are under-prepared for direct entry into the workforce.

5. ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN DEVELOPING A WACE FOR THE FUTURE

A major objective in the establishment of the WACE was to provide a system that is inclusive of all students and has sufficient flexibility to accommodate the diverse range of learning needs, interests and aspirations of all students. The current WACE does, through the breadth of study opportunities it provides, cater for students who have different needs and preferred post-secondary pathways. A wide range of courses and vocational education opportunities are available that are suitable for students who are university-bound, those who seek further vocational education and training, and those who plan to enter the workforce on leaving school.

However, an analysis of enrolment patterns, feedback from a range of stakeholders and emerging external factors suggests that there are several aspects of the current WACE that need to be addressed. This section identifies the issues that need to be addressed in shaping a WACE for the future.

5.1 Stage 1 enrolments are much higher than envisaged and significant numbers of students are not undertaking courses commensurate with their ability

The WACE provides opportunities for students to study at a level of difficulty commensurate with their ability by offering WACE courses at up to four stages of difficulty. Unfortunately, as indicated in Section 3.3, many more students are studying courses at Stage 1 than was anticipated and are not undertaking courses commensurate with their abilities.

In 2011, Stage 1 unit completions made up approximately 36% of all unit completions. In contrast, only about 15% of unit completions were at Stage 2. There is a clear bifurcation between Stage 1 (often seen as being for students who do not have an interest in tertiary selection), and Stage 3 (often seen as being for students who do have an interest in tertiary selection).

The high percentage of unit completions at Stage 1 might not be considered problematic if those units were serving their intended purpose of providing a transition to higher stages of study. Several factors relating to Stage 1 study are cause for concern and suggest that this purpose is not being met.

In particular:

- approximately 76% of students who take Stage 1 units in Year 11 also take Stage 1 units (in the same or different pairs) in Year 12. This is not consistent with the intended transition role of Stage 1 units;
- there is considerable evidence that many students take Stage 1 units in Year 12 after having achieved a C grade or higher at Stage 1 (or even Stage 2) in Year 11. As would be expected, many of these students achieve similar or even higher grades in Year 12. This pattern is not consistent with the aim of extending students to achieve at the highest level possible; and
- universities and VET providers have raised concerns regarding the standard of Stage 1 courses and their unsuitability as preparation for entry to university or vocational education and training.

These concerns point to a need to consider whether the requirements for the WACE should be changed to make higher stages study more attractive to students, particularly those who may not be focusing on university study after leaving school.

It has been widely mooted that Stage 1 units are attractive to students (and their schools) because they are not externally examined. If this is a major reason for the high level of Year 12 enrolments in Stage 1 units various options could be considered, including:

- reducing the focus on external examinations in Stage 2 units; or
- specifying that, in order to receive a WACE, students must complete a minimum number of units at particular level, especially during Year 12.

In summary, the high level of enrolment in courses at Stage 1 is clearly evident and indicates that many students are not undertaking courses commensurate with their ability.

5.2 Low and declining Stage 2 enrolments have resulted in Stage 2 examinations being unviable

The decline in Stage 2 enrolments between 2010 and 2011 (Section 3.3.1) has continued in 2012 and now stands at approximately 13%. As described in Section 3.3.1, the low and declining Stage 2 enrolments are probably attributable to a range of factors.

In the 2012 Authority examinations, 52 examination papers were set at Stage 2. There were no enrolments in five of these examinations, enrolments of less than 20 in twelve examinations and enrolments of less than 100 in thirty examinations. The setting of examinations is an expensive exercise and it is inappropriate to use the Authority's limited resources to set examinations for courses with very small enrolments.

5.3 The current three stage design of WACE courses is incompatible with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum, which comprises Year 11 and Year 12 courses

A significant task facing the Authority is to align WACE courses with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum. This work also provides an opportunity to consider any other changes to the WACE which may be desired.

The Australian Curriculum identifies eight learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Social Science, the Arts, Languages, Health and Physical Education, and Technologies. The F-10 curriculum is being developed in three phases and is scheduled for completion by the end of 2013. The State Minister for Education has approved the implementation of Phase 1 of the Australian Curriculum for Years F-10, to be completed by mid-2015. Subject to the approval of the Minister, it is anticipated that schools will commence formal implementation of Phases 2 and 3 of the Australian Curriculum from the commencement of 2014.

For Years 11-12, ACARA anticipates the completion of 15 two-year (Year 11 and 12) courses by the end of 2012. These courses are English (four separate courses); Mathematics (four courses); Science – Biology, Chemistry, Earth and Environmental Science; History – Ancient History and Modern History; and Geography. It is uncertain at this stage how many additional courses will be developed.

While the proposed Year 11 and 12 courses are, for the most part, comparable with Stage 2 and 3 courses in the WACE, the architecture of the two curriculum frameworks is quite different. The Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum is based on year-long courses at Year 11 (comprising two units) and Year 12 (comprising two paired units – i.e. a year-long course), whereas WACE courses are structured around three major stages, often with multiple semester-length units at each stage.

The Authority will need to give consideration to the subjects developed within the Australian Curriculum, the subjects that the Authority will continue to offer in WA that are not developed within the national curriculum, and the need for a consistent structure of courses across the final two years of schooling. Consistent with the Ministerial Agreement to establish a national curriculum and subject to the Minister's approval, appropriate Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum courses will be adopted with adaptation to suit Western Australian requirements.

This alignment task provides an opportunity to address issues noted in this review, including:

- the lack of specification in the current WACE of the stages of study to be undertaken during Year 12; and
- the need for greater depth of study, with the year-long courses within the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum offering a way of providing greater continuity and depth of study within a subject area.

5.4 Significant concerns have been raised regarding the standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by students who are currently graduating with a WACE

Within the current WACE, there are very limited requirements for students to demonstrate specific levels of literacy or numeracy.

Students are required to achieve a C grade in any of the four English units they must complete during Year 11 and 12. Given that many students are only completing Stage 1 English units, for which there is no external assessment or moderation in place, the Authority is unable to ensure that students are achieving even a basic standard of literacy.

Within the WACE there are no specific requirements relating to numeracy and students are not required to study any Mathematics units in Years 11 and 12.

The Authority has received considerable feedback from state training providers and employer groups that many students are not achieving satisfactory levels of literacy and numeracy for them to make a successful transition to many VET programs and to work. Given these concerns, it is important that a WACE for the future includes ways of extending the skills of students in these areas, and of reliably confirming that students who achieve a WACE have achieved minimum levels of skill in both literacy and numeracy.

5.5 Some students graduating with a WACE are poorly prepared for subsequent educational pathways into university or vocational education and training

Concerns have been raised by both the university and VET sectors that substantial numbers of students graduating with a WACE are poorly prepared for entry into university or training. This applies to standards of literacy and numeracy and to the general level of achievement associated with the completion of Stage 1 courses. Stage 1 courses are viewed as having insufficient rigour for students to enter university (through alternative entry or bridging programs) or training in specific VET programs.

5.6 The Authority is currently unable to provide adequate information about students' standards of achievement in Preliminary course units, Stage 1 course units and endorsed programs.

The Authority is responsible for the establishment, assessment, monitoring and reporting of standards of student achievement in Western Australian schools. The extent to which the Authority is currently able to deliver on this mandate is quite limited and highly variable across the different categories of courses on offer.

In relation to the WACE the Authority currently has the following processes in place:

- in Stage 2 and 3 courses, the SCSA exercises quality control and monitors standards through prescribed syllabuses, moderation processes and external examinations;
- for Preliminary and Stage 1 courses, while syllabuses are prescribed, there are no moderation or examination processes with which to monitor standards of student achievement;
- in VET industry-specific courses and VET transfer for WACE credit, quality control is provided by the certifying registered training organisation (RTO) under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards; and
- for endorsed programs, the Authority's only quality assurance mechanism is through the initial approval (and renewal) processes for program registration.

The high enrolments and lack of external examinations and/or moderation processes for Stage 1 courses and endorsed programs is a significant impediment to the Authority's ability to establish, assess and monitor the achievement standards of students undertaking the WACE.

In considering a WACE for the future, it is apparent that the Authority will need to implement moderation processes that provide greater assurance regarding students' standards of achievement across all WACE courses. For those courses without external examinations this will require the application of moderation processes, including the provision of externally set tasks, in order to assure comparability of grades across schools and enable appropriate monitoring of standards of student achievement.

5.7 Lack of clarity regarding the value and significance of achievement of a WACE

A major challenge in the development of the WACE was to establish a single credential and structure that is inclusive of all students, recognising the huge diversity in students' needs, interests and abilities.

Without underestimating the difficulty of fulfilling this challenge, it has become apparent that the current WACE has placed too much emphasis on students' completion of Years 11 and 12 rather than on requiring evidence of demonstrable standards of literacy and numeracy, appropriate preparation for post-secondary pathways (university, training or work) and acknowledging different levels of student achievement. Current WACE arrangements do not provide sufficient clarity in:

- requiring demonstration of adequate levels of literacy and numeracy;
- emphasising the importance of achieving an ATAR or Certificate II (or higher) as preparation for further study or work;
- recognising the differences in difficulty between WACE course stages in the presentation of results on WACE certificates; and
- recognising differences between WACE course stages undertaken in the determination of Certificates of Excellence and Commendation.

The challenge, in part, is how to maintain a range of offerings that meet the full range of student interests and abilities, while making the certificate a more transparent statement of relative achievement across a mix of very varied courses and programs. Such transparency is important to students, their parents, future employers and post-school higher education and training institutions.

6. PRINCIPLES AND DESIGN BRIEF FOR A WACE FOR THE FUTURE

Sections 3–5 of this review have outlined a range of issues associated with the current WACE which should be addressed in developing a WACE for the future. These issues include:

- Stage 1 enrolments are much higher than envisaged and significant numbers of students are not undertaking courses commensurate with their ability;
- Low and declining Stage 2 enrolments have resulted in Stage 2 examinations being unviable;
- The current three stage design of WACE courses is incompatible with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum, which comprises Year 11 and Year 12 courses;
- Significant concerns regarding the standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by students who are currently graduating with a WACE;
- Some students graduating with a WACE are poorly prepared for subsequent educational pathways into university or vocational education and training;
- The Authority is currently unable to provide adequate information about students' standards of achievement in Preliminary course units, Stage 1 course units and endorsed programs; and
- Lack of clarity regarding the value and significance of achievement of a WACE.

6.1 Principles to underpin the development of an amended WACE

As a starting point for developing an amended WACE which will address these issues, principles to underpin that development need to be agreed.

Seven proposed principles are outlined below. They are similar in many ways to the aims articulated in developing the current WACE, but modified to accommodate the issues which have been previously discussed.

6.1.1 Proposed principles

1. Learning is a lifelong process and schooling should prepare students for multiple educational pathways;
2. The WACE should be flexible and accommodate students with diverse backgrounds, interests and abilities and from different learning communities;
3. The WACE should embed both breadth and depth of learning;
4. Students should engage with courses that are personally challenging, that enhance their development and maximise their future study and career options;
5. Marks and grades awarded should be reliable and comparable across the State, and be respected as such by the Western Australian public;
6. After thirteen years of schooling, students should demonstrate a minimum level of literacy and numeracy; and
7. After thirteen years of schooling, students should be prepared for further study in either training or university or entry to the workplace.

6.2 A design brief for the development of an amended WACE

The task of amending the current WACE in a manner consistent with the above principles and which will address the issues which have been identified, requires a well-constructed design brief. Key aspects of such a design brief are as follows.

6.2.1 Design brief for an amended WACE

1. Construct a system of certification and courses that encourages students to select courses that are personally challenging and reward student achievement;
2. Modify the current WACE structure to allow for the eventual integration of the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum;
3. Provide students, parents and the public with a clear statement of whether a student has met the minimum standards of literacy and numeracy required to enter training or the workplace;
4. Modify the current WACE so that most students completing thirteen years of schooling achieve either an ATAR or a Certificate II or higher;
5. Replace the current three stage course design with Year 11 and 12 courses which may involve either Authority examinations or school-based Authority-moderated examinations/tests;
6. Maintain a single WACE structure that is inclusive of all students and allows schools the opportunity to offer viable and appropriate programs to meet the needs of their students and community; and
7. Establish moderation processes to ensure that marks and grades are reliable and comparable across the State, and are respected as such by the Western Australian public.

N.B. These adjustments to the WACE do not overcome the problems associated with small senior school enrolments in some secondary schools – schools will still need to consider carefully what they can and should offer to their students and in their community.

7. CONCEPT PLAN FOR AN AMENDED WACE

To provide a practical guide as to what an amended WACE should look like, a concept plan has been prepared which outlines its main intended features.

The amended WACE

1. The WACE will comprise Year 11 courses (Units 1 and 2) and Year 12 courses (paired Units 3 and 4).
2. The structure of the WACE will be modified so that students undertake a minimum of ten courses (20 units) across Years 11 and 12 (typically five or more Year 11 courses and a minimum of five Year 12 courses); up to a combined maximum of two Year 11 courses and two Year 12 courses may be replaced by VET programs and endorsed programs (VET programs may replace up to two Year 11 courses and two Year 12 courses; endorsed programs may replace up to one Year 11 course and one Year 12 course).

Note: The provision of credit for VET and endorsed programs will be streamlined and credit will be allocated for completed programs at the unit level.

3. The courses will be modified from existing WACE courses.
4. Year 11 courses will be introduced in 2015 and Year 12 courses will be introduced in 2016.
5. The courses in the WACE will be defined as:

ATAR Courses:

- Courses with external examinations in Year 12 set by the Authority.
- Courses will typically be based on current Stage 2 and Stage 3 course units.
- As Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum becomes available appropriate courses will be adopted as ATAR Courses with adaptation to suit Western Australian requirements.
- Only ATAR Courses will be externally examined from 2016.

General Courses:

- Courses with school-based tests/examinations and moderation by the Authority.
- Tests/examinations may include Externally Set Tasks (EST).
- Courses will typically be based on Stage 1 and Stage 2 course units but it is likely that modification will be required to the content and assessment in current units.
- As Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum becomes available appropriate courses will be adopted as General Courses with adaptation to suit Western Australian requirements.
- Course Advisory Committees will provide advice to the Board regarding the appropriateness of General Courses for some subjects.

Foundation and Preliminary Courses:

- Foundation courses will typically be based on Stage 1 course units and provide a focus on literacy and numeracy skills, practical work-related experience and the opportunity to build personal skills that are important for life and work.
 - Preliminary courses are focussed on providing a relevant option for students with special education needs, in particular those students who cannot access the ATAR or general course content with adjustment and/or disability provisions; students with an intellectual disability or who have had a severely disrupted learning pathway; and students who are unable to progress directly to training from school or who require modified and independent education plans.
 - Tests/examinations may include Externally Set Tasks (EST).
 - The Authority will investigate strategies to ensure that enrolments in Foundation and Preliminary courses will be restricted to students for whom they are designed.
6. Students will be able to select across the suite of ATAR, General and Foundation and Preliminary courses offered appropriate to their educational pathways, needs and interests.
7. In order to achieve a WACE students will:
- complete literacy and numeracy tests to demonstrate a minimum standard.
 - achieve an ATAR¹ or complete a Certificate II (or higher).
 - complete two Year 11 English units and two Year 12 English units.
 - complete at least one pair of units from a List A course and one pair of units from a List B course in Year 12.
 - complete at least 20 units (or equivalents), including a minimum of 10 units at Year 12.
 - achieve a minimum of 6 C grades in 6 Year 11 units and 8 C grades in 4 pairs of Year 12 units (or equivalents).

Note 1: The achievement of an ATAR requires students to complete a minimum of four Year 12 ATAR Courses.

8. Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement (WASSA)
Every student who completes studies that can contribute towards a WACE will receive a Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement (WASSA) which will detail achievement in all courses, VET programs and endorsed programs completed by the student.
9. Literacy and numeracy tests will be provided that students are required to complete to demonstrate achievement at or above a minimum standard in order to receive a WACE.
- The tests will be mapped to the Australian Core Skills Framework. Achievement will be reported on a band scale with a minimum standard based on the skills regarded as essential for individuals to meet the demands of everyday life and work in a knowledge-based economy.

- During their senior secondary schooling, students will have multiple opportunities to demonstrate achievement at or above the minimum literacy and numeracy standards. Students will be able to repeat the tests at semester intervals.
 - Students who have not demonstrated the minimum standards of literacy and numeracy will receive a WASSA.
10. Foundation English and Foundation Mathematics courses will be introduced to prepare students for the various forms of writing and mathematics required in further training and employment.
11. Awards
- A Certificate of Distinction and a Certificate of Merit will recognise student achievement dependent on the degree of difficulty of the courses and programs undertaken and their level of achievement.
 - These certificates will replace the current Certificates of Commendation and Excellence.
 - These certificates will be determined through the allocation of points.
12. From 2015, all courses (excluding Languages) with fewer than 100 students for two consecutive years will be placed on notice and if enrolments remain at or below 100 students for a third year, the course will be removed from the course list(s).
13. Syllabuses will be reviewed typically on a five-year cyclical basis, according to learning area.

8. HOW THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE WACE ADDRESS THE ISSUES IDENTIFIED WITH THE CURRENT WACE ARRANGEMENTS

The proposed amendments to the WACE are designed to provide a senior secondary school certificate which will meet the needs of its many stakeholders and address the many issues which have been identified with the current WACE arrangements.

Ways in which the proposed WACE addresses issues associated with the current WACE can be summarised as follows.

Issue with the current WACE	How addressed by the proposed amendments to the WACE
Stage 1 enrolments are much higher than envisaged and significant numbers of students are not undertaking courses commensurate with their ability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new WACE will be based on Year 11 courses (comprising two units) and Year 12 courses (comprising paired units), providing for greater continuity and depth of study. • Students must complete a minimum of at least 20 units (or equivalents) including a minimum of 10 Year 12 units. • A combined maximum of eight unit equivalents of VET and endorsed programs is permitted, but with endorsed programs being restricted to a maximum of four unit equivalents. • Enrolments in Foundation and Preliminary courses will be restricted to students for whom they are designed.
Low and declining Stage 2 enrolments have resulted in Stage 2 examinations being unviable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course stages will be discontinued and will be replaced by Year 11 and 12 courses. • Only Year 12 ATAR courses will be externally examined (from 2016). • All courses with low enrolments in two consecutive years will be placed on notice and, if enrolments remain low, the course will be removed from the course list(s).
The current three stage design of WACE courses is incompatible with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum, which comprises Year 11 and Year 12 courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The establishment of Year 11 and Year 12 courses is consistent with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum. • As Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum courses become available, appropriate courses will be adopted as ATAR, General or Foundation courses and adapted to suit WA requirements.
Significant concerns have been raised regarding the standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by students who are currently graduating with a WACE.	<p>Achievement of the amended WACE will require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completion of two Year 11 English units and a pair of Year 12 English units; • completion of literacy and numeracy tests demonstrating achievement of minimum standards of literacy and numeracy; and • literacy and numeracy skills will be a focus of Foundation English and Mathematics courses.

<p>Some students graduating with a WACE are poorly prepared for subsequent educational pathways into university or vocational education and training.</p>	<p>Achievement of the amended WACE will require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstration of minimum standards of literacy and numeracy; • achievement of an ATAR or Certificate II (or higher); and • completion of Year 11 and 12 courses that require greater depth of study than current Stage 1 units.
<p>The Authority is currently unable to provide adequate information about students' standards of achievement in Preliminary course units, Stage 1 course units and endorsed programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ATAR courses will continue to be externally examined by the Authority. • School-based tests/examinations for General and Foundation courses will be moderated by the Authority and will include Externally Set Tasks to assist with moderation and the monitoring of standards.
<p>Lack of clarity regarding the value and significance of achievement of a WACE.</p>	<p>The new WACE will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • require demonstration of an adequate level of literacy and numeracy; • require the achievement of an ATAR or Certificate II (or higher) as preparation for further study or work; • involve greater depth of learning by requiring the completion of a minimum of 10 Year 12 units; • significantly reduce the potential use of lower level Foundation courses and endorsed programs; • more clearly differentiate on the WACE certificate courses taken at different levels of difficulty; and • replace current certificates of excellence and commendation with certificates of merit and distinction which reward students according to both the difficulty of the courses they undertake and their level of achievement (i.e. grades).

9. TIMELINES FOR CHANGE

The Committee proposes that the amended WACE becomes operational for Year 11 students in 2015 and for Year 12 students in 2016. These timelines will enable the Authority, systems/sector and schools to undertake the planning required to effect the changes that are proposed. In addition, this timeline would enable the Authority to provide schools with the required 18 months notice of major syllabus changes.

10. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Committee recognises that the proposed changes to the WACE cannot be implemented successfully without additional resources. In particular, curriculum and syllabus review and revision, the development and implementation of literacy and numeracy tests, expanded moderation activities, significantly expanded provision of access to VET Certificates II and above, and support for systems/sector professional development and change management will require additional funding. Separate from this report, the Authority, in conjunction with other agencies, has developed cost estimates for implementing the proposed changes.

REFERENCES

Curriculum Council of Western Australia (2002) *Our Youth, Our Future: Post-Compulsory Education Review*. Perth: Curriculum Council of Western Australia.

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (2008) *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*.
http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/national_declaration_on_the_educational_goals_for_young_australians.pdf

Curriculum Council of Western Australia (2012) *Western Australian Certificate of Education. WACE Manual. General information for senior secondary schooling 2012*. Perth: Curriculum Council of Western Australia.

APPENDIX 1: Senior School Curriculum and Certification Committee Terms of Reference and Membership

Object/Purpose

Our Youth, Our Future, Post-Compulsory Education Review, published in March 2002, provided the directions for the present Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). The system that includes 51 courses, together with Vocational Education and Training (VET) and endorsed programs, has evolved over ten years and has now been fully implemented for over three years.

The agreement by the Minister to implement a national curriculum, together with aspects of the present system identified by the Board of the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and the Minister for Education as requiring review, serve as basis for the work of the committee.

Roles and responsibilities

The committee is to provide advice and recommendations for changes to the WACE. Aspects to be reviewed by the committee include:

1. Timeframe for change
2. Certification
 - Breadth and depth
 - Number and level of units
 - VET qualifications
 - Endorsed programs
 - Achievement standards
 - Literary and numeracy requirements
 - Examination requirements
 - Awards
3. Number and structure of courses provided
 - Number of courses – general studies
 - Integration of Australian Curriculum
 - Number of VET courses
 - Unit structure
 - Practical component
4. Inclusion of VET
 - WACE courses
 - Full training certificates - equivalence
 - Certificate level
 - Units of competency
5. Inclusion of endorsed programs
 - Level
 - Number of programs registered
 - Number included in the WACE
6. Providing for students with educational needs
7. Providing for private candidate entry to University

Membership

Emeritus Professor Patrick Garnett, Chair, School Curriculum and Standards Authority (Chair)
Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education
Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education
Ms Debra Sayce, Assistant Director, Learning and Teaching, Catholic Education Office
Ms Valerie Gould, Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of WA
Mr Allan Blagaich, Chief Executive Officer, School Curriculum and Standards Authority
Dr Bruce Matthews, Chair, Standards Committee, School Curriculum and Standards Authority
Ms Margaret Herley, Chair, Curriculum and Assessment Committee, School Curriculum and Standards Authority



Supplementary information to the Report:
The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015
Responding and adapting

School Curriculum and Standards Authority

August, 2014

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
1. LITERACY AND NUMERACY ASSESSMENT	2
Issue 1.1 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment – Year 9 NAPLAN results	2
Issue 1.2 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment – requirement for students to sit the SCSA	
Literacy and Numeracy Assessment in Year 10	2
2. ARCHITECTURE OF YEAR 11 AND 12 COURSES	3
Issue 2.1 Year 11 and 12 courses – sequential development	3
Issue 2.2 Year 11 and 12 courses – eligibility restrictions for Foundation and Preliminary units	4
Issue 2.3 Maximum credit allowed in the WACE from study in a single subject	5
3. REQUIREMENTS IN YEARS 11 AND 12	5
Issue 3.1 C grade requirements in Years 11 and 12	5
Issue 3.2 List A and B requirements	6
4. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)	6
Issue 4.1 VET – unit equivalences	6
Credit for Certificates I, II, III and above	6
* VET program unit equivalences	7
Credit for partially completed Certificate IIIs and above	8
VET industry specific courses	8
Issue 4.2 Additional points relating to VET programs and recognition	9
5. WORKPLACE LEARNING	10
Issue 5.1 Workplace Learning	10
6. PRIVATE CANDIDATES IN ATAR COURSE EXAMINATIONS	10
7. ENDORSED PROGRAMS—REVIEW OF CURRENT OFFERINGS	11
8. MODERATION AND USE OF EXTERNALLY SET TASKS	11
Issue 8.1 Externally set tasks for Year 12 General courses	11
9. TRANSITION ARRANGEMENTS	12
Student enrolment and course recognition arrangements – 2014	13
Student enrolment and course recognition arrangements – 2015	14
Student enrolment and course recognition arrangements – 2016	15
10. DISCONTINUATION OF COURSES WITH LESS THAN 100 ENROLMENTS	16
11. CONSIDERATIONS OF SPECIAL NEEDS	16
Issue 11.1 Eligibility for Foundation and Preliminary Units	16
Issue 11.2 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment – requirement for students to sit the SCSA	
Literacy and Numeracy Assessment in Year 10	16
12. CERTIFICATES OF MERIT AND DISTINCTION	17

INTRODUCTION

On Monday 21 January 2013 the Premier and the Minister for Education announced reforms to the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) to take effect for Year 11 students in 2015 and Year 12 students in 2016. The reforms were based on the report *The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015: Responding and adapting* produced by the Senior School Curriculum and Certification Committee which was established by the Minister for Education to review the current WACE.

The Report proposed that from 2016, to achieve a WACE, students would need to:

- complete a Literacy and Numeracy Assessment to demonstrate a minimum standard;
- achieve an ATAR¹ or complete a Certificate II (or higher);
- complete two Year 11 English units and two Year 12 English units;
- complete at least one pair of Year 12 units from a List A course and one pair of Year 12 units from a List B course;
- complete at least 20 units (or equivalents²), including a minimum of 10 Year 12 units; and
- achieve a minimum of 6 C grades in Year 11 units and 8 C grades in four pairs of Year 12 units (or equivalents).

Note 1: The achievement of an ATAR requires students to complete a minimum of four Year 12 ATAR courses.

Note 2: Of the 20 units required for a WACE, up to a maximum of four Year 11 units and four Year 12 units may be substituted by VET programs and endorsed programs. A student may choose to substitute units with only VET programs (up to a total of eight units) OR with endorsed programs (up to a total of four units) OR with a combination of VET and endorsed programs (up to a total of eight units but with a maximum of four units with endorsed programs).

Subsequently, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (Authority) Chief Executive Officer and senior staff have conducted 54 presentations to staff from the government and Catholic education systems and independent school sector, rural and overseas schools (by teleconference/webinar), state training providers, universities, the Department of Training and Workforce Development and home education providers. In addition, the Authority established opportunities for engagement through an online forum and dedicated telephone and email services.

As a result of these discussions the Authority has identified several issues that require additional consideration or clarification to ensure that the overall objectives of the reforms are best met.

We acknowledge that there may be the need for some further fine tuning and any changes will be communicated in the draft *WACE Manual 2015-16*.

1. LITERACY AND NUMERACY ASSESSMENT

Issue 1.1 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment – Year 9 NAPLAN results

In *The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015: Responding and adapting* it was proposed that students would need to demonstrate literacy and numeracy achievement at or above a minimum standard in order to receive a WACE. A Literacy and Numeracy Assessment is being developed, which is indicative of Level 3 of the *Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)*, and is identified as the minimum standard required for individuals to meet the demands of everyday life and work in a knowledge-based economy.

Following the analysis of the results of a trial of the OLNA in September 2013 we advise that students who have achieved Band 8 or higher in the corresponding Year 9 NAPLAN component (reading, writing and numeracy) will be recognised as meeting the standard required for that component to achieve a WACE.

Position statement

- Students who achieve Band 8 or above in any component (reading, writing or numeracy) in the Year 9 NAPLAN reading, writing and numeracy tests will be recognised as meeting the minimum standard required for that component to achieve a WACE.
- Students undertaking the SCSA Literacy and Numeracy Assessment will be required to satisfy both the reading and writing components in order to demonstrate the minimum WACE literacy standard.

Issue 1.2 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment – requirement for students to sit the SCSA Literacy and Numeracy Assessment in Year 10

In *The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015: Responding and adapting* it was proposed that during their senior secondary schooling, students will have multiple opportunities to demonstrate achievement at or above the minimum literacy and numeracy standard. Students will be able to access the SCSA Literacy and Numeracy Assessment in Semester 1, Year 10 and may repeat the Assessment at semester intervals.

Schools and students will be able to use the results of the SCSA Literacy and Numeracy Assessment, taken in Year 10, to help determine their course selections in Years 11 and 12. For students whose literacy and numeracy are **well below the required standard**, Foundations of English and Foundations of Mathematics may be appropriate courses that will facilitate student development in these critically important areas.

Position statement

- Students will be required to undertake the SCSA Literacy and Numeracy Assessment in Semester 1, Year 10 unless, on the basis of their Year 9 NAPLAN results, they have demonstrated the minimum standard of literacy and/or numeracy required for the WACE. Students will be required to sit the assessment for any component in which they have not achieved Band 8 or higher.
- Students are required to sit the numeracy, reading and/or writing components of the Literacy and Numeracy Assessment in Semester 1. If the student does not meet the standard in Semester 1, then they must sit in Semester 2, Year 10, and, if required, Semester 1, Year 11. From then on, and if required, students may choose when next to sit the assessment.
 - International and mature age students will sit the test at the first available opportunity.
 - Students with identified special needs may choose not to sit the assessment and will therefore be ineligible for a WACE.

- Students enrolling in mainstream schools from Curriculum and Re-engagement in Education (CARE) schools are required to sit the OLN at the first opportunity upon their enrolment in the mainstream school.
- In relation to Home School students accessing the OLN:
 - these students (as home schoolers) can access the OLN at a school; at a site with a supervisor approved by the SCSA where invigilation can be guaranteed; or at the SCSA premises; and
 - where these students subsequently enrol in a registered school and have not either pre-qualified in WACE literacy and numeracy through NAPLAN 9 or through the OLN, they must access the OLN at the first opportunity upon their enrolment in the registered school.

2. ARCHITECTURE OF YEAR 11 AND 12 COURSES

Issue 2.1 Year 11 and 12 courses – sequential development

The design brief for the amended WACE included two elements that have particular relevance to this issue, viz:

- construct a system of certification and courses that encourages students to select courses that are personally challenging and reward student achievement; and
- modify the current WACE structure to allow for the eventual integration of the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum (SSAC).

The architecture of the SSAC is such that courses include two Year 11 units (units 1 & 2) and two linked Year 12 units (units 3 & 4). It was proposed that as the SSAC becomes available appropriate courses will be adopted with adaptation to suit Western Australian requirements.

The ATAR courses that are not part of the phase one SSAC will be constructed using the content that is currently described in Stage 2 (for Year 11) and Stage 3 (for Year 12) in order to match the architecture of the SSAC. Units 3 & 4 are more challenging and require the demonstration of higher order knowledge, skills and techniques than expected in units 1 & 2. In all ATAR courses it is a fundamental assumption that units 3 & 4 are designed to challenge students to demonstrate a higher standard than units 1 & 2.

The General courses, with some modification, will be constructed using the content that is currently described in Stage 1 (for Year 11) and Stage 2 (for Year 12). The same model of content development applies to General courses as ATAR courses, i.e. it is a fundamental assumption that there should be an increasing level of difficulty and complexity from Year 11 units to Year 12 units.

The design brief for the writers of all ATAR and General courses requires that units must demonstrate an increasing level of complexity from Year 11 to Year 12. Although it can be argued that content in some courses is 'naturally' more hierarchical or sequential than in others, it is reasonable to require that all courses require an increasing level of complexity of knowledge, skills and techniques in Year 12 than is expected in Year 11.

It is therefore expected that students study Year 11 units **before** studying Year 12 units. It is not educationally appropriate for students to be studying course units out of sequence **because** of the increasing conceptual difficulty of Year 12 course units compared with Year 11 course units.

The Authority does not formally require that Year 11 units are pre-requisites for study of Year 12 units. However, it does acknowledge that Year 12 units are conceptually more challenging and are designed for

students to engage with as a final pair of units in a study program. Students may enrol in Year 12 units without having studied Year 11 units in the same course.

Position statement

- Course units must be completed sequentially, with Year 11 units (1 & 2) being undertaken before Year 12 units (3 & 4) unless students enrol directly in Year 12 units without completing Year 11 units.
- Enrolment in Year 11 units after completing Year 12 units in the same course pathway will not be permitted.

Issue 2.2 Year 11 and 12 courses – eligibility restrictions for Foundation and Preliminary units

The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015: Responding and adapting report identified, as an issue of considerable concern, the high level of Year 12 student enrolments in Stage 1 course units. A major principle identified within the proposed reforms was to ensure that “students should engage with courses that are personally challenging, that enhance their development and maximise their future study and career options”.

The report did recognise, however, that appropriate levels of courses need to be provided to cater for the full range of student abilities and interests. It was proposed that Foundation and Preliminary courses would be provided as follows:

- Foundation courses – typically based on Stage 1 course units and providing a focus on literacy and numeracy skills, practical work-related experience and the opportunity to build personal skills that are important for life and work; and
- Preliminary courses – focussed on providing a relevant option for students with special education needs, in particular those students who cannot access the ATAR or General course content with adjustment and/or disability provisions; students with a learning difficulty or an intellectual disability or who have had a severely disrupted learning pathway; and students who are unable to progress directly to training from school or who require modified and individual/documentated education plans.

It was anticipated that the reforms will significantly reduce the use of lower level courses and that enrolments in Foundation and Preliminary courses will be restricted to students for whom they are designed. Furthermore, the report indicated that the Authority would investigate strategies to ensure that enrolments in Foundation and Preliminary courses would be restricted to students for whom they are designed. The Authority wants to ensure that enrolment in Foundation English and Foundation Mathematics courses is restricted to students for whom these courses are appropriate.

Position statement

- Students who have achieved the minimum standard of literacy in the literacy component of the Year 10 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment are not eligible to enrol in Foundation English and other List A Foundation courses.
- Students who have achieved the minimum standard of numeracy in the numeracy component of the Year 10 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment are not eligible to enrol in Foundation Mathematics and other List B Foundation courses.
- Enrolment in Preliminary courses will be restricted to students who have been identified as having a learning difficulty or an intellectual disability or who have had a severely disrupted learning pathway to the extent that the Foundation courses do not address their needs appropriately.
- Students who achieve the minimum standard of literacy and/or numeracy in semester 1 of Year 11 are not eligible to continue in the associated Foundation courses in Semester 2 of that year.

- Students who achieve the minimum standard of literacy in Semester 2 of Year 11 or during Year 12 will be permitted to continue in Foundation English and other List A Foundation courses in Year 12.
- Students who achieve the minimum standard of numeracy in Semester 2 of Year 11 or during Year 12 will be permitted to enrol in Foundation Mathematics and other List B Foundation courses in Year 12.

Issue 2.3 Maximum credit allowed in the WACE from study in a single subject

The revised WACE allows students to select from a wide range of ATAR and General courses depending on their interests and abilities. It is anticipated that most students studying a particular course in Year 11 and 12 will study either the ATAR or General course in both years. However, it is likely that some students will change from an ATAR course to a General course, or vice versa, particularly in Year 11. However, it is intended that students can only achieve credit for a maximum of four units in any one subject. For example, students could receive credit for four Geography General course units or four Geography ATAR course units or two Year 11 Geography General course units and two Year 12 Geography ATAR course units, but may not accrue credit for two Geography General course units and four Geography ATAR course units (i.e. a total of six units).

Position statement

- Students can achieve credit towards the WACE for a maximum of four units within any one subject (e.g. four ATAR course units, four General course units or a combination of four ATAR and General course units).

3. REQUIREMENTS IN YEARS 11 AND 12

Issue 3.1 C grade requirements in Years 11 and 12

In *The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015: Responding and adapting* it was proposed that students must achieve six C grades in Year 11 (out of a likely enrolment in 12 units) and eight C grades in Year 12 (out of a likely enrolment in 10 units). The change from requiring students to achieve a 'C average' across 20 units to requiring a minimum of 14 C grades was intended to place greater emphasis on students achieving a satisfactory standard across the majority of their course units in Years 11 and 12.

Many principals have welcomed the requirement for students to demonstrate a satisfactory level of achievement in a reasonable number of courses rather than the previous C grade average approach. However, concern has been raised that the Year 11 six C grade requirement may result in students not attempting ATAR courses in Year 11 in case they achieve so poorly that the situation cannot be retrieved in their Year 12 study program.

It has also been suggested that the Year 12 eight C grade requirement in units 3 & 4 may cause students to choose General courses rather than ATAR courses in Year 12 because if they 'pass' only three of their five ATAR courses (i.e. achieve six C grades and four D grades) they would be ineligible for the WACE. This could result in a lower percentage of students being eligible for an ATAR than is currently the case. Data from 2012 shows that 3% of students eligible for an ATAR did not achieve six C grades in Year 12 and that 8% of students eligible for an ATAR did not achieve eight C grades in Year 12.

It is proposed that these concerns can be addressed by maintaining a requirement for a student to achieve 14 C (or better) grades across Years 11 and 12 with a minimum of six C grades in Year 12 units. This would provide more flexibility for students who wish to try the ATAR courses in Year 11 and should also reduce concerns about not achieving a WACE if students only achieve six C grades in Year 12.

Position statement

- To achieve a WACE, students must obtain a minimum of 14 C grades or higher in Year 11 and 12 units with a minimum of six Year 12 C grades in units 3 & 4.

Issue 3.2 List A and B requirements

In *The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015: Responding and adapting* it was proposed that students must complete at least one pair of Year 12 units from a List A course and one pair of Year 12 units from a List B course. This is a continuation of current requirements. Given that all students are required to undertake two Year 11 and two Year 12 English units the List A/B requirement is essentially that students must undertake two Year 12 List B (mathematics/sciences/technologies) course units.

It has been suggested that VET studies should be able to contribute to the fulfilment of this requirement.

The revised WACE provides flexibility for students to undertake up to eight units in VET programs and/or endorsed programs. Students are expected to undertake studies in at least a further 12 ATAR or General (and in some cases Foundation) course units. These studies represent an important component of a broad general education that students should experience as part of the WACE. The breadth of learning requirement within the WACE was deliberately included to ensure that students are exposed to some study in both English/the arts/languages/social sciences and mathematics/sciences/technologies.

Position statement

- The breadth of study requirement for one pair of units from a Year 12 List A course (English/the arts/languages/social sciences) and one pair of units from a Year 12 List B course (mathematics/sciences/technologies) must be fulfilled through ATAR or General (and Foundation) courses.

4. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)

Issue 4.1 VET – unit equivalences

Credit for Certificates I, II, III and above

In *The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015: Responding and adapting* the following VET program unit equivalences were proposed:

Completed qualification	Equivalence (total)	Credit allocation (units)	
		11	12
Certificate I	2 units	2	-
Certificate II/III	4 units	2	2
Certificate IV and higher	6 units	2	4

- credit is split across Years 11 and 12 for completion of a Certificate II or higher qualification; and
- students may only use eight units of VET (VET and endorsed program units) for WACE recognition (40% of the 20 unit requirement). Students may elect to undertake additional VET programs and endorsed program units but will be limited to a maximum of eight units credit as part of the requirement to complete a minimum of 20 units over Years 11 and 12.

It has been proposed that completed Certificate III qualifications should be awarded the same credit towards the WACE as was proposed for Certificate IVs and above.

The following points have been made in support of this position:

- students undertaking a Certificate III are required to operate at a higher level than in pre-employment qualifications at Certificate II level and should be awarded credit accordingly;
- the initially proposed unit equivalence allocation does not encourage higher level qualification achievement; and
- few students have the opportunity to complete a Certificate IV. In 2012 only 3% of Year 12 enrolments in VET were at Certificate IV level or higher.

In addressing this issue, the Authority has also considered the variation in complexity and time requirements for certificates at the same and at different levels. It has also considered the additional request (see below) to allow partially completed Certificate IIIs and above (in restricted areas) to satisfy the VET qualification requirement. On balance, the Authority has accepted the proposal that the credit allocated for completed Certificate IIIs should be increased to six units – two Year 11 units and four Year 12 units. The enhanced credit allocation has ramifications for the amount of credit that students may accrue for Workplace Learning which is discussed in Section 5.

Position statement

- The credit provided towards the WACE for completed Certificate III or higher qualifications will be increased to two Year 11 units and four Year 12 units as indicated in the following table of revised VET program unit equivalences*:

Completed qualification	Equivalence (total)	Credit allocation (units)	
		11	12
Certificate I	2 units	2	-
Certificate II	4 units	2	2
Certificate III and higher	6 units	2	4

*** VET program unit equivalences**

- For a completed Certificate I, a student is credited with two Year 11 units provided that the achievement in units of competency is equal to or greater than 110 nominal hours. Where the number of hours is less than 110 students may choose more substantial elective units within the qualification to ensure that the Certificate I meets the requirements for the full allocation of unit equivalents. Certificate I qualifications where student achievement in units of competency are less than 110 nominal hours in total will not be awarded any unit equivalence towards the WACE.
- For a completed Certificate II, a student is credited with two Year 11 units and two Year 12 units provided that the achievement in units of competency is equal to or greater than 220 nominal hours. Where the number of hours is less than 220 students may choose more substantial elective units within the qualification to ensure that the Certificate II meets the requirements for the full allocation of unit equivalents. A student who achieves a Certificate II qualification with units of competency that are less than 220 nominal hours in total will be able to meet the minimum Certificate II qualification requirement but the qualification will only contribute towards the WACE as two Year 11 unit equivalents.

Credit for partially completed Certificate IIIs and above

Queries have been received regarding whether a partially completed Certificate III or higher should qualify for unit equivalence within the WACE and as meeting the minimum Certificate II completion requirement. It is recognised that in some specific and specialised Certificate IIIs and above, students may not have sufficient time to complete the requirements by the end of Year 12 or there may be age restrictions associated with the qualification. It was therefore proposed that unit equivalence within the WACE on the basis of partially completed VET qualifications should be provided under specified conditions.

Position statement

A student may be awarded unit equivalence for the partial achievement of a Certificate III or higher and deemed to have satisfied the Certificate II minimum qualification requirement where it has been demonstrated that:

- they have insufficient time to complete the qualification by the end of Year 12; or
 - there are age or other appropriate restrictions associated with the qualification (such as in a school based traineeship or apprenticeship);
- and
- they are enrolled to complete*, in the current year, the equivalent of at least four WACE course units (220 nominal hours of VET) from Year 12 VET enrolments only.

*Nominal hours will not be calculated for results that identify that the student has already achieved the unit in previous academic years or, has been withdrawn, or where the student did not commence/participate in the first instance.

No credit will be allocated for a partially completed Certificate III or higher achieved in prior academic years.

Students who are enrolled in a Certificate III or above and who meet these requirements are eligible for four units of credit towards the WACE (two Year 11 units and two Year 12 units) as indicated below, and will satisfy the minimum VET qualification requirement (the completion of a Certificate II or higher) for the WACE:

Completed qualification		Equivalence (total)	Credit allocation (units)	
			11	12
Certificate III and higher	Partial	4 units	2	2
	Full	6 units	2	4

VET industry specific courses

Consistent with the discussion included under Issue 3.2 the Authority wishes to ensure that all students are exposed to a broad general education including some study in both English/the arts/languages/social sciences and mathematics/sciences/technologies. It is expected that this requirement will be met through enrolment in ATAR and General courses rather than through VET industry specific courses or other VET programs.

Position statement

- To support students being exposed to a broad general education, including study in Mathematics/Science/Technology, the VET industry specific courses will no longer be identified as List A or List B and will not satisfy the List B breadth requirement for the WACE.

Further considerations

VET industry specific courses include a full qualification from a training package and contribute to the WACE as a General course. Credit for a VET industry specific course is awarded upon completion of all course components.

The current VET industry specific courses were reviewed as part of the WACE course revisions. Changes to current arrangements include:

- amended VET industry specific course structures for the Hospitality and Tourism and Creative Industries courses;
- the inclusion of a new VET industry specific course in Engineering;
- the following VET industry specific course structure and associated unit credit:

VET industry specific course qualification	General course units		Meets minimum qualification requirement for WACE
	Yr 11	Yr 12	
Certificate I	Unit 1/2	x	x
Certificate II	Unit 1/2	Unit 3/4	✓
Certificate III	Unit 1/2	Unit 3/4	✓

- Year 11 VET industry specific course units (units 1 & 2), in addition to Year 12 course units (units 3 & 4), are paired (i.e. there is no semesterised unit credit for VET industry specific courses commencing for Year 11 in 2015); and
- an incomplete Certificate II or III VET industry specific course may be allocated credit for two Year 11 course units (units 1 & 2) providing the following requirements are met:
 - Qualification component: the successful completion of 110 or more nominal hours in the qualification; and
 - Workplace Learning component: at least one unit of workplace learning relevant to the VET industry specific industry area; and
 - The total commitment for Year 11 course units 1 & 2 for VET industry specific Certificate II or III courses equates to 110 nominal hours (two General course units) in addition to at least 55 hours of workplace learning (165 hours in total).

Issue 4.2 Additional points relating to VET programs and recognition

Position statement

- Students may 'bank' achievement of VET qualifications – i.e. VET qualifications can be achieved before Year 12 (note: restrictions relating to recognition of partially completed Certificates III and higher detailed above).
- Qualifications are awarded credit (as VET industry specific course units or unit equivalence) towards the WACE regardless of the academic year in which the student completes the VET qualification.
- Qualifications from the suite of Certificates of General Education for Adults (CGEA) and other general education qualifications will be reported on a student's Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement (WASSA) but will not be allocated credit nor recognised as meeting the requirement of achieving a Certificate II or higher for WACE completion.
- The Authority reserves the right to identify some VET qualifications from nationally recognised accredited courses which it does not recognise for unit equivalence within the WACE.

5. WORKPLACE LEARNING

Issue 5.1 Workplace Learning

Currently students can gain credit for Workplace Learning through Stage 1 Courses and as endorsed programs. Four Stage 1 Workplace Learning units are available: 1AWPL, 1BWPL, 1CWPL and 1DWPL. Endorsed program options include Workplace Learning On-the-job Training (WL1), Workplace Learning Employability Skills (WL2 and WL2B), Work Skills (PGWS), Work Skills for the Music Industry (PWSM), Work Skills for the Sport and Recreation Industry (PWSSR) and ASDAN Preparatory Award Program – Workright (CWR100).

The Authority has reviewed the range of offerings in Workplace Learning and has endorsed a simplification of course/unit offerings. It recognises the value of Workplace Learning and the requirement for Workplace Learning to achieve some VET qualifications. The Authority proposes that four units of Workplace Learning be available, two Year 11 units and two Year 12 units. These units will be sufficiently generic to allow for a variety of workplace experiences. The Workplace Learning units will be offered as endorsed programs.

The Authority also considers that all students, including those who undertake a significant component of VET and Workplace Learning within the context of a school-based education, should be exposed to a broad general education. It is therefore proposed that the Workplace Learning units (which are designated as endorsed programs), along with VET programs and other endorsed program units can only be used to accrue credit up to a combined maximum of four Year 11 units and four Year 12 units. Students may elect to undertake additional VET programs and endorsed program units but will be limited to a maximum of eight units credit as part of the requirement to complete a minimum of 20 units over Years 11 and 12.

Position statement

The following changes will be made to Year 11 and 12 Workplace Learning options within the WACE:

- Current Workplace Learning offerings will be discontinued and will be replaced by one endorsed program (which allows students to accrue a maximum of two Year 11 units and two Year 12 units) that is generic in nature and meets the needs of all students who wish to use Workplace Learning within their WACE.

6. PRIVATE CANDIDATES IN ATAR COURSE EXAMINATIONS

Currently, individuals are eligible to enrol to sit a WACE examination for a course/stage as a private candidate.

These candidates do not undertake the school-based assessment that is usually required and their assessment is based solely on their examination results. This provision was put in place primarily so that students unable to undertake normal school-based enrolment in courses would not be disadvantaged.

Position statement

Private candidature be discontinued except for students:

- seeking entry to university as a mature-age applicant, or
- undertaking language courses through interstate language offerings where the course is not offered by the school, or
- undertaking French, German and Italian Background Language courses where the course is not offered by the school.

7. ENDORSED PROGRAMS—REVIEW OF CURRENT OFFERINGS

Endorsed programs were introduced in 2007 as alternative study options for students in Years 10, 11 and 12. They enabled recognition of a range of formal and informal learning activities not covered by WACE courses or VET programs.

Position statement

The Endorsed Programs Committee (a sub-committee of the Curriculum and Assessment Committee) has been charged by the Authority to provide advice for the consideration of the Curriculum and Assessment Committee and the Board on the following:

- the desirability and feasibility of separating completely the use of endorsed programs for credit within the WACE from providing students with a record of other achievements on their Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement (WASSA);
- strengthening policies and processes regarding the approval of endorsed programs for credit within the WACE;
- significantly reducing the number of endorsed programs on offer;
- removing the variety of grading schemes currently provided within endorsed programs;
- discontinuing the use of endorsed programs for credit within the WACE where the proposed courses have significant overlap with WACE courses;
- reviewing the nature of university courses that are suitable for registration as endorsed programs for credit within the WACE;
- investigating how the Authority can better quality assure those endorsed programs that are available for credit within the WACE; and
- allowing for credit within the WACE only those endorsed programs that are the equivalent of a full WACE unit.

8. MODERATION AND USE OF EXTERNALLY SET TASKS

Externally Set Tasks (ESTs) will be used for moderation of General courses and integrated into the overall Authority work plan.

Issue 8.1 Externally set tasks for Year 12 General courses

The Authority has a suite of moderation processes which aim to ensure comparability of marking and grading between schools. The processes currently used are:

- consensus moderation;
- school moderation program (documentation and grading reviews by visit or mail);
- statistical moderation of school marks; and
- small group moderation.

Currently the statistical moderation of school marks occurs for Stage 2 and Stage 3 using the school's WACE examination marks distribution to ensure marks from schools are on the same numerical scale.

For General courses, statistical moderation of school marks will not be possible as there will not be WACE examinations for these courses.

An externally set task (EST) process will be introduced as part of the Authority's suite of moderation processes for General courses (including Foundation courses but excluding Preliminary courses) at Year 12.

The EST process will:

- have an educative role in establishing common understandings of the course standards and related content;
- provide access to feedback which will encourage teachers to review and where appropriate adjust their marking, assessment and teaching;
- model best assessment practice which teachers can apply to other school-based assessment tasks;
- enable analysis by the Authority across schools and/or courses;
- inform the Authority's selection of schools for which grading reviews will be conducted; and
- enhance public confidence in school-based grades for these non-examination courses and maintain the credibility of certification.

Inclusion of the EST in the assessment table

The EST will be included in the assessment table in the Year 12 syllabus.

Rotation

All Year 12 students enrolled in a General courses (including Foundation) will complete the EST for that course. These tasks will be marked by the teacher using the marking key provided and contribute to the final mark for the pair of units (as indicated in the assessment table for the course).

9. TRANSITION ARRANGEMENTS

Current arrangements regarding student requirements to achieve a WACE continue in 2014 and 2015 but are replaced by the new requirements from 2016. Because 2015 is a transition year for schools the Authority will put in place transition arrangements to ensure that the needs of students and obligations of schools can be met. The following table identifies:

- enrolment information for students anticipating completing their WACE in 2014, 2015 and 2016 – note that Stage 1, 2 and 3 enrolments will not be available from 2016;
- information relating to external examinations; and
- recognition arrangements regarding Stage 1, 2 and 3 course/unit completions achieved prior to 2016.

Position statement

- The student enrolment and course recognition arrangements, for the period 2014–2016, are outlined in tables on the following pages.

Student enrolment and course recognition arrangements – 2014

Course level	Year 11 *	Year 12	WACE recognition in 2016 and beyond
Existing WACE			
Stage 1	Yes	Yes	11 General
Stage 2 ** (continuing to Stage 3)	Yes	Yes	11 ATAR
Stage 2 *** (exiting course)	Yes	Yes	12 General
Stage 3	Limited availability (students on accelerated pathways)	Yes	12 ATAR
11 Foundation	Not available	Not available	
12 Foundation	Not available	Not available	
11 General	Not available	Not available	
12 General	Not available	Not available	
11 ATAR	Not available	Not available	
12 ATAR	Not available	Not available	

* Year 10 students enrolled in WACE courses follow the same recognition arrangements as provided for Year 11.

** Students completing Stage 2 who complete Stage 3 in the following year.

*** Students completing Stage 2 and exiting the course.

Student enrolment and course recognition arrangements – 2015

Course level	Year 11	Year 12	WACE recognition in 2016 and beyond
Existing WACE			
Stage 1	Not available	Yes	11 General
Stage 2	Not available	Yes	11 ATAR / 12 General
Stage 3	Limited availability (students on accelerated pathways)	Yes	12 ATAR
WACE 2016			
11 Foundation	Yes	No	
12 Foundation	Not available	Not available	
11 General	Yes	No	
12 General	Not available	Not available	
11 ATAR	Yes	No	
12 ATAR	Not available	Not available	

Student enrolment and course recognition arrangements – 2016

Course level	Year 11	Year 12	Recognition
Existing WACE			
Stage 1	Not available	Not available	
Stage 2	Not available	Not available	
Stage 3	Not available	Not available	
WACE 2016			
11 Foundation	Yes	Limited availability (for students who have not achieved a C in the unit or unit pair in Year 11)	
12 Foundation	No	Yes	
11 General	Yes	Limited availability but is not permitted for students who have achieved a C or better in the corresponding Year 12 General course	Accept completion of related Stage 1 unit or unit pair as the equivalent
12 General	No	Yes	Accept completion of related Stage 2 unit or unit pair as the equivalent
11 ATAR	Yes	Limited availability	Accept completion of related Stage 2 unit or unit pair as the equivalent
12 ATAR	Limited availability (students on accelerated pathways)	Yes	Accept completion of related Stage 3 unit or unit pair as the equivalent

10. DISCONTINUATION OF COURSES WITH LESS THAN 100 ENROLMENTS

In *The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015: Responding and adapting* it was proposed that from 2015 all courses (excluding languages) with fewer than 100 students and courses with defined contexts with fewer than 100 students within a context, for two consecutive years will be placed on notice and, if enrolments remain at or below 100 students for a third year, the course will be removed from the course list(s). Concerns have been raised from a small number of subject discipline areas regarding this proposal.

Position statement

- The issue of course enrolments and possible course discontinuation will be monitored and decisions made by the Authority Board at the appropriate time.

11. CONSIDERATIONS OF SPECIAL NEEDS

Issue 11.1 Eligibility for Foundation and Preliminary Units

Position statement

- Enrolment in Preliminary courses will be restricted to students who have been identified as having a learning difficulty, an intellectual disability or who have had a severely disrupted learning pathway to the extent that the Foundation courses do not address their needs appropriately.

Issue 11.2 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment – requirement for students to sit the SCSA Literacy and Numeracy Assessment in Year 10

- Students with a language background other than English, who arrived from overseas and have been attending school in Australia for less than a year before the SCSA Literacy and Numeracy Assessment, or whose schooling is being carried out in an Intensive English Centre, should be given the opportunity to attempt the assessments, but may be exempted from the assessment in Semester 1, Year 10.
- Students with significant intellectual disability and/or those with significant co-existing conditions which severely limit their capacity to participate in the SCSA Literacy and Numeracy Assessment may be exempted from sitting the assessment in Semester 1, Year 10. This will be determined after consultation has occurred, involving the principal, student, and the relevant parent/carer, and a decision is reached that the student is not able to access the assessment with the disability provisions available.
- Students who meet the criteria for exemption but who sit any or all components of the Literacy and Numeracy Assessment under test conditions, will be counted as assessed students and will be notified that they have or have not demonstrated achievement at or above the minimum literacy and numeracy standard.
- Students with identified special needs may choose not to sit the assessment and will therefore be ineligible for a WACE.

12. CERTIFICATES OF MERIT AND DISTINCTION

The Western Australian Certificate of Education 2015: Responding and adapting foreshadowed the development of two new awards (Certificates of Distinction and Certificates of Merit) designed to recognise students' achievement depending on the degree of difficulty of the courses and programs undertaken. These certificates will replace the current Certificates of Commendation.

These awards will be based solely on the grades awarded to students by their schools and the levels of the courses and programs undertaken. It is anticipated that approximately 5% of students would achieve a Certificate of Distinction and an additional 10% of students would achieve a Certificate of Merit.

Position statement

- Two new awards, Certificates of Distinction and Certificates of Merit, will be established that are based on students' achievement (measured by the grades awarded by schools) and the levels of the courses and programs undertaken. Certificates will be determined through the allocation of points as set out below:

Rules for calculating points for Certificates of Merit and Distinction

- Points are accrued at the unit level.
- Points are accrued from 20 Year 11 and 12 units of which at least 10 must be Year 12 units.
- The units used to calculate a student's points will be those that maximise the student's score (maximum points = 200).
- Repeated course units cannot be used in the determination of this award.
- Points can be accrued through completed training qualifications at Certificate II and higher.
- Unit equivalents for training qualifications will be allocated as follows:
 - Cert Is count as two Year 11 units;
 - Cert IIs count as two Year 11 units and two Year 12 units; and
 - Cert IIIs* and above count as two Year 11 units and four Year 12 units.
- Training qualifications are allocated points as follows:
 - Cert IIs – 24 points;
 - Cert IIIs* – 48 points; and
 - Cert IVs and above – 54 points.
- Cert IIIs and Cert IVs must be completed to attract points.
- Endorsed programs are not allocated points.
- Points required for Certificates are as follows:
 - Certificate of Merit – 150-189 points; and
 - Certificate of Distinction – 190-200 points.

* VET industry specific courses represent a special case in the allocation of points for Certificates of Merit and Distinction. Students who complete a Certificate III through a VET industry specific course will be allocated 48 points but will only be able to accrue points from a further 14 units.

Points (per unit)	ATAR courses	General courses	Foundation courses	VET qualifications	Points (per unit)
10	A				10
9	B			Cert IV+ Replaces two Year 11 and four Year 12 units	9
8		A		Cert III Replaces two Year 11 and four Year 12 units	8
7					7
6				Cert II Replaces two Year 11 and two Year 12 units	6

EXAMPLES:

For students taking exclusively ATAR courses

10 ATAR As (100) + 10 ATAR Bs (90) = 190 points – distinction – (Note: 50% As and 50% Bs)

8 ATAR As (80) + 12 ATAR Bs (108) = 188 points – merit – (Note: 40% As and 60% Bs)

6 ATAR As (60) + 14 ATAR Bs (126) = 186 points – merit – (Note: 30% As and 70% Bs)

4 ATAR As (40) + 16 ATAR Bs (144) = 184 points – merit – (Note: 20% As and 80% Bs)

20 ATAR Bs (180) = 180 points – merit

18 ATAR Bs (162) = 162 points – merit

16 ATAR Bs (144) = 144 points – no award

For students taking both ATAR courses and VET programs

Cert IV (54 points) + 10 ATAR As (100) + 4 ATAR Bs (36) = 190 points – distinction

Cert III (48 points) + 14 ATAR Bs (126 points) = 174 points – merit

Cert III (48 points) + 12 ATAR Bs (108 points) = 156 points – merit

Cert II (24 points) + 16 ATAR Bs (144 points) = 168 points – merit

Cert II (24 points) + 14 ATAR Bs (126 points) = 150 points – merit

For students taking exclusively General courses and VET programs

Cert II (24 points) + 16 General As (128 points) = 152 points – merit (Note: As in all units)

Cert II (24 points) + 14 General As (112 points) = 136 points – no award (Note: As in 14/16 units)

Cert III (48 points) + 14 General As (112 points) = 160 points – merit (Note: As in all units)

Cert III (48 points) + 12 General As (96 points) = 144 points – no award (Note: As in 12/14 units)

Cert IV (54 points) + 14 General As (112 points) = 166 points – merit (Note: As in all units)

Cert IV (54 points) + 12 General As (96 points) = 150 points – merit (Note: As in 12/14 units)

Cert IV (54 points) + 10 General As (80 points) = 134 points – no award (Note: As in 10/14 units)

For students taking both ATAR and General courses and VET programs

Cert II (24 points) + 4 ATAR As (40 points) + 12 General As (96 points) = 160 points – merit

Cert II (24 points) + 4 ATAR Bs (36 points) + 12 General As (96 points) = 156 points – merit

Cert II (24 points) + 4 ATAR Bs (36 points) + 10 General As (80 points) = 140 points – no award

Cert III (48 points) + 4 ATAR As (40 points) + 10 General As (80 points) = 168 points – merit

Cert III (48 points) + 4 ATAR Bs (36 points) + 10 General As (80 points) = 164 points – merit

Cert III (48 points) + 4 ATAR Bs (36 points) + 8 General As (64 points) = 148 points – no award

Cert IV (54 points) + 4 ATAR As (40 points) + 10 General As (80 points) = 174 points – merit

Cert IV (54 points) + 4 ATAR Bs (36 points) + 10 General As (80 points) = 170 points – merit

Cert IV (54 points) + 4 ATAR Bs (36 points) + 8 General As (64 points) = 154 points – merit