

Discussion Paper: Curriculum Review: Years 11-12

New South Wales. Board of Senior School Studies, 1982

Overview of the document

8 page discussion paper issued by the Board of Senior School Studies in July 1982 as part of its “total review of curriculum for Years 11 and 12”.

Keywords

Senior school curriculum; assessment and reporting; core subjects; retention; university entrance; HSC; external examinations; school assessment.

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INTRODUCTION

- States that “The Board of Senior School Studies is engaged in a total review of the curriculum for Years 11 and 12. This paper, developed by the Board for community consultation, reflects informal discussions already held with tertiary institutions, school principals and other educational agencies and groups”. (p. 1)
- Puts forward proposals for “changes in the nature and organization of the senior school curriculum and assessment and reporting procedures”. Notes that “these proposals remain deliberately general at this stage. In effect what is provided at this stage is a broad framework for change only”. (p. 1)
- Invites comments and suggests up to the end of January 1983.

BACKGROUND

- Makes the following observations regarding the background context of the paper:
 - Following the Wyndham Report in 1961, “the scope of junior secondary was extended to address the needs of all children whether directed towards academic careers or not”. (p. 1)
 - In addition to a “designated core of compulsory subjects” an increasing number of optional subjects were introduced in order to better meet the needs of a diverse student population. Since then, “junior secondary education has typically been carried out in comprehensive institutions” and the “holding power of these schools from Year 7 to Year 10 has gradually increased from 69.7% in 1967 to 84.7% in 1981”. (p. 1)
 - While these changes in junior secondary were anticipated, senior secondary was still “envisaged as essentially the domain of academically oriented students”. (p. 1)

- International changes since 1961 have seen rapid growth in the retention of students in Years 11 and 12 and in the numbers attempting the HSC.
- “In 1975 the Board introduced a new curriculum based on a unit structure with primarily 3-unit, 2-unit and 2-unit A courses. The 3-unit and 2-unit courses were designed as a suitable preparation for the study of the subject at tertiary level; whereas the 2-unit A courses were designed with a more general content not leading to further study of the subject at tertiary level”. (p. 2)
- To broaden the range of courses the Board also introduced Other Approved Studies. Notes that “hundreds” of such courses have been approved, including Accountancy, Legal Studies, Photography, Motor Maintenance, Weaving as an Art Form, Australian Government and Comparative Religions.
- Other Approved Studies may be recorded on the HSC but do not contribute to aggregate scores for matriculation and university entrance. Although Other Approved Studies courses were conceived of as being of comparable intellectual demand as Board courses, this has been difficult to sustain because they are not monitored by the Board at the school level, and also because they include more courses for “non-tertiary motivated students”. (p. 2)
- The number of Board devised subjects has also increased considerably particularly in the area of community languages. The Board has established a Languages Advisory Committee to consider “the nature and purpose of syllabuses in all language subjects”. (p. 2)
- Changes in existing syllabuses are also taking place. Significant changes have been introduced in Science (Biology, Chemistry, Geology and Physics). “To offer a broader base, each of these new science courses has a core and a set of electives. This pattern has been established as an attempt to cater for all students, both those directed at tertiary study and those without further academic aspirations.” (p. 3)
- “The demand for a broadening of senior school curriculum options both academic and non-academic is growing” (p. 3). The board has approved courses bridging both TAFE and secondary education and some schools have introduced ‘alternative’ senior courses not leading to the HSC.
- Although there has been a “temporary pause” in increasing retention, it is anticipated that the proportion staying on for Years 11 and 12 will again rise and that abilities and interests will become more diverse. “Unless unforeseen factors intervene, a retention rate of 60% to 70% by the end of the century is by no means unlikely.” (p. 3)

REPORTING OF RESULTS

- States that “Consideration of possible models for curriculum development for Years 11 and 12 increasingly indicates that the flexibility and relevance of the curriculum is greatly restricted by the current requirement that a final aggregate mark must be determined for each candidate. This requirement appears to dictate that most courses should be considered as part of the curriculum which may lead to a component of the aggregate.” (p. 3)
- Notes the problems of placing each course on a common scale for the purposes of determining aggregate marks.
- Discusses the problem the Board has faced over the last few years in determining a satisfactory scaling process as more subjects have been introduced into the curriculum. Argues that “The basic question which now must be asked is whether a scaling process across subjects is necessary.” (p. 3)

- Points out that the “prime charter” of the Board is to determine curriculum and that the development of an aggregate for the purposes of university entrance “has been an additional service for candidates proceeding to tertiary studies. It was never intended that selection procedures should exert undue demands upon the Higher School Certificate provision and procedures.” (p. 4)
- Overviews the “fundamental information” required for a candidate at the end of study, which is the subjects and courses and the level at which the candidate performed.
- Suggests that performance may be determined from an examination, a moderated school assessment or a school assessment, and that “The level of performance should be given on a universally understood scale. In whatever manner the level of the candidate’s performance is determined it should be given as a mark”. (p. 4)
- Discusses reporting options and suggests that results determined in different ways (e.g. through school assessment and examinations) should be identified and clearly stated.
- Suggests that such an arrangement would “minimise the connection between tertiary selection and the curriculum” and “avoid the difficulties which may be experienced if selection were not based on the HSC results”. (p. 5)
- Senior secondary has already changed to meet broader demands and this trend will continue. Suggests that it is now appropriate to modify courses offered and modes of assessing student performance. To do this it is proposed that:
 - “A structure be devised to cater for the needs of all candidates entering Year 11 with sufficient flexibility to accommodate a semester progression system, if required; and
 - All courses in the curriculum contribute to either –
 - a) a one year program; or
 - b) a two year program.” (p. 5)

THE MODEL

- Proposes that “The senior secondary school should offer a one year or a two year program drawn from a number of courses designed to meet the needs of the candidates entering Year 11...The two year program would lead to the award of the Higher School Certificate the results being finalised at the end of Year 12. Two year programs could be arranged on the basis of one year courses...The one year program would lead to a Year 11 certificate awarded by the Board on the recommendation of the school, on results provided by the school at the end of Year 11 for students not proceeding to Year 12 or subsequently not completing Year 12, thereby not proceeding to the Higher School Certificate.” (p. 5)
- Advises that the Year 11 and Year 12 programs would be made up of a number of courses as outlined in the following sections.

TYPE A COURSES

- Proposes that each Type A Courses would be:
 - examined by public examinations;
 - scaled so that the total subject would yield a mark range within 0-100; and
 - additionally assessed by the school and school assessments moderated by the external examinations.
- Notes that the assessment would also be presented as a mark within the range of 0-100. Advises that as the mark and assessment have different bases, they would not be combined but would be presented separately and distinctly.

TYPE B COURSES

- Notes that Type B Courses would be board devised and school assessed.
- States that “Each course/subject in this group would be assessed by the School, a moderating and reporting system being developed by the Board to enable each candidate to be awarded a mark within the range of 0-100, with a mean of about 62 and a standard deviation of about 15.” (p. 6)

TYPE C COURSES

- Advises that Type C Courses would be school devised and school assessed.
- Proposes that “Each course/subject in this group would be assessed by the School and the results given without any adjustment.” (p. 6)

UNITS OF STUDY

- Proposes that the curriculum would be based on units of study with one unit the equivalent of two hours study per week for one year and details how this would work in practice.
- Advises that under this definition, the present:
 - 1 Unit General Studies course for one year only would become 1 Unit
 - the present 2 Unit courses would become 4 Unit
 - the present 3 Unit course (except Mathematics) would become 5 Unit
 - the present 3 Unit Mathematics course would become 6 Unit
 - the present 4 Unit Mathematics course would become 7 Unit
- Notes that “The one year program leading to the award of the Year 11 Certificate would require at least 12 Units of which at least 2 Units would be English”. (p. 7)
- Notes that “The two year program of study leading to the award of the Higher School Certificate would require at least 24 Units over the two years of which at least 4 Units would be English.” (p. 7)
- Advises that the Type A courses could include the present 4, 3 and 2 Unit course and some of the more widely taken Other Approved Studies courses, such as:
 - Automotive Mechanics
 - Drama
 - Government
 - Law and Society
 - Leisure and Recreation
 - Personal Development
 - Photography
 - Television and Film
- Proposes that “The Type C courses could include those present Other Approved Studies which are generally designed to meet the specific needs of students in a particular school.” (p. 7)

PATTERNS OF STUDY

- Notes that this model would enable three basic patterns of study leading to an award:
 1. Two years of study leading to the award of the Higher School Certificate – the majority of courses would be courses taught over the two year period. (p. 7)
 2. Two years of study leading to the award of the Higher School Certificate – the majority of courses could be one year courses. (p. 8)
 3. One year of study leading to the award of the Year 11 Certificate. (p. 8)