Securing Their Future

The New South Wales Government’s reforms for the Higher School Certificate
Foreword

It is three and a half decades since the decision was taken to restructure New South Wales secondary education and establish the Higher School Certificate. Thirty-five years on, a number of problems have emerged. The Government is now reforming the Higher School Certificate to enhance its intellectual rigour, fairness and relevance to the needs, interests and capacities of senior school students. This will ensure its continuing quality and standing into the twenty-first century.

The New South Wales Government’s White Paper, Securing Their Future, introduces substantial reforms which respond to the significant increase in the range of young people who now wish to study for the Higher School Certificate. They also tackle the new challenges facing the curriculum at this level.

The Government is indebted to Professor Barry McGaw for the leadership and insight he has exercised in writing the Green Paper, Their Future, and, following the most extensive consultations in the history of the Higher School Certificate, his final report, Shaping Their Future. Professor McGaw has clearly identified problems in curriculum, assessment, and reporting and has recommended a comprehensive set of solutions.

The Government has accepted the major directions proposed by Professor McGaw, but will pursue other strategies in some cases. The final decisions, like Professor McGaw’s reports, reflect the over-riding themes of challenging students to achieve their best and of achieving greater fairness.

Securing Their Future honours the Government’s commitment to a stronger Higher School Certificate that parents, students, and the wider community will be able to understand. Students will be assessed fairly and validly on what they know, understand and can do. The Higher School Certificate will establish clear links to post-school pathways of education, training and employment.

The measures adopted by the Government in Securing Their Future build on the best features of the current Higher School Certificate and realise substantial improvements. The New South Wales Higher School Certificate will become a more rigorous, competitive, and externally-assessed credential meeting the educational needs of young people and securing their future.

John Aquilina, MP
Minister for Education and Training
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Overview

WHY CHANGE THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE?

The New South Wales Government was elected on a platform of creating a stronger, simpler and fairer Higher School Certificate. This was to achieve a number of key goals:

- to increase the rigour and quality of the HSC curriculum;
- to ensure HSC marks fairly reflect the standards achieved by students;
- to better equate the method of reporting achievement with concepts understood by the community; and
- to enhance the chances for more equitable educational outcomes.

These goals aim at providing the educational platform which will secure the future for our young people and place New South Wales at the forefront of Australian education.

To achieve these goals, the Government commissioned Professor Barry McGaw, the Director of the Australian Council for Educational Research, to undertake an extensive public review of the Higher School Certificate. His report, Shaping Their Future, confirmed major concerns with the current Higher School Certificate:

- an inconsistent, at times ad hoc, approach to curriculum development, which produced an excessively differentiated range of courses within subjects beyond the capacity of many schools to offer and which, by lowering expectations, may be against students’ best interests;
- a significant decline in the number of students studying courses at an advanced level;
- an assessment and reporting methodology that allots marks based on the rank order of students rather than the standards they have achieved; and
- university entrance procedures that dominate the Higher School Certificate, and too often encourage students to select courses on the basis of beliefs about maximising their chances of university entrance rather than on their educational needs, interests and capacities.

The Government accepts the validity of these criticisms. The policy directions in this paper set out solutions to them, while retaining what is positive in the current Higher School Certificate.

THE GOVERNMENT’S REFORMS

Improving curriculum standards

To solve the problem of an excessive number of courses within some subjects, and to preserve and strengthen the intellectual rigour of the Higher School Certificate, the Government will establish strict new guidelines for new and existing subjects. This will streamline the curriculum, removing some existing subjects and courses.

(This is explained in full on pages 7 - 8.)

Arresting the decline in advanced study

The Government will take steps to reverse the significant decline in the number of students studying courses at an advanced level.

Each subject will be reported on a single scale, to remove the present disincentive for students to study more demanding courses within subjects. Capable students will be rewarded for advanced study.

(This is explained in full on pages 10 - 11.)
The Government endorses in principle the development of a 2 unit structure for courses in the Higher School Certificate to broaden opportunities for students to study at more demanding levels, including advanced and standard level courses. This is aimed at increasing the amount of study time in existing advanced courses from 1 unit to 2 units. It will also help overcome difficulties experienced in many schools forced to offer advanced courses outside the normal timetable.

Before proceeding with this new curriculum structure, the Government will conduct a detailed investigation of its implications for raising standards, for flexibility of student choice, equity of participation and subject availability, and delivery within schools’ timetables and resources.

(This is explained in full on pages 11 - 12.)

**Strengthening English**

In view of the urgent need for a new English curriculum, the Government authorises the development of a new structure for English, including:

- a 2 Unit Advanced course and a 2 Unit Standard course with overlapping content;
- a new 2 Unit Literature course, set at a demanding level, to enable students for the first time to undertake 4 units of English in the Higher School Certificate;
- a new 2 Unit English as a Second Language course, with strict entry criteria, for students recently arrived in Australia; and
- a new course in Fundamentals of English available only in Year 11, for those students who require additional help with literacy.

(This is explained in full on pages 12 - 13.)

**More flexible study requirements**

To provide students with the opportunity to increase their depth of study and allow schools greater flexibility to offer advanced options, new study criteria for the Higher School Certificate will require students to undertake at least 12 units of study in the Preliminary Year (Year 11), reducing to at least 10 units in the Higher School Certificate Year (Year 12). English will be the only compulsory subject.

(This is explained in full on pages 18 - 19.)

**Enhancing the quality of vocational studies**

Vocational studies in the Higher School Certificate have not been sufficiently rigorous to earn industry and university respect, and have not always led to clear pathways to further training or employment. The Government will provide vocational courses that meet the standards expected of all Higher School Certificate courses and which lead to industry-recognised vocational qualifications. This should also enable recognition of more vocational courses for university entrance.

(This is explained in full on pages 15 - 17 and pages 27 - 28.)
Setting explicit standards

Central to the Government’s concerns over the present Higher School Certificate is a marking and reporting system that is now out of step with community perceptions of the meaning of marks and in which no information is provided on the performance standards achieved by students.

The Government will introduce explicit standards against which student achievement will be measured which will:

- derive standards from existing examinations and reflect syllabus content, thus enabling clear reporting of what students know, understand, and can do;
- no longer report student achievement according to pre-determined distributions of marks;
- give students and teachers a clearer understanding of what is expected of them; and
- enable schools to track how their students’ performance changes from year to year.

(This is explained in full on pages 22 - 25.)

Reforming tertiary entrance

The Tertiary Entrance Rank has become a surrogate performance index for Higher School Certificate achievement. Thirteen years of schooling is reduced to a single number. Individual subject achievement is played down. It does not mean the same thing from year to year and is a poor measure of school performance.

The Tertiary Entrance Rank will be abolished. Students who apply for university entrance will receive their Universities Admission Index number direct from university authorities. This will remain confidential to students and the university authorities to which they apply. Higher School Certificate results will be released separately and prior to the release of Universities Admission Index information to students. University selection will not be allowed to capture the Higher School Certificate at the expense of its proper focus on teaching and learning.

(This is explained in full on pages 28 - 29.)

Reviving the School Certificate

With the current School Certificate Reference Tests being conducted in the middle of each year, many schools experience a wind-down in the Year 10 effort for the second half of the year. This can mean some students are not adequately prepared in the foundations for the more demanding expectations of Year 11 and 12, and of employment and further training if they leave school before Year 12. Moreover, students’ grades are not directly based on their individual performance in Year 10 Reference Tests.

External examinations in foundation areas – English literacy; Mathematics; Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics; and Science and Technology – will be conducted in November each year. Students will receive their own results in December. This will effectively add six months to the school calendar. Year 10 will be restored as a significant and important stage of schooling.

(This is explained in full on pages 31 - 33.)
Principles for reform of the Higher School Certificate

The Government’s Review of the Higher School Certificate has been founded on its commitment to two overriding, and related, principles: high educational standards and equity.

**STANDARDS**

The Charter for the Review made it clear that the Government wanted the community to have confidence in the standards and rigour of the New South Wales Higher School Certificate.

The reforms outlined in this White Paper are designed to strengthen the Higher School Certificate curriculum, to raise students’ and teachers’ expectations, and to encourage a greater range of students to undertake more demanding levels of study.

Students, parents, potential employers and further education and training providers are entitled to clear reporting on the standards of learning achieved. Students should understand the standards expected of them when they finish their Higher School Certificate studies. Teachers should know explicitly what is expected of their students. Schools and school systems should be able to track how their students perform from year to year. The Government and the community should know whether standards are improving over time.

This focus on rigorous and explicit standards should be the foundation for improved teaching and learning in the Higher School Certificate.

**EQUITY**

The Government’s review of the Higher School Certificate has been firmly grounded in a commitment to educational equity.

The Government recognises that equity becomes a hollow concept unless it is linked to high standards. Equity demands higher expectations of all students, especially those who benefit least from the present system.

Equity is not achieved by watering down the curriculum to meet the needs of students who are perceived to be of lower ability. The curriculum for the Higher School Certificate must be able to cater for the interests and abilities of the full range of students, without compromising standards or lowering expectations.

The Government cannot ordain higher expectations. It can, however, establish a climate conducive to raised expectations, and which does not reinforce social divisions.

The proper concern of the Higher School Certificate is with attaining curriculum outcomes of the highest standards for all students. The Higher School Certificate should not fundamentally be about assessing, and potentially exaggerating, differences between young people for use in a competition for social and economic rewards. The current system, which measures students’ performances in the Higher School Certificate against each other rather than against clear standards, disguises the real achievements of students.
The Higher School Certificate of itself cannot guarantee equity. The Government’s reforms embody real options for achievement. These will complement the Government’s *Charter for Equity in Education and Training* and the consequent strategic plans of agencies within the education and training portfolio. These strategies will be designed to move away from a system that permits students’ social and economic background, and their geographical location, to determine the quality of their educational experience.

**CONCERN FOR STUDENTS**

The Government recognises that students undertaking a Higher School Certificate program of study are subject to a range of pressures and personal stress. Much of this can be constructive and can contribute considerably to the sense of achievement students experience on successful completion of their program of study. Many students will inevitably find themselves under a degree of pressure. Students will cope with this in a variety of ways.

But there are other more negative pressures on students. These often arise from uncertainty about what is expected of students, the amount of study required for the Higher School Certificate, and a sense of unfairness in the current system. Under the Government’s reforms, the degree of unjustifiable uncertainty associated with Year 11 and 12 curriculum, assessment and reporting will be reduced.
Purpose of the Higher School Certificate

The issue of the diverse, sometimes competing, purposes ascribed to Years 11-12 education was consistently and vigorously raised in submissions to the Review and related consultations. The Government recognises the multiple roles assigned to the Higher School Certificate, and is conscious of the differing educational needs of young adults emerging from school.

The Higher School Certificate is more than an examination. The New South Wales Higher School Certificate is a nationally and internationally recognised program of study by which the achievements of students are measured and reported through both school-based assessments and formal external examinations. The Higher School Certificate is currently offered in government and nongovernment schools, through distance education, through TAFE New South Wales, and can be undertaken by students studying at home and privately. The Internet and other technologies bring new possibilities for the future.

Everyone is entitled to high quality education and training that provides recognised credentials and clear pathways to employment and lifelong learning. The Government recognises that the senior years of school must cater for all students who participate.

To cater for the needs of students with intellectual disabilities in the senior years of schooling, the Government will extend its existing special curriculum and reporting arrangements that were established for the School Certificate. These will ensure that the learning achievements of all students who choose to remain in school are acknowledged.

The Government accepts the following statement of purpose to guide the future development of the Higher School Certificate.

### PURPOSE OF THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

The purpose of the Higher School Certificate program of study is to:

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<td></td>
<td>provide a curriculum structure which encourages students to complete secondary education;</td>
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<td>foster the intellectual, social and moral development of students, in particular developing their</td>
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<td>- knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes in the fields of study they choose,</td>
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<td>- capacity to manage their own learning,</td>
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<td>- desire to continue learning in formal or informal settings after school,</td>
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<td>- capacity to work together with others,</td>
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<td>- respect for the cultural diversity of Australian society;</td>
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<td>provide a flexible structure within which students can prepare for</td>
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<td>- further education and training,</td>
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<td>- employment,</td>
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<td>- full and active participation as citizens;</td>
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<td>provide formal assessment and certification of students’ achievements;</td>
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<td>provide a context within which schools also have the opportunity to foster students’ physical and spiritual development.</td>
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Curriculum

Central to the quality of education is the quality of the curriculum. The Government’s reforms ensure the Higher School Certificate curriculum is rigorous, externally assessed, and relevant to the broad range of needs, interests and capacities of students in Years 11 and 12.

In any consideration of the rigour, breadth and coherence of a school curriculum, there are some fundamental questions: what is made available to students; what is demanded of students; what choices students are able to exercise; and the principles of quality and equity that ought to underpin the construction and delivery of the curriculum. These questions provided a focus for the Review in relation to the content and standards of curriculum for the Higher School Certificate.

RAISING CURRICULUM STANDARDS

The Government’s purpose is to ensure that the Higher School Certificate curriculum is of the highest standard, with rigour and subject integrity underpinned by explicit criteria. It endorses the development of a clearer and more coherent curriculum structure. The approach outlined in this White Paper involves a measured and considered reshaping of the current structure.

This White Paper builds on the reforms proposed by the panel, chaired by Professor Eltis, which in 1995 undertook the Government’s review of primary and secondary curriculum outcomes. The Eltis Review recommended that syllabuses should clearly define the content (knowledge, skills and understanding) that students are expected to learn in each subject.

Government policy is that the curriculum for each subject should be of the highest quality and developed within a context of research, expert advice, and best national and international practice. The community expects no less.

The Government endorses the need for explicit criteria that ensure the integrity and standard of subjects offered in the Higher School Certificate. The Government has built on the criteria proposed by Professor McGaw. These criteria, listed below, are central to the Government’s plans for the Higher School Certificate. They establish clear guidelines for a systematic investigation of the range and rigour of existing courses, and any proposed new courses, for the Higher School Certificate.

Taken together, these criteria will provide a Higher School Certificate that is equitable and of the highest standards.
For any new courses developed or endorsed by the Board of Studies, there must be satisfactory evidence of the need for the course and an assurance of its quality, through:

- a detailed explanation of the nature of the subject content (knowledge, skills and understanding);
- a clear rationale and statement of purpose for the course;
- a review of national and international research and practice;
- the learning outcomes students are expected to achieve;
- evidence that the learning outcomes for students are set at an appropriate standard;
- prior knowledge assumed in students enrolling in the course, and the manner in which that prior knowledge will be built upon;
- an identification of the subsequent uses students might make of the learning from the course;
- internal and external assessment procedures to be used;
- the relationship of the course to existing courses with which it might appear to overlap;
- evidence of potential demand for the course;
- an analysis of the likely impact on school timetables;
- evidence about the availability of appropriate numbers of suitably qualified teachers; and
- evidence that the course can be taught and examined within the resources usually available to schools.

Each new Higher School Certificate course proposed by the Board of Studies must have a clear statement of how it meets these criteria.

These criteria will also be applied to all existing courses, placing on notice for removal or re-organisation all courses that fail to satisfy the criteria.

The Review process identified concerns about the extent to which these criteria would be met by existing curriculum in a number of areas. Many submissions raised these concerns in relation to General Studies, Applied Studies and Life Management Studies.

The current level of participation in General Studies arises largely from its use as a way in which students can complete a one unit course to meet the current requirement of at least 11 units for the Higher School Certificate. It also enables many students specialising in Mathematics and Science to meet the requirement of at least one unit from the ‘humanities/social sciences/creative arts’ key learning areas.

Professor McGaw noted that many submissions to the Review were critical of the lack of rigour in General Studies and that it was not taken seriously by many students. He also showed that there is substantial overlap between General Studies and at least seven other subjects.

Professor McGaw also reported a significant degree of overlap between Applied Studies and other subjects, particularly in Mathematics and Science. For those students not attempting a course in Mathematics and
Science, enrolling in Applied Studies is seen as a less demanding way of satisfying the requirement for at least one unit in the ‘mathematics/science/technologies’ key learning areas.

For these reasons, Professor McGaw recommended the deletion of General Studies and Applied Studies from the Higher School Certificate curriculum as Board-developed courses.

Similar concerns were raised in the Review about Life Management Studies. On balance, however, Professor McGaw found that this subject area had potential value under the proposed new curriculum criteria and structure. He recommended that Life Management Studies be retained as a Board-developed course, but that it be revised to upgrade it and to remove overlap with both junior secondary school courses and other Higher School Certificate subjects.

The Government supports these recommendations.

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**CURRICULUM CHANGES**

The Government accepts Professor McGaw’s advice to make the following changes to the curriculum for the Higher School Certificate:

- delete General Studies;
- delete Applied Studies; and
- evaluate and revise Life Management Studies against the criteria for the introduction of new courses.

In the context of the decision to delete General Studies and Applied Studies from the Higher School Certificate curriculum, the Government will investigate the feasibility of introducing a small number of new 2 Unit subjects, available in Year 12 only, conditional upon these new courses meeting the requirements for the introduction of new subjects and courses as outlined previously. These courses would provide an option for students wishing to change their pattern of study for the Higher School Certificate year and in some cases would encourage breadth of study.

Professor McGaw also recommended that Distinction courses, currently undertaken by a small number of students in the specialist areas of Comparative Literature, Cosmology and Philosophy, be deleted from the Higher School Certificate curriculum. He proposed instead that able students be given access to a greater range of university undergraduate courses, such as those currently offered at the University of Western Sydney and Charles Sturt University. This would give students the opportunity to obtain direct credit at university level.

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**DISTINCTION COURSES**

The Government accepts Professor McGaw’s advice to delete Distinction courses from the curriculum and instead to support more able students to enrol in university undergraduate studies while still at school.

The Government will initiate joint discussions involving the Board of Studies, school education authorities and universities to negotiate curriculum, delivery, and credit transfer arrangements. As an interim measure, however, the Government will maintain Distinction courses until the proposed new arrangements with universities are established.
THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Key Learning Areas

In 1990 the Education Reform Act established new curriculum arrangements requiring subjects to be grouped within broad learning areas. Six Key Learning Areas were mandated in Years K-6, with eight established for Years 7-12.

Submissions to the Review indicated that the Key Learning Area arrangements are of doubtful benefit when applied to the senior years of schooling. There have been particular problems in those areas defined by somewhat arbitrary clusters of previously discrete subjects. Disputes have arisen as to who should be teaching what content to whom within these areas. The traditional territorial boundaries between subjects brought together artificially have often constrained attempts to deliver a coherent curriculum. The existence of Key Learning Areas may have also created pressures for the expansion of the curriculum.

For these reasons, Professor McGaw advised that the use of the Key Learning Area structure in the Higher School Certificate be abandoned. The Government accepts this advice.

KEY LEARNING AREAS

The use of the Key Learning Area structure in the Higher School Certificate will be abandoned.

The structure of subjects and courses in the Higher School Certificate

Professor McGaw’s review of the Higher School Certificate revealed a number of concerns with the current curriculum structure. Significant problems are caused by the excessively differentiated array of Board-developed courses within some subjects. This results in a lowering of student expectations. There is evidence that too many capable students are studying less demanding courses. For example, between 1991 and 1996 the candidature in the two most demanding English courses declined by nearly 50 percent, and for the two most demanding Mathematics courses by over 30 percent. Similar downward trends have been recorded in recent years for the candidature of other 3 Unit subjects, such as Modern and Ancient History, Geography and Economics. Overall, there has been a decline since 1991 of some 35 percent in the number of students undertaking at least one 3 Unit or 4 Unit course (while total candidature of the two years is similar).

Moreover, Professor McGaw found that expectations, not only prior performance, determine whether the more demanding options are taken up. Capable students in the School Certificate from South West Sydney, for example, have been significantly less likely to undertake the more demanding English courses than those from Northern Sydney.

Excessive differentiation has also led to doubts about the quality of courses at the lower end of a series of courses within a subject. The curriculum demands made on students in the lower courses often fail to challenge those students to reach their potential.

To answer these concerns, Professor McGaw recommended a curriculum structure based on 2 Unit courses for Higher School Certificate subjects. Where justified in a particular subject, two courses – a 2 Unit standard and a 2 Unit advanced course, with overlapping content and assessment – could be provided to cater for a range of student abilities. Professor McGaw noted that in most subjects this overlap would be about
one-third of the curriculum content. This would enable the higher-level course to cover more advanced material, while the standard course would consolidate material on which the overlapping part would build.

The advanced and standard courses within a subject would be reported against a single performance scale for the subject. The single performance scale will be structured in such a way that successful students of the advanced course will be more likely to score the highest marks than students attempting the standard course. This will provide an incentive for capable students to undertake advanced studies.

The Government’s primary purpose in revising the curriculum framework is to raise expectations by maximising the opportunity for students to study, and succeed in, more demanding courses. Rigour, subject integrity, relevance, and equity will be assured by application of the criteria for Higher School Certificate curriculum as outlined on page 8.

Students who undertake advanced studies will have their achievements recognised and rewarded. This will be achieved through the use of a single scale for assessing and reporting students’ achievement across courses within a subject. Students’ marks in different courses within the same subject will now be directly comparable, providing students doing the more demanding course with greater opportunities to receive higher marks.

**COURSES IN THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE: ADOPTION OF A SINGLE PERFORMANCE SCALE**

Where there are standard and advanced courses within a subject, a component of the curriculum will be common so that students’ achievements can be assessed and reported on a single scale of marks.

The course structures must also address the issues of low student expectations, the proliferation of courses, and the declining numbers of students taking up advanced level courses, as raised by Professor McGaw in his review, by:
- raising curriculum standards;
- allowing for greater depth of study in subjects where this is warranted;
- providing more students with the opportunity of attempting higher levels of study; and
- raising teacher and student expectations about student achievement.

The Government has already conducted a pilot trial of the 2 Unit curriculum model in a small number of government and nongovernment schools. That trial considered the implications of the model for timetabling, resources and subject choice. It provided encouraging evidence of the potential of the model, taking into account options for patterns of study over both Year 11 and Year 12. The trial suggested that offering both advanced and standard courses is feasible in schools of a variety of sizes. It also indicated that students are more likely to choose more demanding courses than under present arrangements. In most of the schools in the trial, the model had little effect on breadth of study, but indicated a significant increase in depth of study.

The Government endorses in principle a 2 Unit curriculum structure for Board-developed courses, but recognises that, in some areas of the curriculum, further investigation needs to be undertaken. It will do this by fully investigating curriculum models consistent with that proposed by Professor McGaw, including the provision of advanced and standard courses within subjects where justified. The investigation of the curriculum model will extend the findings of the pilot trial noted above.

This investigation will be completed by the end of 1997, to enable the Government to make final decisions in early 1998 on the curriculum model to be used.
**PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING THE CURRICULUM**

Consistent with its commitment to a Higher School Certificate curriculum of the highest standard, the Government supports the development of a simpler and more coherent curriculum structure.

It will investigate the proposed 2 Unit model and, where justified, will introduce advanced and standard courses within subjects.

The investigation will be in the context of the Government’s determination to assess and report the standards of students’ achievements in each subject on a single scale. It will be designed to determine the best structure for each subject to:

- allow for greater depth of study;
- maximise participation in advanced level courses, and reverse the decline in advanced studies in recent years; and
- raise student and teacher expectations about student achievement.

The investigation will take special account of perceived difficulties in:

- flexibility for student choices;
- flexibility of delivery;
- equity principles and objectives;
- enhancement of standards; and
- resources and timetabling – taking into account the requirement for students to study a minimum of 10 units in the Higher School Certificate year.

The investigation will examine the existing 3 Unit subject content to ensure that what is necessary and valuable in these courses is retained. It will also extend the modelling of the curriculum structure in a more extensive range of schools, to guide these judgments.

The outcome of this investigation will be reported to the Minister at the end of 1997.

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**English**

The Government recognises the urgent need to redevelop the Higher School Certificate English curriculum.

The experience with English in the Higher School Certificate over recent years has been one of dramatic decline in enrolments in 3 Unit and 2 Unit Related courses. This is the archetypal example of differentiated courses within a subject without a common reporting scale, leading to a lowering of expectations and outcomes of students. Attempts to remedy this problem have been piecemeal and ineffective. There is now an urgent need to proceed with a structure for English – the only compulsory subject – which avoids the pitfalls identified by the Review. Preliminary modelling of the new structure for the subject of English indicates a significant increase in students’ stated intentions to study more advanced English courses.

The Government will ask the Board of Studies to commence work on the development of new courses, as outlined below.

The Board of Studies will draw on the outcomes of its recent developmental work for the Stage 6 (Years 11 and 12) English syllabus to develop standard and advanced courses in English. These 2 Unit courses will have overlapping content and will be marked on a single scale, as described above.
The study of literature will be a component of both the standard and advanced English courses. This will allow for an increased emphasis on literature within the Higher School Certificate. A new 2 Unit Literature course will also be established to provide the opportunity for some students to focus more intensively on literature in English. The Government will require the new Literature course to be taken in conjunction with another 2 Unit English course. The study of the Literature course alone will not meet the mandatory requirement that English be included within the Higher School Certificate program for all students. While the Literature course will be set at a demanding standard, students will have the option of studying it in conjunction with either the standard or the advanced course in English.

For the first time in the history of the Higher School Certificate, these arrangements will allow students to study four units of English.

The Government recognises the need to support students with a history of low achievement in English to meet the requirements for the Higher School Certificate in English, not only because it is the sole compulsory subject, but because literacy in English underpins success for students across the curriculum. The Government’s strategy is based on a desire to raise the achievement level of students to Higher School Certificate standard rather than to lower the standard that the Higher School Certificate should demand of them. Accordingly, the Government will authorise the development of further strategies for students of low achievement in English, including a Fundamentals of English course in Year 11, to be studied in addition to and complementary with the Year 11 English course. This Board-developed course will enable students to spend more time on, and receive more intensive tuition in, the Preliminary course (Year 11) in English. It will equip them to participate in more satisfying learning and to achieve more successful outcomes across all subject areas in both Years 11 and 12.

The Government will establish a 2 Unit English as a Second Language course, as recommended by Professor McGaw. The Government wants to ensure that students who genuinely need English as a Second Language assistance can receive it.

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**ENGLISH**

The Government will authorise the development of the following structure for English:

- two differentiated courses for the Higher School Certificate, with some common curriculum content and reporting on a single scale – 2 Unit Standard English and 2 Unit Advanced English;
- a new 2 Unit Literature course for the Higher School Certificate, set at a demanding level, providing students for the first time with the opportunity to study four units of English;
- a new 2 Unit Fundamentals of English course available only in the Preliminary Year (Year 11) to assist students needing additional support to reach the level of literacy in English required for the Higher School Certificate Year; and
- a new 2 Unit English as a Second Language course, available in both Year 11 and Year 12. It will have strict eligibility requirements. If undertaken in Year 12, it would meet Higher School Certificate requirements for the study of English.
Science
The Government has determined the following arrangements for Science.

**SCIENCE**
The Government endorses Professor McGaw’s recommendations to retain 2 Unit science courses in Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Geology; 2 Unit General Science will be available for students not studying other science courses.

Further consideration will be given to the structure of General Science, including whether advanced and standard courses in General Science are warranted.

Languages
Prior to release of Professor McGaw’s report, the Government initiated a Review of Languages Policy in New South Wales. A report is due to be presented to the Minister later this year. The Government will require that the Review of Languages Policy examine Professor McGaw’s recommendations for restructuring the provision of languages in Years 11 and 12 and incorporate advice on these recommendations within its report to the Minister.

Subsequently, the Government will investigate the feasibility of the 2 Unit structure as it applies to languages, consistent with the guidelines above, and in the context of the outcomes of the Review of Languages Policy.

Other subjects
The curriculum structure for other subjects will be considered in the context of the investigation of curriculum structure outlined above. The option of studying four units of Mathematics will continue to be available.

Content-endorsed and school-designed courses
In the past, school-designed courses have provided the flexibility for schools to address the particular needs, interests and capacities of their students. As these courses have developed currency in a number of schools, the Board of Studies has taken responsibility for enhancing their consistency and standard by accrediting them as content-endorsed courses.

The Government accepts Professor McGaw’s advice to maintain these arrangements, recognising the need for the Board of Studies to continue to ensure their standard and status by adopting appropriate criteria for their endorsement.

The Government will request the Board of Studies to evaluate its current criteria for the endorsement of school-designed and content-endorsed courses, taking guidance from the criteria for the introduction of new Board-developed subjects and courses noted earlier.
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

The Government strongly supports high quality, industry recognised, vocational education and training in the Higher School Certificate.

Responses to the Review of the Higher School Certificate expressed overwhelming support for extending and strengthening vocational studies through the Higher School Certificate.

Vocational education and training programs within the Higher School Certificate have been developed through TAFE, schools, and industry programs. While there has been value in this curriculum diversity, there is now a need to re-assess these programs, assure their coherence and relevance, and extend recognition by employers, the vocational training sector, and universities.

While vocational education and training programs contribute to the comprehensive Higher School Certificate program, they are also part of the broad range of vocational education and training programs available more generally outside of schools.

The future development of vocational education in the Higher School Certificate should be consistent with the Government's commitments to standards and subject integrity. It should also be coherent with the policies, standards, delivery and assessment framework of the vocational education and training sector more generally, and of the needs of industry.

The Government is committed to achieving these goals within a coherent, integrated pattern of senior studies that does not drive students, explicitly or implicitly, into pre-determined post-school pathways.

Principles for vocational education in schools

The principles for the development of vocational education and training programs within the Higher School Certificate reforms recommended by Professor McGaw address the priorities and policies of both the school and vocational education and training sectors.

The Government accepts this advice, which has been strongly supported by schools, teachers, industry and the community.

Implementation arrangements, however, will need to consider requirements for structured work placements. While structured workplace learning is a highly desirable principle, each industry body would have to determine the amount of work placement relevant to, and available in, the industry. The work placement would need to be consistent with principles of quality training and be suitable to the level of the qualification. The potential for students to combine Higher School Certificate study with apprenticeships and traineeships will also need to be considered carefully, taking into account the possible impact of extended work placement on other Higher School Certificate study requirements.
PRINCIPLES FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

To guide the development of vocational education and training within the Higher School Certificate, the Government affirms that vocational education and training courses should:

- be potentially appropriate for all students in the Higher School Certificate and should be accessible to all, including those who move from secondary to higher education;
- be offered in sufficient variety to satisfy different student needs;
- contribute to the broad education of students;
- be recognised by both secondary and vocational education accreditation authorities;
- be offered in response to demand established from industry needs, using the State Training Profile;
- offer training relevant to the industries in the State Training Profile rather than merely to narrowly focused occupations or the specific needs of single enterprises;
- result, on successful completion, in the award of a vocational qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework or in clearly established credit towards such a qualification;
- have clear links to post-school destinations, particularly further vocational education and training and employment;
- be developed in collaboration between the secondary education and vocational education and training sectors and industry; and
- have a component of structured workplace training to allow for competencies to be developed and assessed in the workplace to the extent deemed appropriate by, and available in, industry.

Enhancing vocational education and training

The principles outlined above will ensure the integrity of vocational studies within the Higher School Certificate. They are designed to enhance the status of vocational courses and the recognition afforded them by industry, vocational education and training authorities and universities.

The Government’s objective is to support the development of vocational education and training courses in the Higher School Certificate that enable students also to receive a vocational certificate within the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Vocational courses in the Higher School Certificate will be streamlined and focused more explicitly on the provision of more coherent and comprehensive packages. The range of courses will be reduced to a consistent framework for each industry area. The area of Hospitality, for example, currently has content endorsed courses, Industry Studies strands, and Joint Secondary Schools TAFE offerings. The emphasis now will be on the development of 2 Unit courses within industry areas defined in the State Training Profile.

Consistent with this strengthening of vocational education and training, the Government will support negotiations with universities to expand the range of vocational courses that can be counted for tertiary
entrance. If this is not achieved, the Government will support universities’ reducing the number of Board-developed courses required for their selection index, so that prospective university entrants are not discouraged from undertaking vocational studies.

The Government endorses the strategies recommended by Professor McGaw, below, for reviewing the range of vocational and training programs available through the Higher School Certificate.

### STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The principles for vocational education in schools should be applied to current vocational education and training curriculum in the Higher School Certificate to:

- remove duplication in offerings in the same content area;
- bring all vocational education and training courses within a coherent curriculum framework under broad industry groupings, consistent with the State Training Profile;
- identify those components of general Higher School Certificate courses that can satisfy the requirements of vocational education and training modules and develop explicit accreditation and credit rules for these components;
- enhance the contribution of the courses to the broader education of students;
- determine which vocational education and training courses can count towards university entrance; and
- make the necessary arrangements to undertake this task collaboratively by secondary, vocational and university education authorities and industry representatives.

### Key competencies in vocational and general education curriculum

Key competencies are seen as being integral to the appplication of knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of settings. They are:

- Collecting, analysing and organising information
- Communicating ideas and information
- Planning and organising activities
- Working with others and in teams
- Using mathematical ideas and techniques
- Solving Problems
- Using Technology

The key competencies listed are not new. They are competencies that students frequently use and demonstrate in their learning. They have been accepted nationally as components of vocational education and training curriculum.

The NSW Key Competencies Pilot Project found that assisting students to develop the key competencies in the context of school curriculum can enhance teaching and learning. They are also valued in further education, training and the workplace.

Although not specified as a key competency, the pilot project also highlighted the need for cultural understanding to be incorporated into syllabuses across the curriculum.
The development of key competencies requires the integrated application of knowledge, skills and understanding. They are present, at least implicitly, in good teaching and learning practices.

The Government therefore endorses Professor McGaw’s recommendation that revised syllabus documents identify those key competencies present in the content of the syllabus and that are integral to its learning outcomes.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

The division of the Higher School Certificate program of study into Preliminary (Year 11) and Higher School Certificate (Year 12) courses was intended as a way of providing flexibility for students wishing to accelerate their studies ahead of the rest of their cohort, or for those seeking to extend their studies over a period of up to five years. Subsequently, schools were provided with the additional flexibility to commence teaching senior studies in Term 4 of Year 10.

Students studying for the Higher School Certificate are currently required to meet prescribed study requirements relating to the number of units and breadth of study. There are also regulations concerning the timing and sequencing of study in the Preliminary and Higher School Certificate courses.

Within the context of his proposal for a curriculum framework based on 2 Unit courses, Professor McGaw has recommended the compulsory study of English in the Higher School Certificate, increasing the minimum study requirements for the Preliminary and Higher School Certificate Years to 12 units, and discontinuing requirements for breadth of study.

English – the compulsory subject

The Government notes widespread support for English to be the only compulsory subject in the Higher School Certificate. The Government agrees. The primary, perhaps pre-eminent, means of acquiring and enhancing proficiency in the English language is through reading, writing, reflecting over, critically analysing, and communicating about, the wide range of literary texts, media and other forms of personal and everyday communication. Future opportunities in further education and training, employment and other aspects of economic and social life in Australia are enhanced by mastery of English.

Required units of study

The Government accepts Professor McGaw’s advice to retain the existing distinction between Preliminary and Higher School Certificate courses and the resulting assessment requirements.

The Government will vary Professor McGaw’s recommendation for 12 units of study in both the Preliminary (Year 11) and Higher School Certificate Year (Year 12). While endorsing the requirement for Preliminary (Year 11) students to undertake a minimum of 12 units, the Government will require only that Higher School Certificate students undertake at least 10 units.

The Government recognises the complexities involved in ensuring that the curriculum for Years 11 and 12 balances the complementary objectives of ‘breadth of study’ and ‘depth of study’. An unduly narrow curriculum can limit students’ intellectual, social and cultural development as well as constrain their possibilities as far as education, training and life prospects are concerned. At the same time, a degree of specialisation involving an increased ‘depth of study’ is associated with enhanced intellectual achievement. The Government recognises the significant potential within the curriculum for students to specialise. Specialisation supports students wishing to undertake in-depth study in areas appealing to their intellectual strengths, interests and capacities. A degree of such specialisation to support learning at depth is appropriate, so long as a reasonable breadth of study can be maintained.
The Government supports a broad and balanced education providing opportunities to develop knowledge and skills across the curriculum – the arts, humanities, sciences and technologies.

Preliminary modelling of the proposed curriculum structure in schools indicates that most students will undertake a broad pattern of studies without the need for regulations to mandate particular patterns of study. The Government, however, will limit the study of science to a maximum of six units.

By insisting that in the Preliminary Year students study at least 12 units within a reformed Higher School Certificate curriculum, strengthened by the application of the criteria outlined in this White Paper, the Government is assuring adequate breadth of study for these Higher School Certificate students. By having the opportunity to take a load of 10 units in the Higher School Certificate Year, students will have the opportunity to study over a slightly narrower range of subjects. This structure will enable students to exercise more choice, enjoy greater specialisation, and engage in more in-depth study. It will help to reduce the pressure of personal stress on students, which was commented on so frequently in consultations and submissions to the Review.

The reduction to at least 10 units in the Higher School Certificate Year will also provide greater flexibility for students and teachers. These study requirements, together with the 2 Unit courses of one year’s duration (proposed earlier), will enable students to change their pattern of study, if necessary, on entering the Higher School Certificate Year. Schools will have flexibility in timetabling courses and programs.

Consistent with the goal of providing a balance between ‘breadth’ and ‘depth’ of study, the Government endorses the following requirements for the Higher School Certificate.

**STUDY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE**

To qualify for the Higher School Certificate students are required to complete at least:

- 12 units of study in their Preliminary Year;
- 10 units in their Higher School Certificate Year, of which at least:
  - 6 units must be Board-developed courses, and
  - 2 units must be a Board-developed course in English.

**COMMON STARTING DATE FOR PRELIMINARY AND HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE COURSES**

Currently, schools are able to commence Preliminary studies (Year 11) for the Higher School Certificate during Year 10. Many submissions to Professor McGaw questioned the inequitable nature of the current arrangements, seeing the early commencement of Higher School Certificate studies as a means of providing some schools and students with an advantage in the Higher School Certificate examinations that is not available to others.

The Government recognises that the Higher School Certificate is part of a continuum of learning across all years of schooling. By the end of Year 10 students should be able to demonstrate that they have achieved standards that provide a foundation for their Higher School Certificate studies. This raises important questions about the future of junior secondary curriculum and, in particular, the Year 10 School Certificate, which are considered in a later section of this paper.
The Government notes the general support of school education authorities and educational stakeholders for Preliminary studies to commence on day 1 of term 1 in Year 11 – and not before – taking into account the need for flexibility in designing programs for students accelerating their studies for the Higher School Certificate before Year 12.

**COMMENCEMENT OF THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE PROGRAM**

- Study of the Preliminary course will commence on the first day of term 1 of Year 11.
- Study of the Higher School Certificate course may commence on satisfactory completion of the Preliminary course, normally in term 4 of Year 11.
Assessment & Reporting

The Government’s decision to review the Higher School Certificate was in part a response to concerns that:

- the form of assessment had narrowed inappropriately to emphasise limited aspects of achievement;
- the reporting processes were unfair, providing insufficient recognition for those students who had successfully completed more advanced studies;
- Higher School Certificate reports had become too complex for employers, parents and the community to understand;
- the way in which marks were awarded did not accord with community views; and
- there was no way that systems could monitor their performance in raising levels of educational outcomes and achievements.

Assessment for the Higher School Certificate should be essentially concerned with making judgments about the extent to which students have achieved curriculum outcomes. Reporting on achievement needs to be clear, unambiguous, and accurate. Although these are matters of some considerable complexity, their meaning needs to be communicated effectively to the broader community.

**ASSESSMENT**

Assessment for the Higher School Certificate comprises two elements:

- external examination – designating the completion of the Higher School Certificate course of study; and
- school-based assessment – involving assessment by schools against set tasks over the period of the Higher School Certificate course.

External assessment for the Higher School Certificate has changed and expanded in form in recent years. It now includes assessment of performance, both individually and in groups. This includes practical tests, research projects, assessment against products developed over time, assessment of speaking and listening skills, as well as the use of traditional pen and paper tests.

Over the last decade or more, there have also been changes to school-based assessment practices for the Higher School Certificate in response to an increased understanding of the nature of learning outcomes within particular subjects and courses. The adoption of school-based assessment was an explicit recognition that some syllabus objectives and outcomes cannot be effectively measured through traditional forms of external examination.

Professor McGaw found substantial support for the non-traditional forms of external assessment that had been adopted in more recent times and for comprehensive forms of school-based assessment. He also observed that more recently developed subjects and courses were more likely to use strategies other than pen and paper assessment tasks.

The Review identified a number of concerns with the way in which school-based assessment had significantly narrowed its focus from its original purpose to assess a broad range of outcomes, including those unable to be measured effectively by external examinations, towards approaches that mimic the form of pen and paper external examinations.

The Government supports the need for broad-ranging assessment practices aimed at measuring outcomes from the content defined by a syllabus – knowledge, skills and understanding.

The Government endorses the strategies outlined below as a way of improving assessment practice.
ASSESSMENT FOR THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

Improved assessment strategies for Board-developed Higher School Certificate courses will be adopted so that:

- reviews of syllabuses and external assessment strategies are conducted to identify ways in which assessment strategies might be extended and to estimate costs of implementation as a basis for decision making – this will first be done as part of the evaluation of all existing courses, and then on a cyclical basis;

- clear guidelines are prepared for and distributed to schools concerning the range and balance of school-based assessments to be used, to ensure that school-based assessments focus on those syllabus objectives not adequately assessed by external examination processes and do not simply mimic the external examination;

- schools fully understand their obligations to fulfil the breadth requirements for school-based assessments:
  - attested to in a formal declaration;
  - reviewed by personnel external to the school; and

- reports to schools of the correlations between external and school-based assessment be accompanied by interpretations that make clear that maximising the correlation is not the goal of the school-based assessment.

Assessing against standards

The overwhelming message about assessment that was constantly repeated in the submissions to the Higher School Certificate Review was that it must measure (and reporting must indicate) what students ‘know, understand and can do’. Many saw merit in abandoning the current methodology, arguing that norm-referenced scaling procedures arbitrarily allocated students’ scores according to a predetermined distribution of scores.

Professor McGaw noted that Higher School Certificate syllabuses set out the outcomes students are expected to achieve and that the Higher School Certificate examinations assess the extent to which they have done so. Currently, once the examinations are marked and the school-based assessment recorded, that information is ignored and the ultimate marks awarded show only how students compare with one another – without any serious explanation of what the assessment instruments have measured or what they show about individual student achievement.

The Government has decided to adopt a standards-referenced approach to assessment and reporting. This will provide specific criteria against which to judge what students know, understand and can do – that is, the standards students have attained for their Higher School Certificate. Standards-referenced assessment and reporting also enables comparisons to be made over time in the standards achieved in the Higher School Certificate.

Although this approach is a break-through in providing real information about students’ achievements in the Higher School Certificate, it is based on similar assessment and reporting systems that have been successfully used in Australia and overseas. For example, the approach has been used in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the New South Wales Basic Skills Test and similar tests in other Australian states and territories, and the New South Wales Year 7 English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) program.
The development of standards-referenced assessment and reporting in the Higher School Certificate will build on these experiences. It will first be tested in the reporting formats for the new School Certificate, as outlined on pages 31-33 below. This will inform the way in which students’ achievements will be reported in the Higher School Certificate, and will help provide consistency in reporting between the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate.

This approach does not rely on unmoderated internal teacher-based assessment; nor does it encourage a watering down of the curriculum into vague and nebulous outcome statements. Instead, it relies on external examinations. The Government strongly believes that external examinations are necessary for the rigorous, independent and equitable evaluation of secondary school students’ performance.

Focusing on standards in curriculum, assessment and reporting enhances teaching and learning. Teachers and students will develop a shared understanding of what is to be learned and the standards expected. Being explicit about standards also provides criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the learning process and related assessment strategies.

The standards will be based on the educational outcomes expected of students as defined by the content of each Higher School Certificate syllabus. They will be objectively established by using examination ‘scripts’ (answers by students) to establish a hierarchy of task difficulty.

The Higher School Certificate will now measure not only the relative performance achieved. It will also measure the standards achieved against benchmarks of clearly defined curriculum outcomes established by performance in the external examination.

Standards-referenced assessment avoids the need to scale marks according to a predetermined distribution before they are presented on a credential. It avoids all of the perceived or real distortions of a scaling process that can demand students’ marks be set below a score, or even limit the number of students scoring high scores, regardless of their performance.

It restores the incentive to attempt more demanding courses because there will be a reward in marks for the attainment of better or more difficult performance standards.

The first task, in developing a scale of achievement in a subject, is to analyse students’ performances on individual questions in the examination. Differences in the difficulty of the questions will provide the basis for interpreting the scale from less to more difficult questions and from low to high student performance. The second task is to develop descriptors to give meaning to different levels of achievement on the scale. These descriptors, arising from the analysis of scores on individual questions, will be developed from examiners’ reports on the students’ answers and consideration of the examination and the syllabus. Applying this process to examinations from several years will enable a stable interpretation of the standards for the subject to be developed. This, in turn, will support the refinement of the syllabus outcomes.

Matching the tasks to their objectively measured degree of difficulty can establish a scale or map of achievement that grades the examination tasks or outcomes across a continuum from the easiest to the hardest. Over time, views as to what is hard or easy for students to know, understand, or do will become increasingly refined. In turn, this will better inform curriculum development.

In addition to developing descriptions of student performance derived from examination texts, work will be undertaken to complement these with descriptions derived from school assessments.
DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT STANDARDS

The Government will adopt a standards-referenced approach to assessment for the Higher School Certificate by developing achievement scales for each subject through:

- an analysis of the Higher School Certificate examination results in all courses to
  - clarify the performance scales on which student achievements and question or task difficulties can be represented within the course or, where courses are linked by a component of common assessment, across those courses within the subject,
  - develop descriptors of what the scales measure in broad bands across the range from low to high performance, and
  - identify examination questions and tasks located in the various bands to amplify the meaning of the bands;
- provision of these scales and the sample questions and tasks to schools, together with information about the distribution of student achievements on the scale, to give teachers an indication of the learning outcomes currently being achieved in each subject; and
- revision of curriculum documents to reflect the course structure to be developed and to incorporate the achievement scales.

REPORTING ACHIEVEMENT

Achievement for the Higher School Certificate in the past has been reported as a mark that compares each student’s performance only with that of other students completing that course.

This practice has denied any meaningful or valid comparison between students undertaking different courses within the same subject. In some subjects this has led to concerns that students undertaking harder courses have been penalised by the marking scale. This view is apparent in the recent debate about the inadequate benefit in scaling for the 2 Unit Related English course which has been seen as the reason for the rapid decline in the number of students attempting this more demanding course.

The Higher School Certificate Review has recommended a comprehensive package for reporting students’ achievements in the Higher School Certificate. This will see results in each course for a subject reported on a single scale.

Students’ results will be derived from the achievement scales (discussed above). These scales represent both student achievement and the difficulty of examination questions and tasks. Students undertaking standard courses will have the opportunity to perform well up the scale, but they will be less likely to do so than those successfully undertaking more advanced work. Students undertaking more demanding studies, therefore, will be rewarded for their hard work and performance. The rewards, however, will not be automatic: they will depend upon success in meeting the standards.

The methodology is similar to the present practice of statistically aligning the distribution of 2 Unit and 3 Unit courses marks on the same scale: but these new scales will have more meaning.

Professor McGaw has advanced an argument for using a scale different from that of 0-100 which is currently used, towards others such as 20-70 or 50-120. While there are some arguments in favour of
moving away from the current scale, it is clear that the community would prefer a scale that measures Higher School Certificate results over the range 0-100. The Government will retain a 0-100 scale for reporting Higher School Certificate marks, and will link these clearly to achievement bands.

The Government recognises the cogency of the Review’s proposal to report in ways that describe the knowledge, skills and understanding that students are able to demonstrate. The experience gained from analysis of several successive examinations, coupled with the judgment of the examiners, will lead to the refinement of these initial reports and the formulation of more stable scales that are able to be applied in the Higher School Certificate.

The Government will also trial this form of reporting in statewide tests for the School Certificate prior to its adoption in the Higher School Certificate.

The Government’s strategies are designed to report student achievement as fairly and as accurately as possible. How the achievements of individual students are evaluated will be determined by the purposes of that evaluation.

The report will indicate the minimum standard expected of Higher School Certificate students in that subject. This will be set at a mark of 50 on a 100 point scale.

The Board of Studies will report on students’ achievement as set out below, and as illustrated in the sample reporting portfolio in Appendix A.

**REPORTING STUDENTS’ RESULTS**

In the reporting of students’ results:

- each student will receive a comprehensive package including
  - the Higher School Certificate testamur,
  - a summary of results, and
  - a course result sheet, providing additional information for each course completed;

- the course result sheet for each subject will indicate
  - an examination mark with a numerical value in the range 0 to 100; the marks for a subject will represent a gradation of student achievement along the scales on which student achievement levels and the difficulty levels of examination questions and tasks are represented in that subject,
  - a school-based assessment (having first been statistically moderated against the external examination marks),
  - a graphical representation of where students lie on the performance scale for the subject (see example in Appendix A) showing the location of the student’s Higher School Certificate Mark (obtained from a 50:50 combination of the examination result and school-based assessment),
  - descriptors for the bands in which students’ achievement lies to provide a summary indication of what they know and are able to do in the subject, and
  - an indication of the minimum standard expected of Higher School Certificate students in the subject.
**Reporting key competencies**

The Government supports Professor McGaw’s advice that there be no central reporting of students’ performance on key competencies. Professor McGaw’s comments, along with the findings of the *New South Wales Key Competencies Pilot Project*, indicate that it is best to focus on the key competencies within the context of the curriculum and not develop a separate system-wide approach to assessing and reporting on key competency achievement.

Key competencies can provide a useful language for describing attributes that are valued by teachers, trainers, students, parents and employers. These attributes have been variously described and used in school reports, references, job advertisements and recruitment practices. Reporting that provides additional information on student achievement in these areas is broadly supported.

The Government agrees with Professor McGaw that there should be no central reporting on key competencies, but that schools should have the option of providing reports. Reporting at school level provides better opportunities for including contextually rich evidence of students’ achievements of key competencies.

The Board of Studies, Department of School Education and TAFE New South Wales will provide support to schools and colleges issuing their students with reports on achievements of those aspects of the Higher School Certificate that are consistent with the key competencies.
Selection for post-school pathways

Students completing the Higher School Certificate seek entry to a variety of post-school opportunities in employment, training and higher education. The vital significance, real and perceived, of the Higher School Certificate arises from its use in selection into these post-school pathways.

There are usually more young people seeking entry into each of these sectors than there are places available. There are concerns that pressures on students, and the community generally, to gain entry to these limited pathways have shifted the purpose of the Higher School Certificate away from providing a comprehensive education towards its significance as a selection device.

Currently, around 20% of students leave school on completion of their Higher School Certificate and enter full-time or part-time employment without engaging, in the short term, with further education and training. A further 33% go on to TAFE and other training. Some 37% proceed directly to university study. While these data reflect direct entry from school, many young people will enter and re-enter a variety of pathways throughout their lives. Nevertheless, the Higher School Certificate remains the most widely-used initial criterion for selection.

EASING THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO EMPLOYMENT

Although, generally speaking, there has been a reduction in the number of students transferring direct from school to employment, one in five young people still enter full-time or part-time employment on leaving school. Many will use their Higher School Certificate report as part of a portfolio of achievements and capacities they present to employers.

The Government recognises that the failure of current reporting arrangements to provide for comparison of results achieved on different courses within the one subject has led employers to use the Tertiary Entrance Rank inappropriately as a comparative measure.

Reporting more clearly on a single scale according to a standards-referenced framework within each subject on what students know, understand and can do should be more useful for employers. These more comprehensive and comparable reports will help employers to select future employees using criteria that more accurately relate to the purposes of their fields of employment.

Reporting by schools on key competencies will also provide information that is valued by many employers.

While these data are important, they are not the sole criteria used for employment. Employers also exercise judgment across a broader range of qualities including the student’s initiative, interest, confidence, organisational ability, leadership qualities, capacity to work with others, and qualities of personality and character. Comments on school reports and references will continue to be an important supplement to Higher School Certificate reporting and to impressions gained through interviews for employment.

TRANSFERRING FROM SCHOOL TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Access to vocational education and training is also becoming more competitive, with some courses offered by TAFE New South Wales now having higher entry requirements, because of student demand, than some university courses.

Providers of education and training usually use a broad range of criteria for selection. TAFE, as the major provider of vocational education and training in this State, has explicitly rejected the use of the Tertiary
Entrance Rank as an entry criterion, preferring to use broader subject-based data and the results of interviews in its selection processes.

In making its selections, TAFE New South Wales sets minimum entry requirements for some of its courses. To do this, TAFE must compare relative performance across courses within Higher School Certificate subjects. Currently, these judgments are made subjectively.

The Government believes that its decision to report achievement against standards and on a single subject scale for each subject will assist providers of vocational education and training to refine and justify their selection criteria to a greater extent than currently. These could be augmented, in some cases, by school reports on key competencies that articulate with vocational education and training curriculum.

**ADMISSION TO UNIVERSITY**

Undoubtedly, the issue that raised most response to the Review was that of university admission practices. The Government acknowledges that there are major public concerns about the current Tertiary Entrance Rank and its impact on the curriculum, on students, schools, employers and the community more generally. The Government is also concerned at the excessive, and often uninformed, public concentration on the Tertiary Entrance Rank and its inappropriate use in ‘benchmarking’ the performance of schools.

The Government’s position, like that of many universities themselves, is that the Tertiary Entrance Rank is a less than perfect indicator of a student’s potential to undertake university studies. In addition, current practice does not fully acknowledge the effect of measurement error in the calculation of the Tertiary Entrance Rank when discriminating between students. General acknowledgment of these truths, together with more transparent processes for calculating indexes, would benefit the community and its understanding of university selection and provide the basis for the development of a fairer and more justifiable system for allocating university places.

Many submissions to the Review called on the Government simply to withhold students’ results from the universities. The Government recognises that it is under no obligation to release students’ Higher School Certificate results to universities. But it concedes that the consequences of not doing so would require universities to implement their own testing regimes. As well as causing extra expense to universities, this would impact even more inappropriately on the secondary school curriculum and the Higher School Certificate, and potentially lead to less open and public selection practices.

There are clear disadvantages for students, schools and school systems from any irresponsible use made of the Tertiary Entrance Rank. The Government has a legitimate expectation that data will not be used in ways that adversely impact on the goals of school systems and the needs of students.

Professor McGaw recommended a range of measures aimed at reducing the emphasis on and influence of tertiary selection upon the Higher School Certificate.

The Government has adopted a position consistent with the Review’s recommendations. The Government will release the data to universities, but only on the condition that these are confidential to universities and to individual students. Reporting on students’ achievement in the Higher School Certificate will be separated from universities’ admission processes.

The Government is strongly of the view that the consequence of universities’ gaining access to the data entails an obligation to use the data responsibly. The Government respects the independence of the universities in New South Wales, and the State legislation under which they operate. Universities are, at the same time, part of the public framework for education and, as such, are exempt neither from public accountability nor from the responsibility to act fairly and openly.
As recommended by Professor McGaw, individual results will be treated as confidential and will not be provided to other parties, including the Board of Studies. The only exception would be for policy research agencies who can guarantee to protect the confidentiality of individual, school and system information.

The Government has commenced negotiations with universities on other issues identified in Professor McGaw’s report. Although there are differing views amongst universities on key elements of the Review’s recommendations, universities have reached in-principle agreement on their response to a number of the proposals. The Government also notes that some decisions will be dependent upon the outcomes of the investigative work to be undertaken on curriculum described earlier.

There will need to be ongoing negotiations with the universities on the implementation details for the new system. These will cover a number of areas: arrangements for providing information for the calculation of the universities’ selection index, while protecting students’ and schools’ confidentiality; establishing the number of units of study to be included in the calculation of the index, taking into account final decisions on the curriculum structure for the Higher School Certificate; and eliminating the categorisation of courses in the calculation of the index.

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### ADMISSION TO UNIVERSITY

The Government will:

- ensure that the university selection index calculated from an individual student’s results and related information are treated as confidential and not released to parties other than the Universities Admissions Centre and the universities to which the student has applied; and

- separate the processes of reporting on the Higher School Certificate from the release of university entrance information to students.

Matters on which universities have provided in principle agreement:

- changing the name of the Tertiary Entrance Rank to the Universities Admission Index;

- continuing to combine (50:50) external and statistically moderated school-based assessments as the basis of calculation of selection indices;

- extending the use of additional flexible criteria for selection purposes and making existing arrangements more transparent;

- including strengthened, high quality vocational education and training courses in the Higher School Certificate, that would enable students who study these courses to leave their options open for admission to university;

- discontinuing the use of scaled results in French and German to locate results of other Languages other than English courses;

- taking no action at this stage on the development of separate indexes based on patterns of study in the areas of mathematics-science-technology and humanities-social sciences-creative arts;

- reporting publicly on the validity of the use of Higher School Certificate results in university admission decisions; and

- providing a step by step explanation of the way in which students’ Higher School Certificate marks are scaled and calculated as a Universities Admission Index.
The Government reiterates its strong support for providing vocational education and training courses of the highest standard in the Higher School Certificate, and that students undertaking vocational studies should not be precluded from tertiary entrance. Negotiations with the universities will work through the details of the way in which strengthened vocational education and training courses will be included in the Universities Admission Index.

The Government and the universities have agreed on interim arrangements for 1997. This involves providing universities with data for all eligible students, but without identifying the names of non-applicant students or their schools. Only students who apply for university entrance will be identified to universities. Advice of university entrance offers will be mailed directly to students from the Universities Admissions Centre, but not prior to the release of Higher School Certificate reporting information.

These arrangements represent a major milestone in the history of the Higher School Certificate. They affirm the integrity of the Higher School Certificate curriculum in its own right, while acknowledging the importance of continued collaboration with the universities. They meet the criterion of openness in the way the universities will use Higher School Certificate information for their selection purposes. Most importantly, the new arrangements act in the interests of the young people whom the Higher School Certificate is intended to benefit.
The School Certificate

The Review of the Higher School Certificate noted widespread dissatisfaction with the current Year 10 School Certificate. The Government is concerned that the extension of Higher School Certificate studies into Year 10 has contributed to the devaluing of Year 10 as an essential component in the schooling of young people. The fact that the majority of students now proceed to senior secondary schooling, changes to the labour market and the extended period of high levels of youth unemployment have all contributed to the diminished status of the School Certificate as an exit credential. The belief that Year 10 students essentially mark time while waiting to commence the Higher School Certificate program, however, is not sufficient justification for bringing Higher School Certificate studies forward. It is, rather, a rationale for re-examining and strengthening what happens in Year 10.

Although schooling in Years 7-10 was not directly addressed in the terms of reference or in the Green Paper, many submissions to Professor McGaw criticised:

- the lack of preparedness of many students for Year 11 and 12;
- the apparent lack of challenge posed by Year 10 studies for more able students;
- the ‘low stakes’ nature of the external assessment where students were not accountable for their own individual results;
- perceptions that the timing of external examinations in the middle of Year 10 has lessened the significance of subsequent Year 10 studies; and
- concerns about a perceived discontinuity between junior and senior secondary school studies.

Professor McGaw recommended that the School Certificate be abolished and replaced, for students leaving school, with a statement of achievement which would include each student’s results on statewide tests in literacy and numeracy as well as school-based results in all courses completed in Year 10.

The Government will respond immediately to the concerns identified.

The School Certificate, however, will be retained and strengthened by taking steps to enhance the form, purpose and outcomes of this stage of schooling.

The Government’s intention is to return significance and purpose to Year 10 studies by providing students with a credential that is valued and reports meaningfully on their achievement. It will be awarded on the basis of external statewide tests in four curriculum-based areas, and on strengthened school assessment of subjects studied.

The Government will discontinue the use of Reference Tests and replace them with statewide curriculum-based tests in four areas: English literacy; Mathematics; Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics; and Science and Technology. The tests in each of these areas will be based on Board of Studies curriculum and will be reported against standards achieved by students. The Board will specify the scope of these tests and make this information available in early 1998.

This decision is based on the Government’s commitment to ensuring that students at all stages of schooling have strong foundations in their education.

These foundations are needed for the successful study of the range of subjects within the Higher School Certificate. They are necessary for analysing and evaluating texts; making appropriate use of technology; analysing data; evaluating arguments; appreciating art forms; and critically assessing the ideas and opinions of others. They enhance the expression of students’ own ideas and arguments, their gathering and analysis of data, the development of research skills, and their artistic creativity. These all depend on students’ having developed the knowledge, skills and understanding that will enable them to participate effectively in their Years 11 and 12 studies, and for their role in society as adults.
The new statewide tests will be administered in November each year, with students to receive their own results before the end of Term 4. Year 10 students will now maintain their studies until the end of the school year.

The Government will also allow students to re-sit these tests in Year 11, if they wish, as an opportunity to improve their results on such tests as a part of a portfolio of results that they might wish to present to an employer or training provider.

The Government’s commitment to expanding the range of subjects externally assessed in Year 10 and to enhance the study of Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics will also be met.

The English literacy and Mathematics testing will commence for Year 10 students in 1998. Trialling of tests for the other areas will also be undertaken in 1998, with a view to full implementation of the reformed School Certificate in 1999.

These changes to the School Certificate will involve a consideration of mandatory study requirements over Years 7-10. Interim advice will be given to schools to ensure that no student is adversely affected.

The Board of Studies will report on the standards achieved in statewide tests for the School Certificate in ways that are consistent with the model adopted for the Higher School Certificate. Students will continue to receive the results of their own specific performance in all subjects studied.

Students satisfying requirements for the School Certificate will receive a statement of results achieved in statewide tests and in school-based assessments. This reporting will include agreed descriptors of standards, consistent with the review of curriculum outcomes by the panel chaired by Professor Eltis. Students will also be eligible to receive an updated statement of results if they leave school prior to the Higher School Certificate examinations.

Finally, the Government will apply the criteria for evaluating Higher School Certificate subjects to the Years 7-10 curriculum. This process will look, particularly, at the questions raised in the Higher School Certificate Review about the relative difference in standard between junior and senior secondary schooling. Such a process will build on the recommendations of the Eltis Review of curriculum K-10, with the intention of strengthening Year 10 curriculum and adding cohesion to the K-12 continuum.

The Government’s policy for the School Certificate is summarised opposite.
SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

The Government acknowledges the multiple purposes of a credential marking the end of junior secondary schooling. The Government will:

- strengthen the School Certificate so that it has meaning and significance for students, parents and the community;
- discontinue the use of Reference Tests and replace them with statewide tests in four areas: English literacy; Mathematics; Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics; and Science and Technology. Results in these tests will be reported against the standards achieved by students;
- administer the tests in November with students to receive their own scores before the end of Term 4. The mandatory testing of English literacy and Mathematics will commence for Year 10 students in 1998; trial tests in a sample of schools for Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics; and Science and Technology will be undertaken in 1998 with statewide testing to occur in 1999;
- continue to include school-based assessment of the standard of students’ achievement in subjects studied;
- strengthen the Years 7-10 curriculum by evaluating courses in terms of the relevant criteria for introducing new subjects and courses into the Higher School Certificate; and
- provide students who leave school at any time prior to the Higher School Certificate with a School Academic Record. Results in subjects will be reported according to agreed standards framework descriptors consistent with the Eltis recommendations.
Implementing the Changes

The Government recognises the deeply held concerns in the community that the present arrangements for the Higher School Certificate do not cater adequately or fairly for the majority of students. At the same time, the Government will not rush the changes to the Higher School Certificate. Its implementation strategies are deliberate and achievable.

In responding to Professor McGaw’s recommendations, the Government was mindful of:

- the impact of change on students already engaged in senior study or in the years leading to senior study;
- the effects on teachers and the organisation of schools; and
- the need to develop and refine some proposals prior to implementation, while taking advice on the directions being pursued.

The strategic directions for the reformed Higher School Certificate announced in this White Paper will be implemented in ways that meet these needs. They will also be co-ordinated across all agencies with responsibilities for the development and delivery of the Higher School Certificate.

The commitment to consultation, on which this Review was grounded, will extend to the implementation phase.

The changes arising from this Review will be put into place in a considered manner. The Government will avoid the mistakes of the past which saw too little attention given to implementation.

The first graduates of the new Higher School Certificate will begin their Preliminary (Year 11) studies in the year 2000 and sit for their examinations in the year 2001, as set out in the timeline below. The timeline reflects the strong advice of school authorities and educational groups affected by the changes. It also reflects the Government’s commitment to instituting changes that are important, have clear benefits, involve schools and education professionals in their implementation, and are supported by the community.
## IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE FOR THE NEW HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE AND THE REFORMED SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ACHIEVEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 1997</td>
<td>White Paper released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 1997</td>
<td>Commencement of curriculum investigation and evaluation of courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1997</td>
<td>Advice from the Languages Policy Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 1998</td>
<td>Interim approach to release of HSC results in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1998</td>
<td>First version (iteration) of performance scales established for all courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1998</td>
<td>Statewide School Certificate testing in English literacy and Mathematics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1999</td>
<td>Revised, quality assured syllabuses distributed:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– consistent with course structure;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– acknowledging of performance scales and associated expected learning outcomes; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– inclusive of advice on extended assessment strategies, and explicitly acknowledging relevant key competencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1999</td>
<td>Second curriculum arrangements in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1999</td>
<td>Students receive School Certificate Reports on the comprehensive range of Year 10 assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2000</td>
<td>Year 11 commences preliminary courses under new curriculum structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2001</td>
<td>Year 12 commences first HSC year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2001/ Jan 2002</td>
<td>Students receive HSC results from Board of Studies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A: Reporting Model

Students successfully completing their Higher School Certificate will receive a portfolio of results. The portfolio will contain their Higher School Certificate testamur, a Summary of Results, and a course result sheet for each course/subject completed. A working example follows.

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**HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE**

**BOARD OF STUDIES**

**NEW SOUTH WALES**

This is to certify that

This Student

who attended

The Local High School

has met the requirements for the award of a Higher School Certificate.

Dated at Sydney on 17th December, 2001
Higher School Certificate
Summary of Results

This is to certify that THIS STUDENT who attended THE LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL having completed all Board requirements has been awarded the results shown herewith:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Subject (Course)</th>
<th>Examination Mark</th>
<th>Moderated School Assessment Mark</th>
<th>HSC Mark</th>
<th>Achievement Band (0-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>English (advanced)*</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mathematics*</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modern History (advanced)*</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Industry Studies - Retail</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examination and assessment marks are on a scale of 0-100.
Achievement Bands: Band 5 represents the highest achievement level.
* More than one course in the subject: results for all courses are reported on a single subject scale.

ELIGIBLE FOR THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

Dated at Sydney on 17th December, 2001

Issued by the Board of Studies without alteration or erasure.
Course Report

Examination mark.

Moderated school assessment.

Mark range 0-100.

HSC Mark
a 50:50 combination of the examination result and school based assessment.

Distribution of student achievements on the scale.

Minimum standard expected.

Descriptors in broad bands providing a summary of what students know and are able to do.

These descriptors will be developed from an analysis of performance on individual examination questions.

They will also refer to the school-based assessment.

Appendix A: Reporting Model
Each student will receive a portfolio containing the HSC testamur; the cumulative Summary of Results; and individual subject reports, detailing examination and assessment performances including a description of the student’s examination and school-based assessment achievements.

If applicable, certificates for dual accredited vocational education and training courses will be included.