



Government of **Western Australia**  
School Curriculum and Standards Authority



# **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  
10<sup>th</sup> 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  
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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  
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## **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 ATAR<sup>1</sup> 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"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Students must complete a minimum of at least 20 units (or equivalents) including a minimum of 10 Year 12 units.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Enrolments in Foundation and Preliminary courses will be restricted to students for whom they are designed.</li> </ul> |

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| <p>Low and declining Stage 2 enrolments have resulted in Stage 2 examinations being unviable.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course stages will be discontinued and will be replaced by Year 11 and 12 courses.</li> <li>• Only Year 12 ATAR courses will be externally examined (from 2016).</li> <li>• 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).</li> </ul>                           |
| <p>The current three stage design of WACE courses is incompatible with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum, which comprises Year 11 and Year 12 courses.</p>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The establishment of Year 11 and Year 12 courses is consistent with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Significant concerns have been raised regarding the standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by students who are currently graduating with a WACE.</p>                               | <p>Achievement of the amended WACE will require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• completion of two Year 11 English units and a pair of Year 12 English units;</li> <li>• completion of literacy and numeracy tests demonstrating achievement of minimum standards of literacy and numeracy; and</li> <li>• literacy and numeracy skills will be a focus of Foundation English and Mathematics courses.</li> </ul> |
| <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"> <li>• demonstration of minimum standards of literacy and numeracy;</li> <li>• achievement of an ATAR or Certificate II (or higher); and</li> <li>• completion of Year 11 and 12 courses that require greater depth of study than current Stage 1 units.</li> </ul>   |
| <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"> <li>• ATAR courses will continue to be externally examined by the Authority.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>   |

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| <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"> <li>• require demonstration of an adequate level of literacy and numeracy;</li> <li>• require the achievement of an ATAR or Certificate II (or higher) as preparation for further study or work;</li> <li>• involve greater depth of learning by requiring the completion of a minimum of 10 Year 12 units;</li> <li>• significantly reduce the potential use of lower level Foundation courses and endorsed programs;</li> <li>• more clearly differentiate on the WACE certificate courses taken at different levels of difficulty; and</li> <li>• 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).</li> </ul> |
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### **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         |
| <b>Total cohort number</b>  | <b>30757</b> | <b>30807</b> | <b>31477</b> |

##### 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**

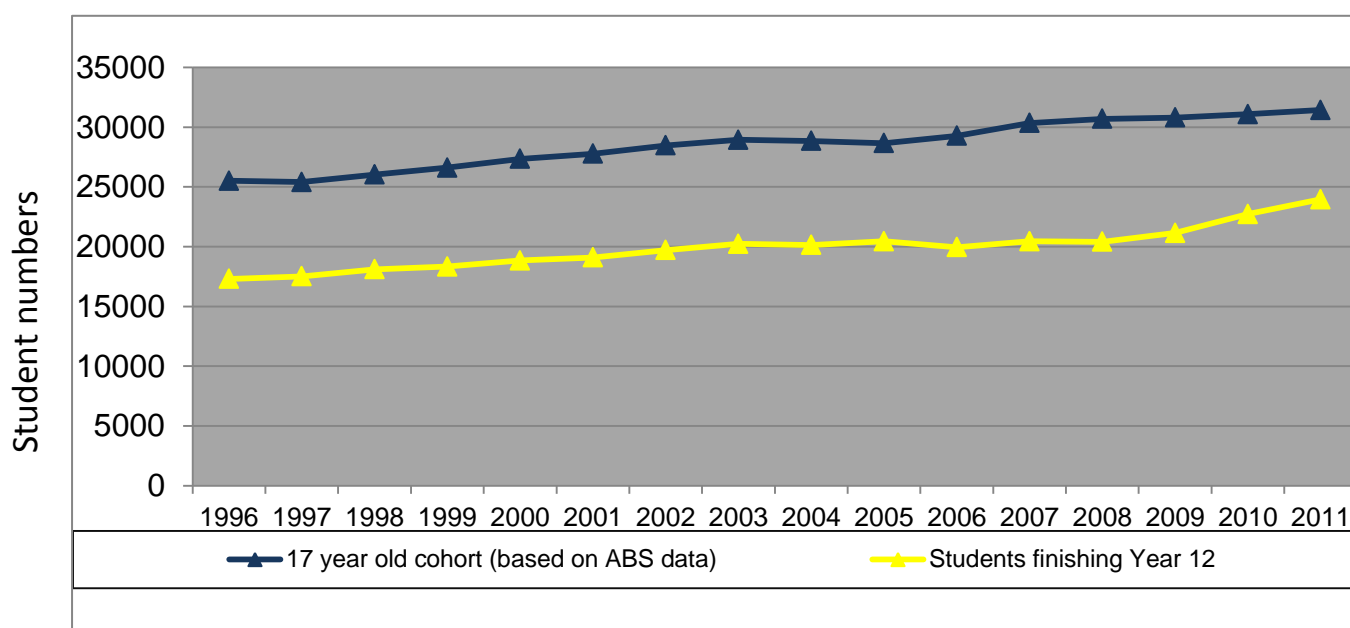


Table 2 presents Year 12 data regarding the numbers of eligible students who completed Year 12 and the numbers and percentages of students who successfully completed a WACE in the period 2009-2011.

**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.

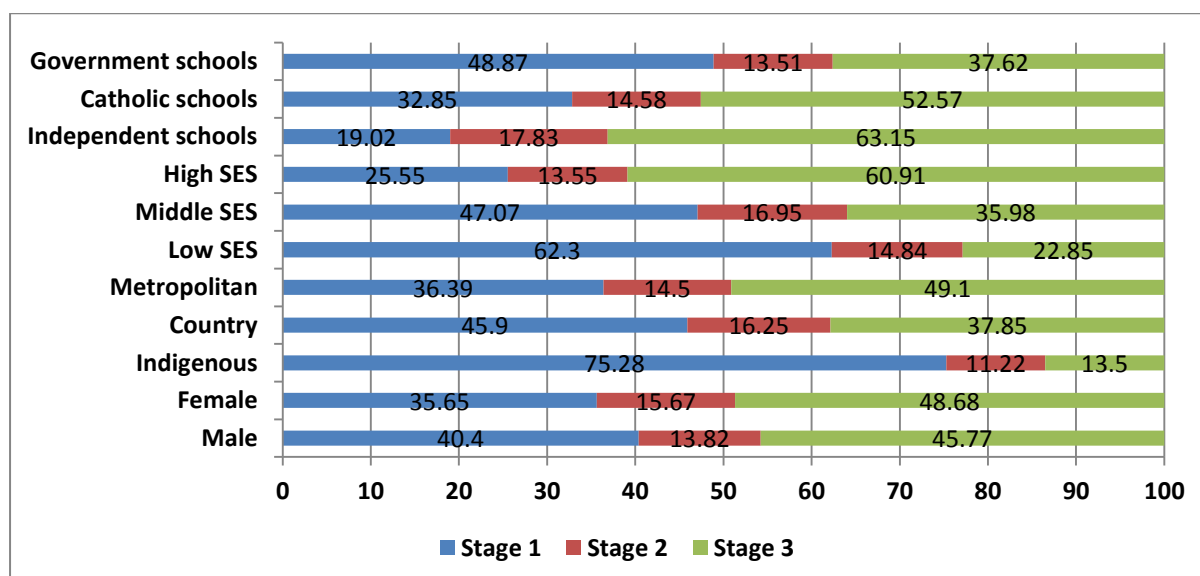
In considering a WACE for the future, the enrolment patterns for the different stages warrant close attention, as do the reasons which may underpin those patterns. These matters are discussed further in Section 5.

### 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 |
| <b>Total</b> | 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                           |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>2622</b>                 |

\* 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.

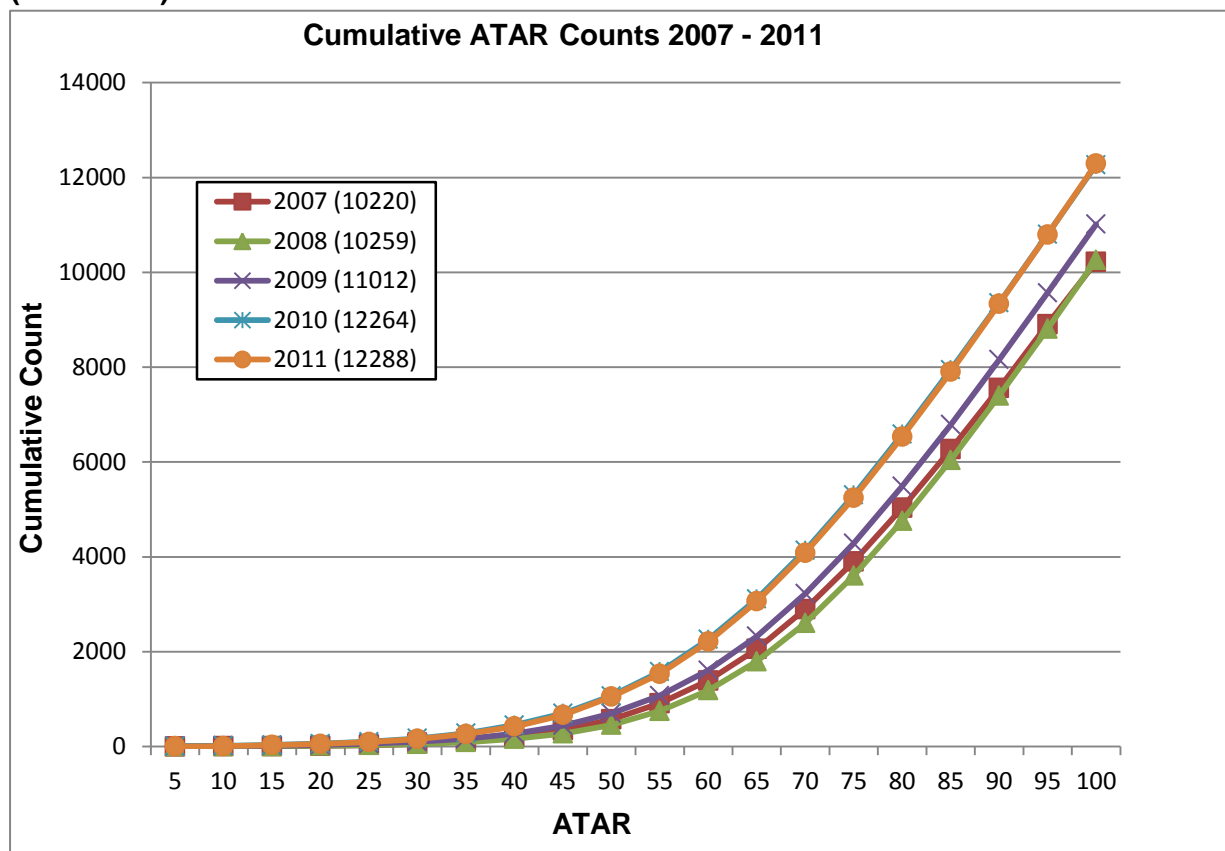
### 4.1 Pathways to higher education

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)<sup>1</sup> or the percentage of students who achieve the relevant state education certificates issued at the end of Year 12 schooling<sup>2</sup>. 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 <sup>1</sup> | Percentage of students achieving an ATAR in the population of students achieving state certificates <sup>2</sup> |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Western Australia | 40.7%   | 59.2%  |
| New South Wales   | 56.3%   | 82.8%  |
| Victoria          | 65.8%   | 94.9%  |
| Queensland        | 75.3%   | n/a  |

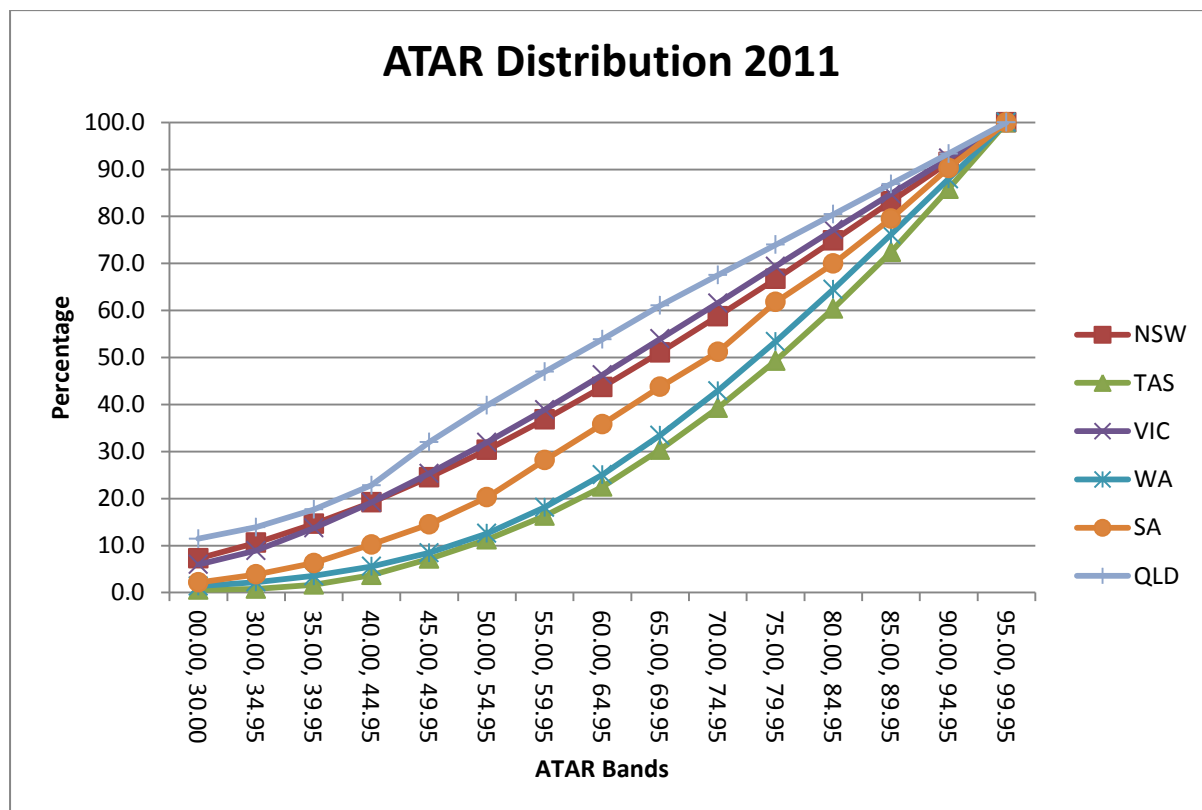
It is difficult to make meaningful comparisons of the percentages of students achieving an ATAR in the various states. This is because states have different requirements for the various state education certificates and different processes for assessing eligibility for an ATAR. In New South Wales, students 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 ATAR<sup>1</sup> 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 equivalent), 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 equivalent).
- 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   |
|---|--|
| <p>Stage 1 enrolments are much higher than envisaged and significant numbers of students are not undertaking courses commensurate with their ability.</p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Students must complete a minimum of at least 20 units (or equivalents) including a minimum of 10 Year 12 units.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Enrolments in Foundation and Preliminary courses will be restricted to students for whom they are designed.</li> </ul> |
| <p>Low and declining Stage 2 enrolments have resulted in Stage 2 examinations being unviable.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course stages will be discontinued and will be replaced by Year 11 and 12 courses.</li> <li>• Only Year 12 ATAR courses will be externally examined (from 2016).</li> <li>• 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).</li> </ul>   |
| <p>The current three stage design of WACE courses is incompatible with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum, which comprises Year 11 and Year 12 courses.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The establishment of Year 11 and Year 12 courses is consistent with the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Significant concerns have been raised regarding the standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by students who are currently graduating with a WACE.</p>        | <p>Achievement of the amended WACE will require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• completion of two Year 11 English units and a pair of Year 12 English units;</li> <li>• completion of literacy and numeracy tests demonstrating achievement of minimum standards of literacy and numeracy; and</li> <li>• literacy and numeracy skills will be a focus of Foundation English and Mathematics courses.</li> </ul>   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <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"> <li>• demonstration of minimum standards of literacy and numeracy;</li> <li>• achievement of an ATAR or Certificate II (or higher); and</li> <li>• completion of Year 11 and 12 courses that require greater depth of study than current Stage 1 units.</li> </ul>   |
| <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"> <li>• ATAR courses will continue to be externally examined by the Authority.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>   |
| <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"> <li>• require demonstration of an adequate level of literacy and numeracy;</li> <li>• require the achievement of an ATAR or Certificate II (or higher) as preparation for further study or work;</li> <li>• involve greater depth of learning by requiring the completion of a minimum of 10 Year 12 units;</li> <li>• significantly reduce the potential use of lower level Foundation courses and endorsed programs;</li> <li>• more clearly differentiate on the WACE certificate courses taken at different levels of difficulty; and</li> <li>• 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).</li> </ul> |

## **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](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