Questions You May Ask

**Q** What’s wrong with the current Western Australian Certificate of Education? Why is it changing? What are the issues with the current WACE?

Several issues associated with the current WACE have been identified. These include:

- Stage 1 enrolments are much higher than envisaged and significant numbers of students are not undertaking courses that match their ability;
- low and declining Stage 2 enrolments have resulted in some Stage 2 examinations being unviable;
- the current three-stage design of WACE courses is incompatible with the senior secondary Australian Curriculum, which comprises Year 11 and Year 12 curriculum;
- significant concerns have been raised regarding the standards of literacy and numeracy demonstrated by students who are currently graduating with a WACE;
- some students graduating with a WACE are poorly prepared for subsequent educational pathways into university or vocational education and training.

**Q** Why is it changing?

We have listened to the feedback from teachers, principals and other stakeholders including the training sector, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chamber of Minerals and Energy. We believe that by responding to this feedback and adapting the existing WACE we will be able to address the issues that have been raised.

The WACE must demonstrate to the public and any employer that a student who has completed 13 years of school education possesses the minimum levels of literacy and numeracy to be able to enter the workforce or engage with further study or training in a knowledge-based economy.

The WACE must provide students with the opportunity to complete 13 years of education, achieving either an ATAR or a Certificate II or higher through a VET in Schools program.

The WACE must allow us to easily embed the senior secondary Australian Curriculum. The senior secondary Australian Curriculum is organised on the basis of discrete Year 11 course
content and discrete Year 12 course content and therefore we must remove the current three stages to allow for this to occur.

The WACE needs to evolve to keep pace with the needs and aspirations of students and the community. These changes build on and are informed by the experiences of the previous three years of WACE examinations and the development of the Australian Curriculum Pre-primary to Year 12.

Q The new senior secondary structure has only been in place a few years, why change so soon?

There have been many achievements from the most recent changes to the WACE including the increased number of accredited courses that schools are able to offer students and the recognition of VET in Schools as a successful and highly valued element of secondary schooling.

These reforms are necessary and are in response to data analysis of three complete cycles of examinations, requests from teachers and principals for the removal of Stage 2 examinations and the need to prepare for the introduction of the senior secondary Australian Curriculum in Western Australia.

Q What is different about the new WACE structure?

To achieve a WACE from 2016, students will need to:

- demonstrate a minimum level of literacy and numeracy based on the skills regarded as essential for individuals to meet the demands of everyday work and life in a knowledge based economy;
- achieve an ATAR\(^1\) or complete a Certificate II (or higher);
- complete two Year 11 English units and a pair of Year 12 English units;
- complete at least one pair of units from a List A (arts/languages/social sciences) course and one pair of units from a List B (mathematics/science/technology) course in Year 12;
- complete at least 20 units (or equivalents), including a minimum of 10 units at Year 12;
- achieve a minimum of 6 C grades in Year 11 units and 8 C grades in 4 pairs of Year 12 units (or equivalents).
Note 1: The achievement of an ATAR requires students to complete a minimum of four Year 12 ATAR courses.

There will be two major groups of curriculum offerings:

- **ATAR courses** – for students who are aiming to enrol in university directly from school. These courses will be examined by the Authority.

- **General courses** – for students who are aiming to enter further training or the workforce directly from school. These courses will not be examined by the Authority. This second group of curriculum offerings will have two small subsets of courses for students who cannot demonstrate minimum levels of literacy and numeracy or who may need additional modification to the curriculum to meet their special needs.

- **Students** will be able to select from both groups of courses, but students wishing to receive an ATAR will be required to enrol in a minimum of four ATAR courses in Year 12.

All 52 courses that are currently on offer will initially be available to students under the revised system. Ongoing provision of courses will be dependent ultimately on student enrolments remaining above a critical mass across the State (100 enrolments except languages).

Students enrolled in ATAR courses and their teachers will notice little or no change (other than for the senior secondary courses incorporating the Australian Curriculum) to the content and assessment structures that are currently in place. Currently, these students are typically studying WACE courses at Stage 3 in Year 12.

The content of the senior secondary Australian Curriculum will be adopted and adapted to suit Western Australian needs. Teachers will be supported with additional resources to prepare for their implementation in Year 11 in 2015 and the first examinations of the new courses in 2016.

Students enrolled in General courses will not be required to sit external examinations, but school-based assessments, including externally set tasks provided by the Authority, will be embedded in each course. Currently, these students are typically studying WACE courses at Stage 1 or Stage 2.

Students with special education needs will typically study Foundation or Preliminary courses. Currently, most of them are studying WACE courses at Preliminary or Stage 1 level. Foundation and Preliminary courses will be designed only for students who have not demonstrated the minimum achievement in the literacy and numeracy assessments.

All students will be required to demonstrate minimum literacy and numeracy standards to achieve a WACE. Demonstration will be through the completion of an online assessment. The
assessment will be mapped to the Australian Core Skills Framework. It will be possible for students to re-sit the assessment to demonstrate the minimum prescribed standard necessary to achieve the WACE.

Q **What is wrong with numeracy and literacy standards?**

Concern has been expressed by industry and State Training Providers that some students are not demonstrating sufficient literacy and numeracy skills for enrolment in some training and pre-apprenticeship courses or for the workplace. The new assessments will be aligned to a national standard that describes work-ready literacy and numeracy. The assessments will provide additional information to students, parents and teachers in relation to what literacy and numeracy skills are required to meet the demands of life and work in a knowledge-based economy.

Q **Can students change from one study pathway to another or are they ‘locked in’?**

Students can select courses from either the ATAR group or the General group, or from both. Schools will work with individual students to determine the enrolment that best meets their interests, aspirations and needs.

Q **Will comparisons between results in the General courses at different schools be fair?**

Yes. The Authority will implement a range of moderation processes that will ensure that assessment and measurement of results is fair and comparable, regardless of the school students are attending or the courses they are studying.
Q Will the change disadvantage current Year 11 and 12 students and those who have recently completed the WACE?

No. The reform to the current WACE helps to strengthen the system in preparation for the implementation of the senior secondary Australian Curriculum.

Q How will the students enrolled in the General courses be better off under the new WACE arrangements?

Their education will have greater breadth with the completion of a Certificate II and depth because most will be studying courses that are more challenging than the courses that they are currently enrolled in (typically Stage 1 for two years). There will be no external examinations but school-level testing, combined with processes managed by the Authority, will maintain the integrity and comparability of those results.

Results will be meaningful and be valued by post-school training organisations and employers.

Q Will there be any additional cost to parents?

No. The Western Australian Government has made the commitment to cover the costs of student completion of a Certificate regardless of the school at which a student is enrolled.

Q How does this fit in with the Australian Curriculum? Will it all need to change again?

This change is designed to accommodate the new senior secondary Australian Curriculum. The current three stages do not easily mesh with the Australian Curriculum model, which consists of discrete Year 11 and Year 12 course content.

The adjustments to the current WACE allow the senior secondary Australian Curriculum to be adopted and adapted to suit WA requirements.
**Q** How many students are currently enrolled in courses in each of the two groups?

Approximately 50 per cent of students are currently enrolled in courses at Stage 3. On that basis, we can assume that, once fully implemented and established, 50 per cent or more of senior secondary students will continue to be enrolled in ATAR courses. Approximately 40 per cent of students will be enrolled in General courses and approximately 10 per cent in Foundation/Preliminary courses.

**Q** What is the difference between this new system, the current WACE and the old TEE/WSA model?

This evolution of the WACE retains the benefits of increased numbers of courses that are available for students to study in years 11 and 12. It recognises that VET in schools is an extremely worthwhile and valuable pathway for students and it also recognises that, for some students, the sitting of external examinations is not appropriate given their chosen pathway to training or work. This reform of the WACE identifies that rigour and standards are important and that schools can and do create assessments that provide students and teachers with valuable feedback. The Authority will implement processes to validate school assessment and ensure that marks achieved at one school are comparable to the results achieved for the same courses at another school.

**Q** Why are there so few courses in the Foundation group?

The Foundation courses will be designed specifically for students either with special education needs or those who at some stage may have disengaged from schooling, resulting in reduced learning opportunities. These courses will provide opportunities for schools to offer teaching programs that focus on the skills essential for post-school life.

Students enrolled in Foundation English and Foundation Mathematics will be able to enrol in other courses from the General and the ATAR groups of courses.
**Q** Can a student enrolled in Foundation courses get a WACE?

Yes. All students will need to satisfy the same requirements to achieve a WACE. Any student who does not meet the requirements for a WACE will still receive a Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement which articulates what they have achieved.

**Q** What does it mean for those students who do not get a WACE?

Students who do not achieve a WACE will receive the Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement. This was previously known as the Statement of Results. These students will have the option of either continuing their study at a senior campus, enrolling in literacy and numeracy programs provided by State Training Providers or in some instances, remaining in their school for a further year of study. With successful completion, they will be able to achieve a WACE.

The Statement of Student Achievement can also be used to provide evidence to employers of a person’s suitability for a job.

**Q** How will the Authority make sure that the grades achieved by students in different schools are comparable?

All General Courses will include ‘tests’ as an assessment item. The Authority will provide externally set tasks (written) for inclusion in Year 12 school-based assessments. These will be used to assist in moderation of school grades. Processes such as consensus moderation and moderation visits will be maintained for all courses. These processes have and will continue to ensure that results are reliable and comparable.
Q  If the model of examinable and non-examinable courses didn’t work last time, why is the Authority returning to it? Why will it work this time?

We are building on the strengths of both the previous model and the current model. Many significant gains, including expanded course choice, the ability to gain credit for a semester’s work if changing courses, the use of VET in Schools as an integral element of secondary school graduation, were achieved from the introduction of the WACE. The Board of the Authority has responded to the feedback that it has received and has carefully considered how to best position students for future success either in the tertiary sector, further training or in the workplace. The Authority has been working with an advisory forum of secondary principals from across both systems and the sector to inform these reforms – these reforms are necessary and have been well considered when considering the impact of the Australian Curriculum in Western Australia.

Q  Does the Authority admit that the current WACE is not working?

The system has provided us with many strengths upon which we can build. Principals have informed us, and the data provides the evidence, that a two-tier system of examinations did not achieve what it set out to achieve. Instead, we have ended up with too many students enrolled in Stage 1 courses because they did not see the relevance of examinations to their future pathway. With the removal of stages, we expect that students who have demonstrated the literacy and numeracy standard will successfully engage with courses which are challenging and provide appropriate background for further training or work as was originally intended.
Q **How much will this reform cost?**

The Government of Western Australia will invest funds to provide students with access to Certificates in their final years of schooling. This funding will be distributed to public, Catholic and independent systems/sector. In addition, there will be an allocation of funding to the School Curriculum and Standards Authority to support strengthened moderation processes and the introduction of the senior secondary Australian Curriculum.

Q **How will teachers be consulted?**

The Board of the Authority has been working with a reference group of principals from public, Catholic and independent schools and has consulted with principal forums over the past 18 months to develop the framework for the adjustments to the WACE. Teachers will be encouraged to participate through expanded Course Advisory Committees. Teachers should be reassured that changes are essentially structural, for example, the replacement of stages with year-long courses; the introduction of literacy and numeracy assessments; the need to complete a Certificate II.

Where there is greater change expected, for example with the introduction of new Foundation English and Foundation Mathematics courses and the 14 senior secondary Australian Curriculum courses, significant consultation will occur with teachers and other stakeholders over the coming 12–18 months.

Q **How many students do you expect will not receive a WACE?**

There will always be a small proportion of students who will not meet the requirements of the WACE at the conclusion of 13 years of education. Their journey will take longer and the Authority will continue to collect data as students continue their studies beyond school. For students who do not receive a WACE, they will be able to enrol in literacy and numeracy
programs provided by State Training Providers and senior colleges and with successful completion will achieve a WACE.

If a student does not meet the requirements for the WACE they will receive a Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement.

Q How will students who have not demonstrated minimum literacy and numeracy be supported?

In terms of support for students who do not demonstrate the minimum standards of literacy and numeracy we acknowledge that:

- These students are already in schools and that resources are already being directed to supporting them;
- The Authority will develop support documentation to assist teachers to identify very specific skills and understandings that students may be struggling with and providing advice on strategies teachers may use to address these shortcomings;
- The Authority will develop new Foundation English and Foundation Mathematics courses for Year 11 and 12 students with very low literacy and numeracy skills;
- The Australian Curriculum, which is being introduced in Western Australian schools P–10, is very explicit in terms of content relating to literacy and numeracy. Literacy and Numeracy general capabilities are embedded throughout the P–10 Australian Curriculum. Western Australian teachers have until 2015 to implement phase 1 of the Australian Curriculum P–10;
- The importance of explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy skills and understandings has been well documented and secondary schools are rising to the challenge of meeting the needs of students who require additional support and interventions;
- Schools already have a clear indication through NAPLAN assessment results and their own data which students may not demonstrate minimum standards of literacy and numeracy. These new assessments will provide students, parents and teachers with additional information in relation to what literacy and numeracy skills are required to meet the demands of life and work in a knowledge-based economy.

If they do not pass the literacy and numeracy assessment by the time they exit secondary school, they can apply to the Authority to re-sit the assessment at any age.
**Questions You May Ask**

**What is the Government going to say to schools about improving standards?**

Schools are fully aware of what the community, industry and training sector expects of all students. These expectations will be made more explicit in terms of a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy. It is beholden of all schools in Western Australia to support students to demonstrate these minimum literacy and numeracy skills. This is a fair and reasonable expectation after 13 years of schooling. Schools do this work well – they always have.

Schools across our State are catering for vastly different demographics of students and therefore the challenge facing us all is to be explicit about what is most fundamental for success in life beyond schools. These reforms make clear what we expect of our students – minimum literacy and numeracy to meet the demands of everyday life and work. Schools are best placed to determine what interventions are required to support students to attain these minimum literacy and numeracy skills. Students at risk of not demonstrating these skills are identified before their final year of schooling. Student achievement data is successfully collected by all teachers and this data is used to inform teaching and learning programs. In addition to teacher collected data, NAPLAN data will also provide early warnings if interventions are required.

Teachers in partnership with parents are best placed to determine what interventions are required to assist students to be able to demonstrate a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy. Improvements in Western Australia’s NAPLAN results indicate that teachers and schools are very capable of improving standards of literacy and numeracy of our students.

**Universities have been calling for more students to get an ATAR. This would appear to cap it at about 50 per cent of students? Do universities support this model? What about the training sector?**

In 2012, approximately 55 per cent of our Year 12 cohort was enrolled in four or more courses which could earn them an ATAR. Of the students who entered university in 2011, 11,482 students entered directly from school from a total of 15,217 total admissions.

This adjustment to the WACE does not seek to cap student enrolments in ATAR courses – it seeks to provide all students with the best possible foundation upon which to build future education options.
Universities in Western Australia provide alternative means of entry. We aim to have as many students as possible enrol in university directly from school, but equally we want to see students enrolling directly into training and, of course, to see students moving between training and university and vice-versa. It is important to remind ourselves that learning is for life and that our goal must be to provide all students with the best possible foundation upon which to build a lifetime of learning.

The Vice Chancellors of all five Universities in Western Australia have been consulted regarding the proposed reforms. The training sector will be further consulted over the coming weeks.

**Q** About 40 to 50 per cent of students will require a Certificate to achieve a WACE. Has this been costed? If so, how much extra will it add to the public purse or will it be covered by the fact there will be less exams or do parents have to pay?

Parents will **NOT** be required to pay for the Certificate requirement. The reduction in costs for the delivery of Stage 2 examinations will support the implementation and delivery of literacy and numeracy assessments and increased moderation to ensure that standards of achievement in General courses is comparable across the State.

**Q** Why are we allowing optional examinations for Stage 2 courses in 2014 and 2015?

We recognise that change must be managed well and that the Authority will need 2013 and 2014 to prepare courses, sample examinations and supporting documentation and professional development for WACE 2015/16. Students and teachers have argued that the reason students are not enrolling in Stage 2 courses is because they do not want or need to sit examinations – so in order to provide students with access to content that is more challenging and to the content that will form the basis of the year 12 General Courses in 2016, we will allow examinations to be optional for Year 12 Stage 2 courses in 2014 and 2015. This is an interim measure as we develop the WACE for 2016. We also recognise that we cannot make changes for the students who are entering year 12 in 2013 as timetables and planning has been completed.

By allowing students to move into more rigorous stage 2 courses, the Authority will be able to determine enrolments patterns and the viability of courses which currently students have not engaged with in Year 12.