

Pathways to Post-School Success

Review of Western Australian senior secondary pathways

Expert Panel Report: Consultation Draft
March 2024

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and respect the traditional custodians of the lands and waters on which our students live and are educated throughout Western Australia.

We acknowledge and understand that Elders, parents, families and communities are the first educators of their children and we recognise and value the cultures and strengths that Aboriginal children bring to the classroom. Aboriginal people have a long tradition of teaching and learning through sharing their connections with country, community, language, and culture, and through their oral histories, stories and lived experiences that are passed from generation to generation. We recognise and value the learning that Aboriginal children bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom.

Chair's foreword

A strong senior secondary education system is vital for students and for the Western Australian community and economy more broadly. We are grateful to the Western Australian Government and the Minister for Education for the opportunity to undertake this important review.

There is a lot to celebrate about senior secondary in Western Australia at present. The system is flexible, rigorous, and transparent in offering students options on the pathways they pursue.

We also need to acknowledge that the world around us has changed faster than our senior secondary system, and as a result, there are some students whose needs are currently not being met. Our aspiration is that all students in Western Australia have access to senior secondary pathways that are meaningful for them and set them up well for the lives they imagine. We also need to ensure that the system is sensitive to other challenges, including the need to support student wellbeing and the changing world of work.

Throughout this review, there has been real concordance of views among stakeholders about what needs to change in the current system. In particular, there is a shared commitment to deliver for more students and embrace and celebrate student diversity.

As a panel, we are proposing a suite of recommendations that will ensure senior secondary pathways are accessible and meaningful for all students. For us, the measure of success will be if these recommendations support improved outcomes for vastly different groups of students, including students aiming to enter university or the vocational education and training (VET) system, high achievers, students from regional and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, students with disability, potential early school leavers, students from different socio-economic backgrounds, and other students at risk of not making a successful transition from school to further education, training and/or work.

We would like to thank all stakeholders that have engaged with this review since it was launched in June 2023, including the more than 1,600 stakeholders who participated in the environmental scan, the 85 individuals and organisations who responded to our discussion paper, and the other stakeholders who engaged with us through targeted consultation. Your contributions provided rich evidence and examples that helped us better understand how the current system is working in Western Australia and what needs to change.

On behalf of the Expert Panel, I am pleased to share our Final Report. It is our hope that all stakeholders can work together authentically to ensure these recommendations can be realised, enabling more Western Australian students to access meaningful senior secondary pathways and achieve their envisioned futures.

Emeritus Professor Bill Loudon AM
Chair, Expert Panel

Glossary of terms and abbreviations

| Acronym/Term | Definition |
|----------------|--|
| ACACA | Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities |
| ATAR | Australian Tertiary Admission Rank |
| CALD | Culturally and linguistically diverse |
| DTWD | Department of Training and Workforce Development |
| EST | Externally set task |
| IB | International Baccalaureate |
| NAPLAN | National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy |
| NSW | New South Wales |
| OLNA | Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment |
| PPSS | Pathways to Post-School Success |
| SACE | South Australian Certificate of Education |
| SATAC | South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre |
| SCSA | School Curriculum and Standards Authority |
| Sectors | In Western Australia, the Department of Education and Catholic Education Western Australia are systems and independent schools are collectively known as a sector. However, for brevity – when we use the term education or school ‘sectors’, we are referring to the three school systems/sector. |
| SSCE | Senior Secondary Certificates of Education |
| STEM | Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics |
| System | For brevity – when we use the term ‘system’ in the context of the Western Australian education system, we are referring to the collection of institutions, policies, and practices that provide formal education to compulsory-aged students within Western Australia. |
| TISC | Tertiary Institutions Service Centre |
| VCE | Victorian Certificate of Education |
| VET | Vocational education and training |
| WA | Western Australia |
| WACE | Western Australian Certificate of Education |
| WASSA | Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement |

Executive summary

Over the past 50 years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of students completing senior secondary education. This is a welcome change – senior secondary education helps students to develop the knowledge and skills they need for their lives after school. We also know that students who finish secondary school enjoy higher wages and improved wellbeing compared to those that do not.¹

In the days of lower school completion, senior secondary education had a narrower focus on preparing students for higher education. But these days, schools must prepare students for a broader range of post-school pathways. The current system in Western Australia supports this, demonstrating flexibility, rigour, and transparency. The challenge we now have is to ensure that the education offerings and qualifications on offer are accessible and meaningful to all students.

Doing this effectively means addressing imperatives to:

- increase student retention and engagement
- support positive student wellbeing
- recognise the value of all students and their achievements
- better support students from diverse backgrounds
- respond to new opportunities in the world of work
- incorporate changing models of assessment.

We have had these imperatives in mind when developing three main areas where we propose changes.

Reframing the purposes of senior secondary education

We need to recognise that, these days, there are multiple purposes of senior secondary education. It is important to articulate these purposes to ensure they are fit-for-purpose for today's education system in Western Australia and to ensure system stakeholders understand what these purposes are. 'Reframing the purposes of senior secondary education' may seem like a lofty ambition, but it is critical to ensuring that Western Australia's education system and schools are supported to deliver a system that works for students.

To do this, we propose developing, through an inclusive process, a statement setting out the purposes of senior secondary education which is centred upon students' interests and aspirations (*Recommendations 1 and 2*). To ensure we deliver on the newly framed purposes:

- there would need to be a review of Year 11 and 12 course and program options to ensure that course objectives and design are consistent with this new statement of purposes (*Recommendation 4*)
- we propose the strengthened delivery of career education and pathway planning that starts earlier to better prepare students for life beyond school (*Recommendation 9*).

A system built from learning goals

While the senior secondary education system in Western Australia has always had a focus on learning goals, the current system of numerous course and program options has evolved over time. The proliferation of course and program types has occurred due to a desire to provide flexibility to students and to ensure they can select a pathway to suit their circumstances. However, it has led to three unintended consequences:

- Under the current system, modes of assessment – prescribed by course category – are now driving course design in some cases.

¹ Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education, <https://content.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/media/counting-the-costs-of-lost-opportunity-in-aus-education-mitchell-institute.pdf>

- There has been a notable increase in the popularity of General courses, beyond what was originally intended.
- While different course types provide students with choice of pathway, this has resulted in a system where not all course and program options are equally valued.

To address these challenges, we are proposing that Western Australia shift to an approach where:

- learning goals, rather than course category, define course design and assessment requirements (*Recommendation 11*). This includes embracing a full range of contemporary assessment techniques to ensure we are assessing capability in the most appropriate way (*Recommendation 12*)
- we remove 'shadow courses' (offerings where there is both an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) and a General version of the course) to consolidate offerings and simplify the system (*Recommendation 13*)
- we introduce greater flexibility into the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) to ensure that students have more flexibility to choose study options that suit their interests and aspirations (*Recommendation 17*)
- we expand what can count toward an ATAR and, critically, ensure that this includes VET so that students can have a broader range of their achievements recognised through this measure (*Recommendations 19 and 20*).

Fully recognising student diversity and achievement

While the existing system in Western Australia has significant strengths, there is a need to better recognise student diversity and achievement. Students are diverse, as are their achievements throughout their senior secondary education. Stakeholders have delivered a clear message that we need a system that recognises and celebrates the 'whole student', beyond pure academics. It is also critical that the system caters to the diversity of Western Australia's senior secondary population, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability or additional learning needs, students in regional and remote areas, CALD students, students who do not complete Year 12, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Many of the recommendations in this report, if implemented, will result in structural shifts that will enable the school system to more fully recognise student diversity and achievement. For example, introducing greater flexibility into the WACE and ATAR and moving to a system where learning goals define the type of assessment. We are proposing to build on these structural shifts, but go one step further, identifying areas in which further targeted interventions are required to ensure student diversity and achievement are recognised. This includes:

- expanding what can be formally recognised through a record of student achievement (*Recommendations 23 and 24*)
- ensuring that students who leave school before the end of Year 12 can access a Western Australian Statement of Secondary Achievement (WASSA) (*Recommendation 25*)
- specific changes to ensure that equitable pathways are available to students with disability (*Recommendations 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32*)
- maintaining the literacy and numeracy standard as a requirement to achieve the WACE but expanding the methods of demonstrating the standard to address the disproportionate impact of the standard on diverse cohorts (*Recommendations 33 and 34*).

How will this change happen?

The changes we are proposing will meaningfully improve the ability of the Western Australian education system to respond to the needs of students into the future. But implementation won't happen overnight. Instead, it will require authentic collaboration and joint effort between the school sectors, government, tertiary education providers, industry, families, community groups, and students. It is essential that this effort is acknowledged and supported.

To ensure that these changes take place, we are further proposing that:

- the Western Australian Government assess the resourcing implications of all recommendations in this report in order for this package of reforms to be fully funded (*Recommendation 8*)
- young people play a meaningful role in education system design (*Recommendation 5*)
- stakeholders develop partnerships to enhance linkages between different parts of the system, for example, partnerships between schools, universities, and VET providers.

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Pathways to Post-School Success review

On 21 June 2023, the Cook Government launched the Pathways to Post-School Success (PPSS) review of senior secondary school pathways in a bid to ensure all Western Australian students can reach their full potential through post-school study, training, or employment pursuits.

The Minister for Education, the Hon Dr Tony Buti MLA, announced the review would explore whether current pathway options are effectively preparing students for the full range of further study, training, and employment options available to them.

A key outcome of the review was to investigate whether certification and university entry requirements assist students to make the best study choices, as well as to identify the barriers to students being able to access equitable pathways.

This review was undertaken by a panel of education experts including principals and curriculum and assessment policy specialists (the 'Expert Panel'). The Expert Panel has benefited from the direction provided by a larger Advisory Committee, comprising key education stakeholders in Western Australia.

Appendix 1 provides a list of Expert Panel and Advisory Committee membership. Appendix 2 provides the Terms of Reference for this review.

1.2 About this report

This report presents the Expert Panel's findings and recommendations developed throughout the review period. We are lucky to have been able to draw from a substantial body of inputs, including:

- an environmental scan of senior secondary education in Western Australia, conducted between May and September 2023, which involved consultation with more than 1,600 stakeholders from across the state via consultation events and online surveys
- analysis of existing data on the Western Australian senior secondary system provided by the Department of Education, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) (with authority from the Catholic system and independent sector where required) and the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC)
- a desktop review of senior secondary systems in select Australian and international jurisdictions
- 85 public submissions received in response to the Expert Panel's discussion paper, which was open for public comment from October to December 2023 (see Appendix 3 for a list of stakeholders who responded)
- targeted consultation with key stakeholders in Western Australia and beyond.

The report draws from, and aligns with, broader efforts to strengthen the education system in Western Australia and Australia more broadly, including the historic stakeholder consensus on education set out in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration.

We would like to thank all stakeholders for the generous contributions of their time and insights.

1.3 System objectives

As part of the Expert Panel's early work, we developed a set of system objectives to guide our approach to senior secondary reform. These are:

- **Providing effective pathways** – Ensuring the system enables students to transition into a range of post-school options, depending on their needs, and reflecting the needs of industry.
- **Reflecting diversity and uniqueness** – Acknowledging that students will have different starting points, trajectories, aspirations, and particular needs (for example, Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, students from regional and remote areas, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds); and have a range of skills, interests, and attributes that reflect their diversity and uniqueness.

- **Promoting learning and relevance** – Maximising learning and growth during late secondary school years.
- **Optimising student engagement** – Supporting students to remain engaged with education and training.
- **Ensuring system integrity** – Making sure the system has equitable, fair, and transparent checks and balances.
- **Finding achievable solutions** – Identifying approaches that can be successfully implemented and are scalable in practice.
- **Supporting positive wellbeing and resilience** – Ensuring the system is designed in a way that supports student social and emotional wellbeing, given this is critical for student engagement.²

These objectives have guided the development of the recommendations proposed in this report. They were generally endorsed by stakeholders in our consultations and in response to our discussion paper.

1.4 The structure of this report

This report is divided into chapters, with the early chapters providing background information. Chapter 2 describes how the Western Australian system works, and Chapter 3 sets out six key imperatives that we are seeking to address through this review.

The subsequent chapters present three distinct areas for change. It is in these three chapters that we present our substantive findings and recommendations.

Chapter 4 proposes a reframing of the purposes of senior secondary education. This includes discussion on the inter-related purposes of senior secondary education in Western Australia today and how to support the system and schools to deliver on these purposes. It also discusses the need to arrive at agreement among stakeholders on the purposes of VET in schools.

Chapter 5 proposes a shift toward a system built on learning goals. This means transitioning away from a system where course type determines modes of assessments, to a system where assessment types flow from course content. It also means embracing different learning goals by reducing complexity in WACE requirements, expanding what counts toward the ATAR – including VET – and strengthening university enabling programs.

Chapter 6 proposes ways to more fully recognise student diversity and achievement. In developing the recommendations in this report, we have been especially mindful of the benefits these will have for particular cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students with disability. Many of the recommendations in Chapters 4 and 5 will be particularly beneficial for these groups. This chapter goes further, proposing targeted interventions to ensure we are more fully recognising student diversity and achievement. It includes findings and recommendations on how student achievement is recorded, ensuring senior secondary education works for students with disability and additional learning needs, and discusses the WACE literacy and numeracy standard.

² Added as a separate objective following public consultation.

2 The senior secondary system in Western Australia

This chapter describes Western Australia's senior secondary system – that is, the final two years of school (Years 11 and 12). This includes information on course and program options, assessment, qualifications, recording student learning, and access to post-secondary pathways.

2.1 Course and program options

There are seven types of course and program options available for senior secondary students in Western Australia. They are:³

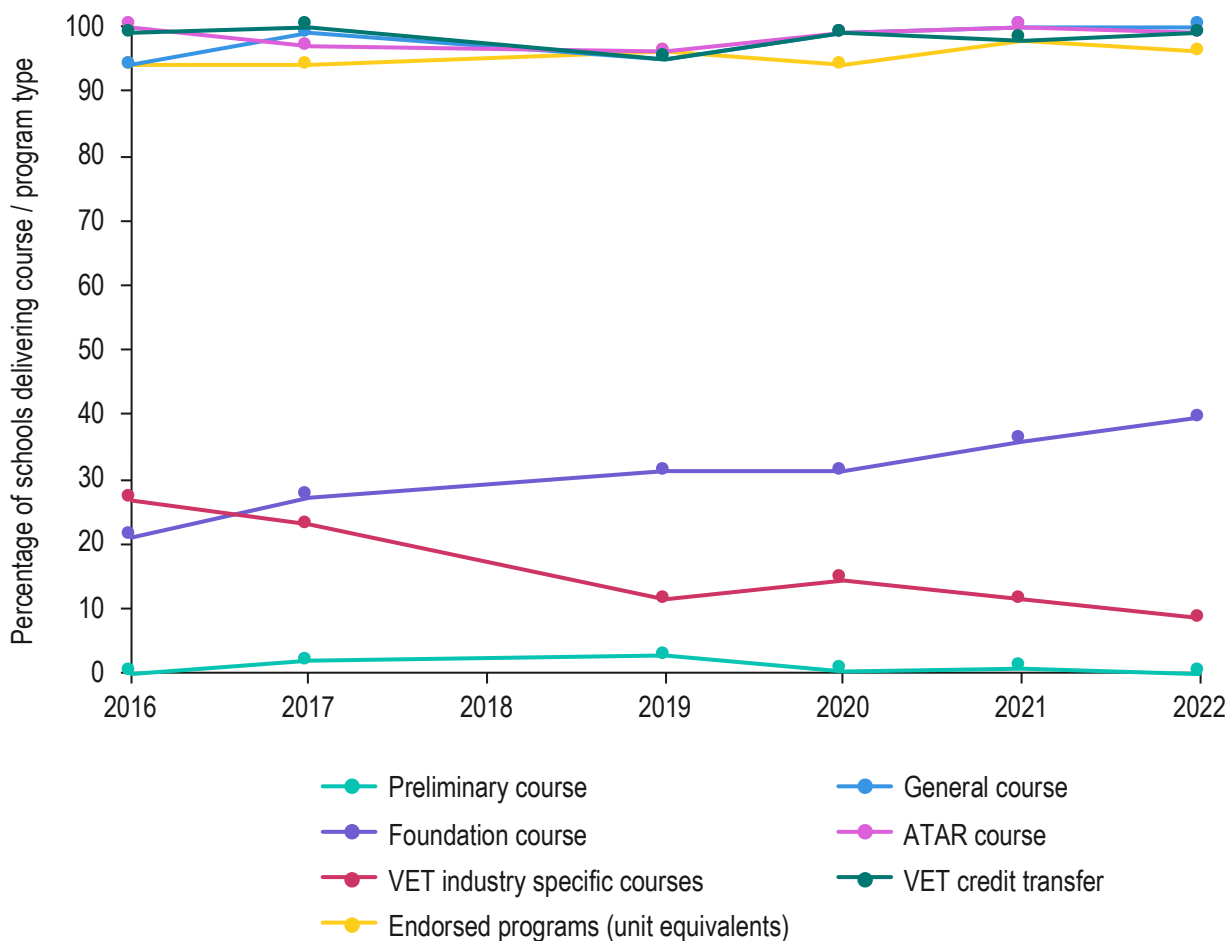
- **ATAR courses⁴** – Courses for students who are typically aiming to enter higher education straight from school. ATAR courses contribute to achievement of the WACE. Student results in ATAR courses are also used by TISC to calculate a student's ATAR score.
- **Endorsed programs (unit equivalents)** – These programs provide access to areas of learning not covered by WACE courses or VET programs and contribute to the WACE as unit equivalents. Endorsed programs are for students wishing to participate in programs which are delivered in a variety of settings by schools, workplaces, universities, and community organisations. Students may use these programs to count toward their WACE.
- **Foundation courses** – Designed for students who need support to achieve the minimum standards for literacy and/or numeracy. These courses provide a focus on functional literacy and numeracy skills, practical work-related experience, and the opportunity to build personal skills that are important for life and work. Foundation courses are not designed, nor intended, to be an alternative senior secondary pathway.
- **General courses** – General courses are for students who are typically aiming to enter vocationally based training or the workforce straight from school. They contribute to achievement of the WACE. General courses may be used for alternative entry to some university courses.
- **Preliminary courses** – Preliminary courses are for students who have been identified as having a learning difficulty and/or an intellectual disability. Preliminary courses do not contribute to achievement of the WACE.
- **VET credit transfer** – VET qualifications undertaken separate to a VET industry specific course may contribute to the WACE through credit transfer. Qualifications undertaken as VET credit transfer contribute to the WACE as unit equivalents and can be used to meet the Certificate II or higher requirement of the WACE, if this option is chosen.
- **VET industry specific courses** – These courses include a full VET qualification and mandatory workplace learning. VET industry specific courses contribute towards the WACE as course units. They are typically for students aiming to enter further vocational training or the workforce straight from school.

Almost all schools in Western Australia deliver ATAR, General, and VET (unit equivalent) courses. This has been largely consistent since 2016, when General and ATAR courses were introduced. Other course types are not as widely delivered, though there has been a notable increase in the proportion of schools offering Foundation courses (from 21% in 2016 up to 39% in 2022, as shown in Figure 1). Preliminary courses and VET industry specific courses are not as widely delivered.

³ Western Australia Department of Education, 'Curriculum – Summary of course and program types', <https://student.scsa.wa.edu.au/curriculum>.

⁴ The International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program runs in parallel to these courses, with IB courses considered equivalent to ATAR courses. The IB is not a major focus of this review.

Figure 1: Percentage of schools delivering course/program types⁵



2.2 Assessment⁶

Assessment differs by course and program type. A key distinction between ATAR courses and other course types is that a student undertakes the course examination administered by SCSA to complete the ATAR course. Externally administered examinations are not a requirement of other types of courses. General and Foundation courses are not externally assessed by examinations; however, each have an externally set task (EST) set by SCSA. The final school mark reported to SCSA is calculated based on student achievement in school-based assessments including the EST. VET is assessed as either competent or not yet competent, through various competency-based assessment methods, including practical assessment, written tasks, and portfolios. Endorsed programs are assessed in accordance with the assessment outline of the SCSA-endorsed program provider who then reports completion to SCSA.

⁵ This chart draws on data provided by SCSA on course and program offerings by school. The data provided by SCSA did not include schools with fewer than 20 full-time WACE eligible Year 12 students and senior campuses/colleges. We identified schools delivering different course/program types by counting all schools that recorded at least one completion per course/program category.

⁶ SCSA, 'WACE Manual 2024', 2024, <https://scsa.wa.edu.au/publications/wace-manual>.

2.3 Qualifications⁷

Senior secondary students in Western Australia have several options regarding qualification pathways.

1. Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE)

The WACE is Western Australia's senior secondary certificate recognised nationally in the Australian Qualifications Framework. The WACE is awarded to students who have successfully completed two years of senior secondary schooling and have achieved the required standard.

This requires:

- **Breadth and depth requirement** – Students must complete a minimum of 20 units, which may include unit equivalents attained through VET and/or endorsed programs. To meet this requirement, students must complete at least:
 - a minimum of 10 Year 12 units, or the equivalent
 - four units from an English learning area course, post-Year 10, including at least one pair of Year 12 units from an English learning area course
 - one pair of Year 12 units from each of List A (arts/languages/social sciences) and List B (mathematics/science/technology).
- **Achievement standard** – Students must achieve at least 14 C grades or higher (or the equivalent, see below) in Years 11 and 12 units, including at least six C grades (or equivalents) in Year 12 units, to meet the WACE requirements. Students completing the WACE must complete:
 - at least four Year 12 ATAR courses; or
 - at least five Year 12 General Courses (or a combination of General and up to three Year 12 ATAR courses or equivalent); or
 - a Certificate II (or higher) VET qualification in combination with ATAR, General, or Foundation Courses.
- **Demonstration of the literacy and numeracy standard**, either through:
 - Year 9 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) score; or
 - the Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA).

2. VET qualifications

Senior secondary students can also complete VET qualifications (only those completed at a Certificate II or higher level may contribute to the WACE). These qualifications are nationally recognised in the Australian Qualifications Framework and prepare students for further training or for entry into the workforce.

In addition to the VET qualifications that count towards the WACE, completed units of competency, Certificate I qualifications, and skills sets funded by the Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD), are recorded on the WASSA.

3. Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR)

In addition to WACE and VET qualifications, some students will receive an ATAR upon leaving school. The ATAR is a rank between 0.0 and 99.95 which indicates a student's position relative to other school leavers in Australia. Students that undertake four or more ATAR courses are eligible to receive an ATAR. The ATAR has traditionally been the main way students are measured for entry into most university programs in Australia. The ATAR is a national ranking, and all states/territories apply the same method in order to make the ATAR comparable nationally (though they take different approaches on what courses contribute to the aggregate which is used to derive the ATAR).

The above options are not mutually exclusive. Students achieving an ATAR would typically also achieve a WACE. Students can also count their achievement of a VET Certificate II or higher

⁷ SCSA, 'WACE Manual 2024', 2024, <https://scsa.wa.edu.au/publications/wace-manual>.

(combined with General, ATAR, or Foundation courses) toward a WACE. At present, VET achievement cannot be counted toward ATAR in Western Australia.

The proportion of students achieving the WACE has remained largely steady over time, but the proportion of Year 12 students achieving the ATAR dropped from 53% to 42% between 2017 and 2022 (see Figure 2) – meaning that less than half of the Western Australian Year 12 population graduated with an ATAR in 2022.⁸ This decline has been relatively consistent over time.

Figure 2: WACE and ATAR achievement over time



⁸ The following chart draws on data provided by SCSA and shows the percentage of Year 12 enrolments that completed WACE/achieved an ATAR from 2017 to 2022. Please note that this chart shows WACE and ATAR completion against a baseline of all Year 12 enrolments for the relevant year. As such, figures may differ from data calculating WACE completion and ATAR attainment against a baseline of 'WACE-eligible students'.

2.4 Record of student learning⁹

Students who have completed any course unit, VET unit of competency, or endorsed program will receive a WASSA at the end of Year 12. The WASSA is a cumulative record of student achievement (though studies undertaken but not completed are not reported). It records, as relevant:

- achievement of WACE requirements
- achievement of literacy (reading and writing) standard
- achievement of numeracy standard
- achievement of exhibitions and awards
- school grades, school marks and combined scores in ATAR units
- school grades and school marks in General and Foundation units
- completed Preliminary units
- completed VET industry specific units
- completed VET qualifications and VET units of competency
- completed DTWD-funded VET skill sets
- completed Endorsed programs
- number of community service hours undertaken (if reported by the school)¹⁰.

2.5 Access to post-secondary pathways

Traditionally, the ATAR has been the main entry pathway to university. But increasingly, pathways to university have diversified. While these changes are taking place outside of the school system, they have significant impacts for schools.

At a national level, Learning Creates estimates that approximately 30% of university entrants are now utilising alternative routes instead of relying solely on their ATAR scores for admission.¹¹ This means that, although there has been a decrease in ATAR attainment in Western Australia (see Figure 2), this has not translated to a decline in university commencements.¹² This stability is attributed to the emergence and adoption of diverse pathways to accessing tertiary education, caused by a growing recognition of the need for flexibility and inclusion in the higher education admissions process.

Many universities have been active in developing new pathways for entry, including offering enabling programs. Enabling programs are preparation courses taken to prepare students to qualify for a range of undergraduate courses. They focus on the skills required for university-level study, such as research, writing processes, and numeracy. Stakeholders noted that enabling programs are especially beneficial for students facing barriers to traditional entry into university, including students with disability. For instance, Murdoch University offers different enabling programs, including OnTrack Flex, K-Track (specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students), and OnTrack Sprint.

Some universities extend early offers to prospective students, granting admission before the release of their final Year 12 examination results. These offers are typically based on projected ATAR, utilising Year 10 and/or Year 11 results and are conditional – students must achieve the projected ATAR or meet specific conditions outlined by the university to secure their place. Some universities also provide unconditional offers, which grant admission to students based on their

⁹ SCSA, 'WACE Manual 2024', 2024, <https://scsa.wa.edu.au/publications/wace-manual>.

¹⁰ Submission: School Curriculum and Standards Authority Board.

¹¹ Learning Creates Australia 'Learning Beyond Limits: Insights and learnings from visionary schools and communities working toward a fit-for-purpose learning system', 2023, p4.

¹² Based on analysis of Commonwealth Department of Education data on commencing students from 2012 to 2022 (see, for example, <https://www.education.gov.au/download/13335/2020-section-1-commencing-students/25742/document/xls>).

Year 11 grades without the need to wait for their Year 12 examination results. Western Australian universities have increased early entry in the last few years.¹³

In recent years, universities have actively shifted away from using prerequisites, which are subjects required for entry to a university course (determined by individual universities). While prerequisite requirements vary across the different jurisdictions and between universities, there has been a decrease in their use.¹⁴ In 2019 (for the 2020 year), 11 out of 40 universities in Australia had no mathematics prerequisites for any of their courses, 14 out of 40 had no science prerequisites, and 19 out of 1,584 courses required higher mathematics.¹⁵ This shift away from prerequisites reflects a broader trend towards more flexible pathways to university access.

Access to post-school VET pathways works differently to pathways to university. Some students directly apply to institutions offering VET programs or specific courses of interest aligned with their career goals. Others use their school-based VET qualifications to advance to higher-level VET qualifications within the same field or related area. Course requirements vary, with certain ones having specific prerequisites. Some VET qualifications allow students to use it as credit towards further study at a tertiary level – at TAFEs or registered training organisations – including diplomas, advanced diplomas, or university degrees in relevant fields. Students can also opt to transition into apprenticeships and traineeships within their chosen industry.

¹³ Pathways to Post-School Success review, 'Discussion Paper', <https://www.pathwaysreview.wa.edu.au/review-discussion-paper>.

¹⁴ Australian Government: Office of the Chief Scientist & Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute: Mapping University Prerequisites in Australia: A joint Office of the Chief Scientist and Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute paper (2020), p. 3

¹⁵ Ibid.

3 Six key imperatives

In seeking to understand what needs to change in the Western Australian system, we identified six major themes. These themes clearly emerged through stakeholder feedback from more than 1,600 stakeholders gathered through the environmental scan, 85 public submissions, and targeted consultations with key stakeholders in Western Australia and beyond. These themes, which we are calling ‘key imperatives’:

- are inter-related and high level
- require immediate attention
- cannot be addressed through any single intervention, but instead require concerted system effort.

This chapter outlines the six key imperatives. The specific recommendations proposed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 align with these six key imperatives (Appendix 4 provides a table showing this alignment).

3.1 Increasing student retention and engagement

There is a clear imperative to increase the number of students that remain in school until the end of Year 12. Retention is a major and persistent challenge in Western Australia. Apparent retention of students in Western Australia has remained largely stable over time and was 82% in 2022.¹⁶ But retention rates are much lower for particular cohorts (62.5% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in 2022).¹⁷ A lower percentage of Aboriginal people aged 20-24 have attained Year 12 or equivalent in Western Australia than at a national level (61% in Western Australia compared to 68% nationally).¹⁸ Retention rates are also lower among students in lower socio-economic areas and remote areas.¹⁹

For those students who remain until the end of Year 12, there is also a need to increase students’ engagement with school. There are many reasons students may disengage from learning, even if they stay at school throughout senior secondary – this may occur due to difficulties with the academic and social demands of school, personal circumstances (balancing school with paid work), mental ill-health, and a lack of perceived relevance of the curriculum. Low student engagement can manifest in different ways, including lower attendance rates, selecting study options that are not sufficiently challenging, or decreased effort. Increasing engagement is important, not only to ensure students are getting value from their senior secondary schooling, but to set them up as life-long learners.

3.2 Supporting positive student wellbeing and resilience

An imperative that came through especially strongly from public consultation was the need to support positive student wellbeing and increased resilience. This is an important objective, and one that goes well beyond the scope of the school system to deliver on. Supporting positive student wellbeing and resilience also has substantial implications for learning and outcomes. The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA’s ‘Indicators of Wellbeing Framework’ notes that the essential pre-conditions to young peoples’ learning and participation are that they are ‘engaged and supported with learning, feel prepared for and feel positive about their future, and that they

¹⁶ Apparent retention rate from Year 10 to Year 12, All full-time students, all schools. Productivity Commission, ‘Report on Government Services’, 2022, <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/child-care-education-and-training/school-education>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ WA, ‘Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025’, p59.

¹⁹ Pathways to Post-School Success review, ‘Discussion Paper’, <https://www.pathwaysreview.wa.edu.au/review-discussion-paper>.

have an active voice and are listened to, as is every child's right'.²⁰

“There is so much pressure on students to succeed, we are told if you fail now your entire life is decided.”
[Submission: Commissioner for Children and Young People WA – quote from 16-year-old person]

Many submissions noted the impact that senior secondary school can have on student wellbeing and resilience. The intensification of workload, particularly in the early months of Year 11, poses a considerable strain on student wellbeing.²¹ The *Speaking Out Survey* found that stress related to school or study is the most frequently reported source of stress for students in Years 9 to 12, with 88.7% of students saying they were affected by this.²² This figure is also higher for students in senior secondary school compared to junior secondary. A survey question considering the 'extent to which students feel pressured by schoolwork' found that 37% of senior secondary students felt 'a lot' of pressure compared to only 27% for students in junior secondary school.

While schools no doubt have an important role to play in promoting wellbeing, it is beyond the scope of the senior secondary education system to address this issue on its own. Wellbeing is a complex issue and the shared responsibility of the system, interagency partners, families, and the community more broadly. Despite this complexity, there is a clear need to put in place systems that are more supportive of student wellbeing and resilience.

3.3 Recognising the value of all students and their achievements

“Why are we so stuck in the industrial model of thinking and learning?”
[Environmental scan stakeholder]

Students are unique – with different interests, strengths, capabilities, motivations, ambitions, and life circumstances. But education systems don't always value this uniqueness. Often, methods of recognising student success only acknowledge academic accomplishments like course grades, with missed opportunities to celebrate a student's broader skills, learning progress, and achievements outside the classroom. A particular area of stakeholder concern is around ATAR, which is seen by many as reducing 13 years of schooling achievement down to a single number.

There is a clear need to ensure our education system values and celebrates the 'whole student'. This may involve expanding the breadth of experiences that students participate in as part of their schooling (for example, expanding opportunities for Aboriginal students to undertake on-country learning and cultural activities as part of their studies), finding more ways to recognise student achievements outside the classroom (for example, volunteer work and extra-curricular achievements), and ensuring that education delivery includes reasonable flexibility to support different learning styles.

3.4 Better support for students from diverse backgrounds

It has been clear throughout this review that the current system needs to do more to serve students from diverse backgrounds. While Western Australia has a senior secondary system that works well for many students, there are clear differences in its ability to support outcomes for different cohorts – including students in different locations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

²⁰ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, 'Indicators of wellbeing', <https://www.cryp.wa.gov.au/our-work/indicators-of-wellbeing/>, accessed 7 December 2023.

²¹ Submission: FutureNow.

²² Speaking out Survey 2021. The Speaking Out Survey is a survey that the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA conducts on the wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia. The survey was conducted in 2019 and 2021. The 2021 survey had a sample of more than 16,500 children and young people from across all regions of Western Australia. www.cryp.wa.gov.au/our-work/speaking-out-survey/

students, students with disability, and from different socio-economic backgrounds. TISC data indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, and CALD students are significantly less likely to receive a university offer.²³ Student attendance and retention are also lower for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.²⁴

Western Australia also has the highest level of remote population distribution in Australia after the Northern Territory.²⁵ This means that education must be provided in some of the most remote locations in Australia. Schools in these areas may face greater challenges in resourcing for staff and other learning supports (for example, securing adequate internet access or devices for students). Many of these schools aim to meet the education needs of remote Aboriginal communities. More isolated schools can also face difficulties engaging with post-school pathways (such as TAFEs or universities) given their distance from these institutions.

3.5 Responding to new opportunities in the world of work

Another imperative is ensuring that our senior secondary systems are responding to the changing world around us, including new opportunities in the world of work. Current students will need a broader and different mix of skills compared with previous generations. Their careers will take place against the backdrop of accelerating technological change, globalisation, and automation.

There is a need for senior secondary schooling to keep up with these changes, and that students are developing the skills they will need in the future. As stated in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, education should be: 'A foundation for further learning and adult life, [where] the curriculum includes practical skills development in areas such as [information and communications technology], critical and creative thinking, intercultural understanding and problem solving. These skills support imagination, discovery, innovation, empathy and developing creative solutions to complex problems. They are central to contributing to Australia's knowledge-based economy.'²⁶

The Speaking Out Survey asked students if they agreed with the statement 'at my school, I am learning knowledge and skills that will help me in the future'. It found that 38% of students believed this was 'pretty much true' and 16% 'very much true'. But over a third of students (37%) stated this was 'a little true' – indicating that a large proportion of students do not believe their learning will significantly support their future.

Submissions note that the current education system has not kept up with emerging workforce needs, citing critical shortages in key occupations. The 2023 Skills Priority List highlights the 36% shortage in Australian occupations, particularly in health (82%) and ICT (69%) professions.²⁷ These gaps are more pronounced in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields and regional areas and raise urgent need for comprehensive STEM education.²⁸ While shortages in key occupations are attributable to a range of factors beyond the Western Australian education system, stakeholders told us that there is work to be done to embed the required skills of the future into the school curriculum.

²³ See Pathways to Post-School Success review, 'Discussion Paper', <https://www.pathwaysreview.wa.edu.au/review-discussion-paper>. We note that this data only reflects university offers provided through TISC and does not include offers where students have applied to universities directly.

²⁴ See Pathways to Post-School Success review, 'Discussion Paper', <https://www.pathwaysreview.wa.edu.au/review-discussion-paper>.

²⁵ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 'Western Australian government (public) schools', 2014, https://myschool.edu.au/media/1323/2014_wa_financial_limitations.pdf.

²⁶ Australian Government Department of Education, 'The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration', February 2020, <https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>.

²⁷ Submission: Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering.

²⁸ Submission: Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering.

3.6 Incorporating contemporary modes of assessment

Just as the skills students need to develop continue to change and evolve, so too do available methods of assessing them. Jurisdictions moving to incorporate contemporary modes of assessment include New Zealand, where external portfolio assessments are used in design and arts subjects; and England, which has introduced grading for their new vocational 'T-Levels' courses. In Western Australia, ATAR, General, and Foundation courses already make use of some contemporary modes of assessments, including portfolios, productions, and oral examinations.

There is a lot to be gained from incorporating contemporary modes of assessments. For students who struggle in traditional, formal examination settings, having other ways to demonstrate competencies and capabilities can be a game changer. This may particularly be the case for students from diverse backgrounds (for example, students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and CALD students). Incorporating a wide range of assessment types may also reinforce deeper learning, instead of incentivising short-term memorisation of facts. Drawing from a wide range of assessment types may also be more enjoyable and beneficial for student wellbeing, given the stress and pressure many students experience with formal examinations.

The remaining three chapters of this report present three distinct areas for change. It is in these three chapters that we present our substantive findings and recommendations.

4 Reframing the purposes of senior secondary education

The case for change

The purpose of senior secondary education in Western Australia, like the rest of Australia, has changed significantly over the past few decades. Historically, student retention through to the end of secondary school was much lower: in 1980, Year 12 completion was at 35%; this more than doubled to 78% by 1994 and remains at a similar level today.²⁹ The increase in the number of students completing senior secondary school is a welcome change – although there is still more work to do to lift this figure higher. Senior secondary education helps students to develop the knowledge and skills they need for their lives after school, and students that finish school enjoy higher wages and improved wellbeing compared to those that do not.³⁰

“Senior secondary schooling needs to be set up for the 80% of students who are in them now; not for the 12% who were in them in the 1980s.” – [School and interagency representatives, PPSS environmental scan]

In the days of lower school completion, senior secondary education was able to have a more singular focus on preparing students for higher education. These days, senior secondary education has a more complex set of inter-related purposes. Given a far higher proportion of students remain in school until the end of Year 12, schools must cater, not just to students seeking to enter higher education, but also to those wanting to undertake vocational education pathways or enter the workforce directly. It must also cater to the many students who don't know yet. As Polesol *et al* say, this creates a 'tension between the original and continuing need to prepare young people for university and the more recent need to cater for near universal participation in the senior secondary years'.³¹

In the evolving landscape of senior secondary education, it is more important than ever to agree on and reframe the inter-related purposes of senior secondary education. This ensures that these purposes are fit for purpose for today's education system in Western Australia, and system stakeholders understand what they are. 'Reframing the purposes of senior secondary education' may seem like a lofty ambition, but it is critical to ensuring that Western Australia's education system – and schools – are supported to deliver a system that works for students.

4.1 Clarifying the purposes of senior secondary education

4.1.1 The multiple purposes of senior secondary education

Our engagement throughout this review has confirmed broad agreement that there is no single purpose of senior secondary education, but instead multiple inter-related purposes. Key purposes of senior secondary identified in the submissions include building the foundations for students to become lifelong learners, preparation for meaningful post-school education and employment, and holistic development and life skills.³²

²⁹ Long, Carpenter and Hayden 'Participation in Education and Training 1980-1994', *Australian Council for Educational Research*, 1999, https://www.isay.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/181419/LSAY_Isay13.pdf.

³⁰ Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education, <https://content.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/media/counting-the-costs-of-lost-opportunity-in-aus-education-mitchell-institute.pdf>.

³¹ Polesol *et al* 'The Australian Senior Certificates: After 50 years of reforms', *The Australian Educational Researcher* (2021), p567.

³² Submissions: Fogarty Foundation; Western Australian Council of State School Organisations; The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA; Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia.

Clearly, a major purpose of senior secondary education is preparing students for post-school pathways – whether into higher education, vocational education, or the workforce. Supporting students in this way has become a more challenging task, given there is now a broader and more complex range of pathways into post-school education and training. As stakeholders made clear during targeted consultations, students on a university pathway generally know why they are studying and what the end outcome will be – but for students on other pathways this is not always clear.

While preparation for life after school is important, stakeholders do not view this as the sole purpose of senior secondary school. The *Shergold Report* also argues that ‘the purpose of Years 11 and 12 should not be diminished to a process that simply directs students into a particular post-school pathway. Rather, the system should support students to continue to learn and grow in a way that does not close off particular routes.’³³ The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration recognises that education has broader goals than simply preparing students for post-school life – including enabling young Australians to become ‘confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community’.³⁴

Today’s senior secondary education systems must also adapt to emerging developments in broader society. Students today face an extensive range of challenges due to technological change, globalisation, and automation. We have also seen a rise in mental ill-health amongst students and an increased focus on wellbeing by schools. Current students will need a broader and different mix of skills compared with previous generations, and the *Shergold Report* argues that there is a need to prepare students for ‘active citizenship in a democratic society’ as well as engagement with the labour market.³⁵

There is also increasing recognition of the need for secondary schooling to reflect students’ interests and ambitions. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which describes this as ‘student agency’, explains this concept as follows:

“The concept... is rooted in the principle that students have the ability and the will to positively influence their own lives and the world around them. [It] is thus defined as the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change. It is about acting rather than being acted upon; shaping rather than being shaped; and making responsible decisions and choices rather than accepting those determined by others”.³⁶

In the context of senior secondary education, where students are preparing for an increasingly complex and dynamic world, reflecting students’ interests and achievements is critical to success. It is important for several reasons. Firstly, ensuring the system reflects students’ interests and ambitions reinforces the individuality of each student – that they are each unique and diverse. It therefore allows for a more inclusive and responsive education system. Secondly, it means respecting that students are approaching adulthood, and may already have considerable responsibilities outside of school. They need to be equipped with the skills to make decisions in their own interest independently. This does not only foster autonomy but continues to prepare them for the challenges of life beyond school. Embracing the need to reflect students’ interests and aspirations also acknowledges the inherent complexity of education and rejects the notion of a

³³ Education Council, ‘Looking to the future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training’, p65 (*‘Shergold Report’*).

³⁴ Australian Government Department of Education, ‘The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration’, February 2020, <https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>.

³⁵ Education Council, ‘Looking to the future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training’, p12.

³⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Future of Education and Skills 2030, ‘Conceptual learning framework: Student agency for 2030’, p2.

'one-size-fits-all' approach to schooling. By empowering students (assuming that they are sufficiently supported by their schools and families) to make decisions on matters affecting their lives, the educational system becomes more adaptable, responsive, and ultimately more effective in meeting the diverse needs of its learners.

Ensuring the system reflects students' interests and ambitions benefits all students. For some cohorts, these benefits are particularly acute. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, it acknowledges and respects cultural heritage and traditional knowledge and creates a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment. For students with disability, it shifts understanding from a deficit-based lens, and respects individuality and lived experience. It also promotes collaboration and partnership between educators, students, families, and community stakeholders, fostering a supportive network that is essential for the holistic development and success of all students.

This concept of ensuring the system reflects students' interests and aspirations clearly resonates with stakeholders, with submissions highlighting the importance of this concept (though some draw on different language to do so).³⁷ Sevenoaks Senior College's submission notes that 'developing student agency as a learning process and a learning goal may well support individual students and their uniqueness as they progress through their final years of schooling, empowered to make their own decisions about their future', though also notes that students need support to exercise this agency. The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia also notes that allowing for greater student 'voice and choice' builds confidence and competence, as well as being key to fostering resilience and positive social and emotional learning.³⁸

4.1.2 Moving toward a statement of the purposes of senior secondary education

Clearly, the education system as a whole – and schools in particular – has to achieve a delicate balance to deliver on these multiple purposes. But at present, there is no clear, holistic articulation of what these inter-related purposes of senior secondary education are in Western Australia.

This problem is not unique to Western Australia. Polesol *et al* discuss this issue in the context of Australia's senior secondary certificates, arguing that 'there is still no evidence of a consistent and shared view of the explicit and implicit purpose'.³⁹ The only exception they find is the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), which has a clear articulation of specific goals:

“The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) is a high-quality, equitable senior secondary education qualification. The qualification allows all students to develop the knowledge, skills, and understandings necessary for becoming active participants in an ever-changing world. It is globally accepted that education is crucial to improving opportunities and pathways and, more significantly, enhancing quality of life. Acknowledging this, the SACE Board's mission is to equip young people with the capabilities to move successfully into further learning and work as confident and responsible citizens.”

There are some relevant statements of purpose in use within the broader educational landscape. This includes the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, agreed in 2019 following extensive consultation across Australia. The Declaration sets out a vision for a world-class education system. It emphasises the role of senior secondary education in equipping young people

³⁷ Submissions: Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia; The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA; Kiind; Sevenoaks Senior College.

³⁸ Submission: Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia.

³⁹ Polesol *et al* 'The Australian Senior Certificates: After 50 years of reforms', *The Australian Educational Researcher* (2021), p567.

with skills, knowledge, values, and capabilities for success in various aspects of life. The declaration includes two distinct goals:⁴⁰ first, that the Australian education system promotes excellence and equity; and second, that all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Another example of a purpose statement currently in use is the 'Statement on the Purpose of Senior Secondary Certificates of Education' (SSCE) developed by the Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA) following the publication of the *Shergold Report*. This statement describes how senior secondary certifications serve as qualifications that enable smooth transitions to further education or employment, establishing standards, and provide a fair and transparent measure of their abilities. It says 'SSCEs certify a quality and quantity of learning. They are rigorously quality assured and provide an equitable and transparent measure of what a young person knows and can do. Student achievements are recognised through the application of fair, accurate, valid, and reliable assessment of their learning and clear, comprehensive, and useful reporting of their achievements to assist them with their transitions to the next phase of their lives.'⁴¹

While these statements are useful in their respective contexts, both serve a slightly different purpose than the statement of purposes we are envisaging. The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration is a statement on education in general, rather than a targeted statement on the purpose of senior secondary education. The ACACA definition is narrowly focused on the purpose of senior secondary certificates – rather than senior secondary education. There would also be value to a standalone statement agreed through consultation, articulating the shared intent of Western Australian system stakeholders.

We believe that developing a clear statement of the multiple purposes of senior secondary education in Western Australia would provide clarity and strengthen the ability of the system and of schools to deliver. As the Learning Creates submission notes, 'Redefining the purpose of education is one of the most powerful levers for transforming the system'. We propose that this inclusive statement should aim to be both relevant and applicable, to be adopted by all actors across the senior secondary schooling system. Once developed and agreed, such a statement can become a touchstone for decisions made at all levels. It can become part of the policy and legislative fabric that provides direction to system actors. Emphasising that senior secondary education has multiple purposes may also be clarifying for students, especially those who do not see a place for themselves within the current system.

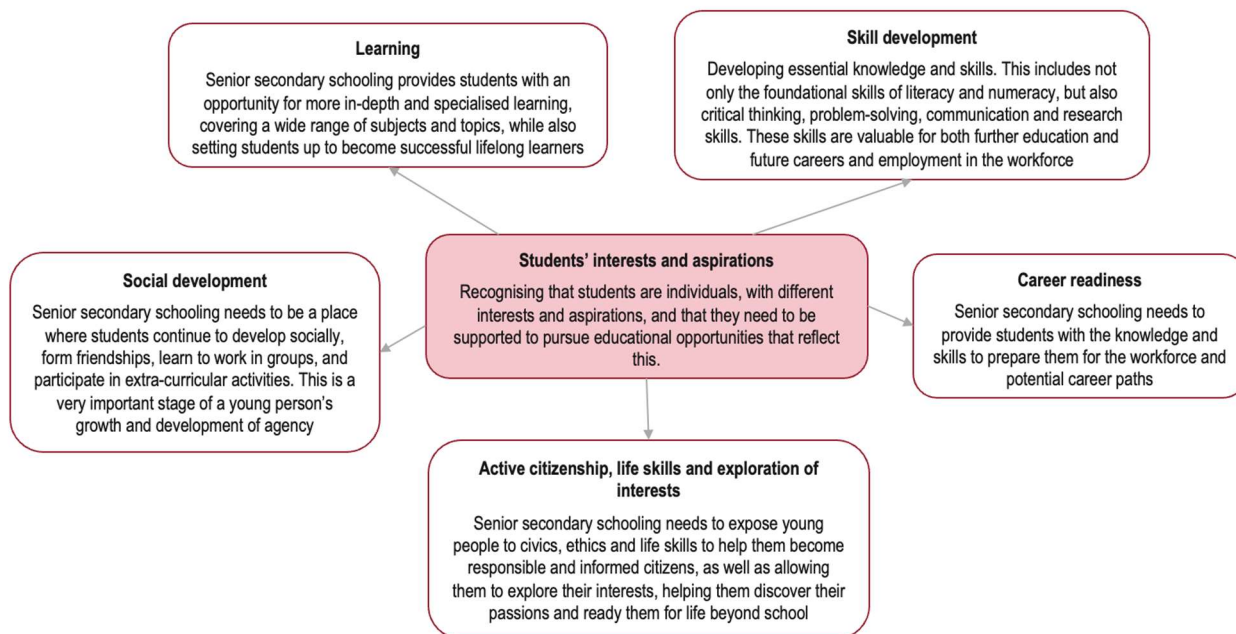
We propose that the statement of purposes centre on the concept of 'students' interests and aspirations', given the evidence falls heavily on the importance of this concept, and the emphasis that stakeholders have placed on this concept throughout this review. Centring on this concept reinforces the message that students are individuals, with different circumstances and aspirations, and that this diversity should be valued. We believe that moving to a system centred on this concept has the potential to strengthen engagement, promote positive student wellbeing and recognise the value of all students and their achievements.

⁴⁰ Australian Government Department of Education, 'The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration', February 2020, <https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>.

⁴¹ Australian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities: Statement on the Purpose of Senior Secondary Certificates of Education.

In order to provide guidance on what the new statement of purposes should include, we offer the following as a starting point for consideration, which draws on the input received throughout this review:

Figure 3: Suggested statement on purposes of senior secondary education



Recommendation 1. *Western Australian Government to commit to developing a statement setting out the multiple inter-related purposes of senior secondary education, which centres on the concept of 'students' interests and aspirations'.*

We are sufficiently confident in our suggested statement of purposes to proceed with the other recommendations we have put forward through this report. But this statement will need to be refined and explicitly validated through an inclusive process, to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are given the chance to weigh in on what should be a seminal statement. Ensuring that the voices of students are heard also provides an opportunity for the Government to show that it is serious about reflecting students' interests and aspirations from the beginning. We envisage the broader school system and sectors running an inclusive public consultation process, which would involve consulting widely across Western Australia with students, their families, their schools, education system actors, industry, and other relevant actors.

Recommendation 2. *School system, sectors, and SCSA to conduct an inclusive process to develop and refine a statement on the purposes of senior secondary education, drawing on consultation with students, schools, families, other education sector stakeholders, and industry.*

4.2 Supporting the system to respond

4.2.1 Reflecting the new statement of purposes across the system

A statement setting out the purposes of senior secondary education can be a powerful tool. Our ambition for such a statement is that it would 'flow through' Western Australia's education system, providing a sense of clarity and direction to actors across the system. This would help inform the countless decisions they make in delivering senior secondary education in Western Australia. If successful, such a statement would have influence reaching far beyond what we can anticipate as

part of our current review. But clearly, there are some key ways in which we would need to support the system to respond to this new statement of purposes as a priority.

As an independent statutory authority responsible to the Minister for Education, SCSA plays a critical role delivering elements of the senior secondary system relevant to this review – such as curriculum development, assessment, and certification. The high level of public trust in the current system is in no small part due to SCSA’s efforts to deliver on its statutory role. Given the importance of this role, SCSA should embrace this statement of purposes to guide its activities. SCSA can do this by incorporating it into its corporate planning and public facing communications. In this sense, it can serve as an important tool to frame strategy and stakeholder expectations.

Many modern legislative frameworks provide a plain English statement of purposes up front to guide agencies with a clear aspirational vision. While SCSA’s enabling legislation – the *School Curriculum and Standards Authority Act 1997* – is clear in defining SCSA’s functions, it does not have this type of clear, purposive framing found in modern legislation. In its current form, the *School Curriculum and Standards Authority Act 1997* focuses on procedural aspects (such as certification) rather than setting a clear ambition.

We note that this legislation has been reviewed recently. But we have an opportunity to change this when it is next reviewed, amending the legislation to incorporate the statement of purposes to ensure that SCSA’s activities are guided by this agreed ambition. Any future review of SCSA’s enabling legislation should also ensure that it is suitable to deliver on the other recommendations contained in this report, as many of these envisage a role for SCSA in implementation.

Recommendation 3. *SCSA to incorporate the new statement of purposes as agreed above to guide its activities through its Strategic Plan. When the School Curriculum and Standards Authority Act 1997 is next reviewed, the Western Australian Government should ensure that it incorporates this statement of purposes into the legislation, along with any other changes required to allow SCSA to deliver on the recommendations contained in this report.*

Another key way in which we would need to support the system to respond would be reviewing current Year 11 and 12 course and program offerings to ensure that course design is appropriate, in light of this new statement of purposes. We recognise that this would be a multi-year process, and that SCSA would need to provide advice on how quickly such a review could be expedited (and how it could align with its existing senior secondary syllabus review process), and how to prioritise courses and programs as part of this review.

Recommendation 4. *As part of its senior secondary syllabus review process, SCSA to commit to a course-by-course review of Year 11 and 12 courses and programs, to ensure that course rationale, aims, and design are consistent with the new statement of purposes of senior secondary education. SCSA to advise on: reasonable timeframes for this process to take place; priority courses for review; alignment with other activity; and how to engage with students in the review process.*

4.2.2 Student involvement in system and course design

Our vision of the purposes of senior secondary education centres on the concept of ‘students’ interests and ambitions’. For this concept to be genuinely embedded into the system, there is a need to consider the role that students themselves play in system and course design.

The Department of Education currently has a student council, made up of Year 10 and 11 public school students from across the state. The WA Student Council advises the Department on education policy and reform and provides feedback on Departmental initiatives. The inaugural council commenced in September 2022.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA's submission notes that 'I would like to see greater voices for children and young people in feedback on course programs and pathway options... Children and young people have a lived experience of the education system that is unique to their generation, cultural and historical context. Their views on how schools are currently meeting their needs around learning, inclusivity, safety, engagement, and wellbeing are particularly important to consider in policy development, and they should be systematically engaged in co-design, monitoring, and quality improvement of the education system and their own education providers'.⁴²

Given the importance of delivering on the concept of 'students' interests and ambitions' – as well as stakeholder feedback that stressed the importance of allowing young people to have a say in the matters that impact them – we recommend expanding opportunities for students to play a role in the current education system. We see value in this going beyond the current role – including, for example, a meaningful role in influencing course objectives and design. It will be particularly important to ensure certain groups of students have opportunities to influence the development of aspects of the system that directly impact them. This could include, for example, considering the views of students with disability and additional learning needs when implementing the recommendations in 6.2 below, and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to understand whether course content is culturally appropriate and relevant to certain contexts.

Recommendation 5. Western Australian Government, through SCSA in partnership with the three school sectors, to review the role that young people play in education system design, including periodically consulting students on senior secondary course rationales, aims, and design.

4.2.3 Evaluation and data collection

Another important element of supporting the system to deliver on the new statement of purposes – as well as the broader recommendations in this report – will be putting the tools in place to understand if reforms are succeeding. Reforming senior secondary education cannot be a 'set and forget' exercise. Instead, it will be necessary to commit to fully evaluating the effectiveness of these reforms, including the new statement of purposes.

Evaluation needs to take place periodically, ensuring we are asking the right questions at the appropriate points in time. For example, in the months following the Western Australian Government's response to this review, it will be necessary to evaluate whether implementation is on track. Several years later, the focus of evaluation should shift to measuring whether reforms have resulted in an improvement of student outcomes. This is especially the case given the recommendations we are proposing will take time to implement and cannot all be undertaken at once. Appendix 5 provides our proposed sequencing and timeframe for implementation of the recommendations.

Recommendation 6. Western Australian Government to commit to periodically evaluating the effectiveness of these recommendations on an agreed schedule. We suggest: 18 months following the Western Australian Government's response focussing on fidelity of implementation, and again three years later with a focus on achievement of new purposes and outcomes for students.

For any evaluation of the effectiveness of these proposed reforms to be a success there will need to be a strengthened approach to data collection and analysis. Our review has revealed some limitations regarding the existing approach to data collection and management in Western Australia – particularly for data collection on priority cohorts (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability and CALD students), and on student outcomes. To cite a few examples:

⁴² Submission: Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

- Western Australia does not have a consistent collection of post-school destinations data reported in a consistent manner for the entire school cohort (though it does collect post-school data on public school students)⁴³ – this makes it hard to gauge students’ post-school outcomes.
- Stakeholders raised concerns about the lack of SCSA data collection on students with disability.⁴⁴ There is great potential to strengthen data collection for these students, potentially in conjunction with the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data.

There is a pressing need to strengthen data collection, and to improve data-sharing between education-sector organisations. Without this, it will not be possible to build a robust understanding of whether the system is delivering on the new statement of purposes, or this broader package of recommendations.

Recommendation 7. *Education sector organisations to work together to strengthen data collection and integration, particularly to enable understanding of school and post-school outcomes for all priority cohorts.*

4.2.4 Resourcing of reforms

As submissions rightly point out, implementing reforms such as these places a significant financial, administrative, and time burden on schools, school leaders and administrators, teachers, and the broader education system.⁴⁵ It is essential that this reform burden is acknowledged, and that implementation efforts are adequately supported.

To support the system to respond to the new statement of purposes of senior secondary education, and the recommendations in this report more broadly, it is essential that adequate resourcing and support be provided to impacted system actors. Without adequate resourcing, these proposed reforms will not come to fruition.

Determining the necessary level of resourcing will require the Western Australian Government to assess the full suite of recommendations, the cost of implementing these, and upon which system actors these costs will fall. It is imperative that the recommendations in this review are fully funded if they are to succeed.

Recommendation 8. *The Western Australian Government, on behalf of the three school sectors and SCSA, to assess resourcing implications of all recommendations in this report, in order for this package of recommendations to be fully funded.*

4.3 Supporting schools to respond

4.3.1 School resourcing

A key part of supporting the system to respond to the recommendations in this review, including the statement of purposes of senior secondary education, will be supporting schools to respond. Many submissions drew attention to resourcing challenges faced by schools in Western Australia. Challenges include:

- teacher shortages and high workloads⁴⁶ – in particular, difficulties employing and retaining teachers who are equipped and qualified to teach advanced subjects⁴⁷
- geographical constraints, and a lack of equity between metropolitan, regional and rural schools;

⁴³ Polesol et al ‘The Australian Senior Certificates: After 50 years of reforms’, *The Australian Educational Researcher* (2021), p578.

⁴⁴ Targeted consultation with professional sector organisation.

⁴⁵ Submission: Principals’ Federation of Western Australia.

⁴⁶ Submission: Principals’ Federation of Western Australia.

⁴⁷ Submission: Curtin University.

with small schools also facing particular challenges⁴⁸

- insufficient demand/resourcing for individual schools to deliver particular pathways⁴⁹
- the need for early intervention prior to secondary school, given that – as the Western Australian Primary Principals’ Association says – ‘the pathway to post-school success commences much earlier than senior secondary education’.⁵⁰

While addressing these challenges is beyond the scope of this review, they have an important bearing on implementation of reforms.

4.3.2 Supporting enhanced career education and pathway planning

Many submissions stressed the need to better support students to make well-informed decisions on course and program selection, and future career options. A key strategy that came through strongly in the submissions was supporting the delivery of enhanced career education and pathway planning.⁵¹

Throughout this review, we have heard many useful ideas on how career education and pathway planning could be strengthened, including:

- *Increasing delivery of career education and pathway planning:* Some submissions proposed an increase in the number of school-based career practitioners and VET coordinators, to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of available careers, connect them to industry opportunities, and facilitate early intervention for finding purpose and direction.
- *Starting earlier:* Many submissions advocated for comprehensive, age-appropriate career education that starts much earlier (with some arguing it should be delivered throughout Kindergarten to Year 12).⁵²
- *Treating career education and pathway planning as separate from course or subject selection counselling:* Existing systems of career education can be seen as too transactional, given their focus on supporting students through the process of course selection. Commencing career education and pathway planning in a less transactional sense, to give students an understanding of who they are and what they are interested in, is seen as a better approach.
- *Including parents, not just students:* Parental involvement is acknowledged as critical to navigating the available pathways for children’s education and future careers, and submissions emphasised the need for dedicated resources and sessions that can specifically support parents.⁵³
- *Strengthening partnerships between schools, tertiary education providers and industry:* These are seen as an important way to help students gain exposure to possible future careers, enable students to undertake ‘career tasters’ or work experience programs, raise aspirations, and support transitions to post-school pathways.⁵⁴
- *Increasing exposure opportunities, particularly for students in regional, remote and lower socio-economic areas:* As the adage goes, ‘you can’t be what you can’t see’. While there is a clear need to enhance career education and pathway planning across the board, this need is particularly pronounced for students in regional, remote, and lower socio-economic areas, and small schools, given they may have less exposure to different career options. For public schools, working through Department regions shows promise to coordinate and provide exposure opportunities.

⁴⁸ Submissions: Regional Education Commissioner; Bob Hawke College.

⁴⁹ Submission: University of Western Australia.

⁵⁰ Submission: Western Australian Primary Principals’ Association.

⁵¹ Submission: The Smith Family.

⁵² Submissions: The Smith Family; Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia; Department of Training and Workforce Development.

⁵³ Submissions: Edith Cowan University; Western Australian Council of State School Organisations; University of Western Australia.

⁵⁴ Submissions: Sevenoaks Senior College; Individual (School leader); Edstemic; Girrawheen Senior High School.

Recommendation 9. Department of Education and DTWD to work with the school system and sectors to strengthen delivery of career education and pathway planning, consistent with the principles outlined above in conjunction with appropriate course selection processes, where applicable, particularly for students in regional, remote, and lower socio-economic areas.

4.4 Clarifying the purposes of VET in senior secondary education

One particular issue we feel merits close attention is clarification on the purposes of VET in schools. VET emerged throughout our review as one of the most challenging and contentious issues. Submissions highlighted wide-ranging challenges relating to the delivery of VET to school students, not all of which are within the scope of this review.

The review surfaced sharp differences in stakeholder views about what VET offerings should be delivered to school students – signalling conflicting perspectives about the purpose of VET in schools. School sector stakeholders greatly value VET in schools, including as a way to engage students in learning. VET in schools is a particularly valuable option for those students who might otherwise be at risk of disengaging from the school system, offering a way to strengthen student retention.

But other stakeholders believe the types of VET offerings delivered in schools need to align more closely with post-school training options and industry needs. Some were concerned that some schools see VET as an engagement program only, rather than as entry into an industry pathway.⁵⁵ We also heard that many of the VET courses taken in schools (such as recreation and business) are not relevant to the skills the economy requires for the future.⁵⁶ These different perspectives on the value of VET in schools appear to drive subsequent disagreements on which VET qualifications are suitable to be taught in schools.

Some submissions raised concern about the potential issues with offering Certificate IV and Diploma qualifications to secondary school students, with apprehension of how the outcomes align with the Australian Qualifications Framework levels. The Principals' Federation of Western Australia also questioned whether certificate qualification (above a Certificate II level) is suitable for secondary students. The high cost and risk associated with these higher-level qualifications, along with the belief that these standards require deep immersion and delivery by industry professionals, create uncertainty about their appropriateness within secondary school timetables.⁵⁷

This is not just a problem in Western Australia. Polesol *et al* note that research from ACACA has suggested that the majority of enrolments in VET in schools may be considered pre-vocational or entry level, which they consider a problem because 'they neither provide work-ready employees nor provide significant theoretical content equivalent to the level of senior certificate subjects'.⁵⁸

Legitimate differences of opinion on the suitability of particular VET offerings in schools – and the delivery challenges that flow from these decisions – cannot be solved without addressing the underlying tension about the purpose of VET delivery in schools. We propose that the Department of Education engage with stakeholders on this issue, before seeking to address broader challenges related to the delivery of VET in schools.

This review proposes substantive changes to the way that VET is counted toward ATAR – an issue we consider central to our scope (see section 5.2.3 below). In addition, we are proposing that there

⁵⁵ Targeted consultation with professional sector organisation.

⁵⁶ Targeted consultation with a not-for-profit organisation.

⁵⁷ Submission: Principals' Federation of Western Australia.

⁵⁸ Polesol *et al* 'The Australian Senior Certificates: After 50 years of reforms', *The Australian Educational Researcher* (2021), p573.

be a first principles discussions on the purpose of VET, to take place as a pre-condition to addressing other issues relating to the delivery of VET in schools.

Recommendation 10. *Department of Education and DTWD to hold first principles discussions with key stakeholders, which includes SCSA, schools, the system and sectors, training providers and employers, on the purposes of VET in schools, including for the purposes of student retention and engagement, with a view to establishing a shared understanding. This should be seen as a pre-condition to addressing issues relating to delivery of VET in schools or assessing the suitability of particular offerings. This process should draw on SCSA's work undertaken as part of its WACE refreshment process.*

5 A system built from learning goals

The case for change

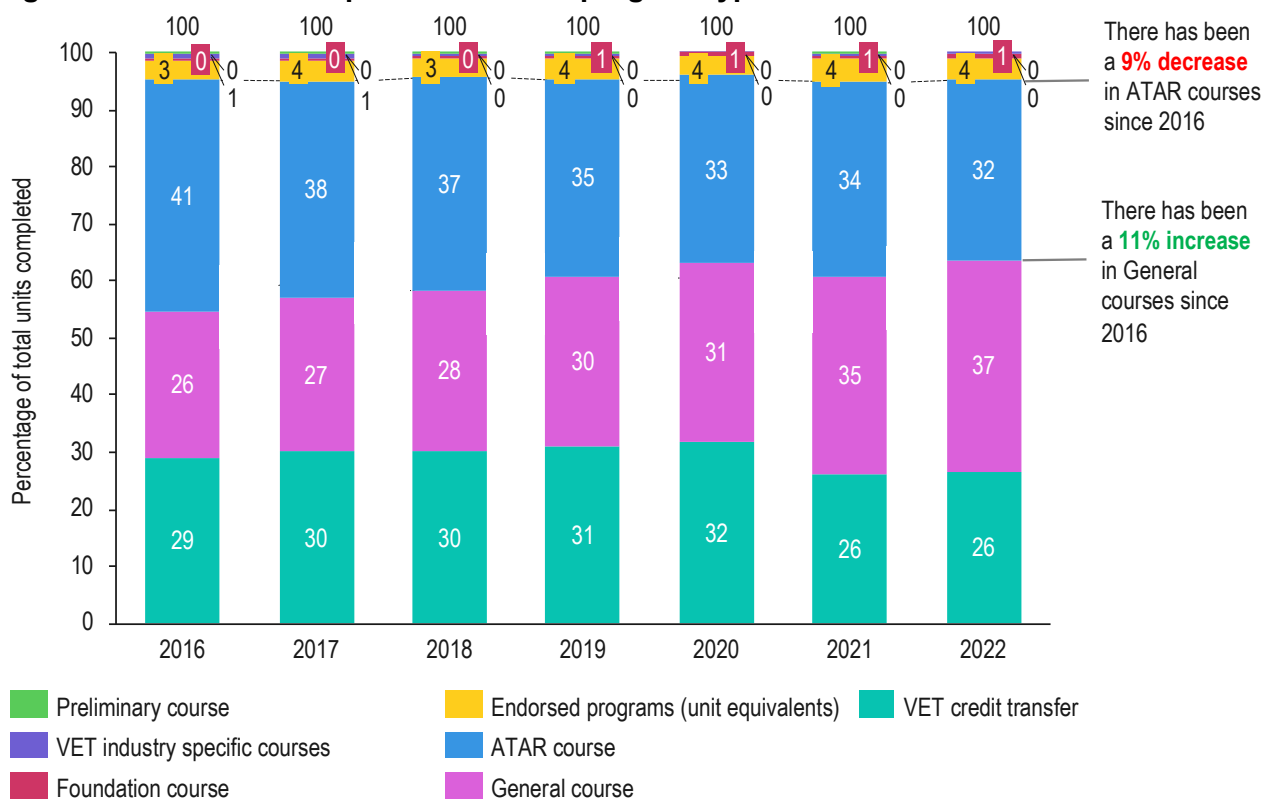
While the senior secondary education system in Western Australia has always had a focus on learning goals, the current system of numerous course and program options (as described in Chapter 2 above),⁵⁹ has evolved over time, adding complications and constraints. The proliferation of course and program types has occurred due to a desire to provide flexibility – that is, ensuring that all students are able to select a pathway that suits their circumstances. While the intention behind this expansion was to ensure that all students could select a pathway that aligned with their individual circumstances, it has led to three unintended consequences that are of concern to stakeholders.

The first is that, under the current system, modes of assessment are now driving course design in some cases. In practice, the key distinction between the different types of courses and programs is the form of assessment required. This is particularly stark in the case of ATAR and General courses, where the former requires an external examination, worth 50% of the mark, and the latter does not. But allowing for a hard distinction between different course types based on mode of assessment has resulted in a situation where assessment requirements drive course design, rather than the other way around. We consider this to be a case of ‘the tail wagging the dog’.

The second is that there has been a notable increase in the popularity of General courses, beyond what was originally intended. This trend toward students taking more General courses, which has accelerated since the introduction of the ‘General pathway’ as an option for WACE attainment in 2020-21, has come at the expense of ATAR and VET courses. The move toward General courses appears to be driven at least in part by student interest in pursuing course and study options that do not involve formal examinations. But stakeholders are concerned that this means at least some students are not selecting pathways that are sufficiently challenging for them and may compromise their long-term educational interests.

⁵⁹ We define ‘learning goals’ as ‘what students are intended to understand, know and be able to do as a result of their education’. Learning goals should serve as a foundation for curriculum design and planning, and assessment to ensure that students achieve the desired levels of knowledge, skills, and understanding for the courses they undertake.

Figure 4: Total units completed of course/program types over time⁶⁰



The third is that, while the system of different course types provides students with choice of pathway, it has resulted in a system where not all course and program options are equally valued. The system appears ‘ATAR-centric’, with VET and General pathways often viewed as lesser options (especially given restrictions on what can contribute to calculation of an ATAR). The existence of discrete streams within the WACE creates complexity, limiting students’ ability to pursue courses in line with their strengths and interests. The ‘ATAR-centric’ system has also resulted in the emergence of university enabling programs, which are serving a useful function, but could benefit from greater standardisation.

In exploring how to address these challenges, we are proposing the following system design principles:

- Learning goals should be a driver for course design and assessment.
- There is a need to embrace different learning goals.

Our specific recommendations on system change flow from these principles.

5.1 Learning goals as a driver for course design and assessment

Assessment of student learning is critical throughout schooling, but particularly during the senior secondary years. Assessment enables the evaluation of student learning, provides a feedback loop for improvement, and underpins recognition and certification of student achievement. Western Australia’s robust approach to assessment of students’ senior secondary performance – through SCSA’s moderation process – is central to the fairness, integrity, and reliability of the senior secondary system.

⁶⁰ Analysis based off data provided by SCSA. SCSA data does not include schools with fewer than 20 full-time WACE eligible Year 12 students and senior campuses/colleges.

While assessment is critical to *understanding* what a student has learned, it should not *determine* what that student should learn. The Western Australian system has evolved in such a way that this is occurring in some cases.

The proliferation of different categories of WACE courses has been undertaken to provide flexibility – that is, ensuring that all students are able to select a pathway of course types that suit their individual circumstances. In practice, the key distinction between course types is the form of assessment required. This is especially true of ATAR courses and General courses: ATAR courses require completion of an externally administered examination, while General courses have an EST set by SCSA.

But allowing for a hard distinction between different course types based on mode of assessment has resulted in a situation where, in some cases, assessment requirements drive curriculum design, rather than the other way around. For example, even ATAR courses in disciplines where there are significant benefits to predominantly relying on alternative modes of assessment (such as Music, and Health Studies and Physical Education Studies) still require formal, end-of-year examinations, worth 50% of a student's grade. This means that the course is designed to ensure that there is sufficient content for a written examination – not based on a first principles assessment of what the intended learning goals are, and what mode of assessment is most appropriate to reflect those goals.

There is no doubt that this stark categorisation of courses based on assessment type is also driving student decisions on what to study. School sector stakeholders report that many students choose not to take ATAR courses specifically because of the exam component, even if they would be interested in studying the content if the exam was not required.⁶¹ This appears to at least partly explain the shift over recent years toward students taking more General courses, and fewer ATAR and VET courses (though the 2020-21 decision to introduce a 'General pathway' as an option for WACE attainment has likely also been significant).⁶² This has led to concern among stakeholders that many students may not be choosing course and study options that are sufficiently challenging.⁶³

We recognise that the current system has evolved into its current form for good reasons, particularly to provide students with pathway flexibility. But in our view, allowing assessment requirements to drive course design is akin to 'the tail wagging the dog'. Instead, we propose that it should be a core principle that *learning goals – not course category – should drive course design and assessment for all courses and programs*.

Recommendation 11. *Western Australia to shift to an approach in which, for any particular course or program, learning goals, rather than course category, should define course design and assessment requirements. This should draw on SCSA's recent and ongoing syllabus review and development work.*

5.1.1 Moving to fit-for-purpose modes of assessment

While system stakeholders are generally agreed on the importance of assessment – particularly, externally validated assessment – we heard mixed views on the role of formal examinations. Some stakeholders, such as SCSA, have argued for the important role formal examinations have to play, noting that '[ATAR] examinations are the only assessments that are common to all students and are important in maintaining high standards of student achievement. They are also important in

⁶¹ Targeted consultation with school sector stakeholders.

⁶² Pathways to Post-School Success review, 'Discussion Paper', <https://www.pathwaysreview.wa.edu.au/review-discussion-paper>.

⁶³ Submissions: Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia; FutureNow.

ensuring that common standards are used across the state in determining students' achievement and in assisting universities in ranking students for university admission purposes'.⁶⁴

We also heard compelling evidence that the Western Australian system currently places too much focus on formal examinations. Many stakeholders raised concerns about the impact of examinations in relation to student wellbeing, stress, and mental health. Submissions draw attention to the negative impact that an exam-centric ATAR model has on student wellbeing.⁶⁵ The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA notes that a one-size-fits-all approach to assessment may not necessarily capture the diverse skills and strengths of every student.⁶⁶ During targeted consultation, some stakeholders proposed a shift to an interest-based learning experience, where knowledge is retained, arguing that information learned for examinations can be 'memorised and then forgotten'.

Increasingly, there is a broader range of available assessment tools that can be used to provide a holistic view of student achievement. As the Learning Creates submission notes 'In the 21st Century, we can recognise achievement in far more sophisticated ways than exams or test scores alone, as these point-in-time assessments do not reflect the breadth and depth of what young people know and can do'.⁶⁷ Examples of the types of assessment that are increasingly being used in schools in Australia and overseas include project-based learning; scored assessments for VET, moderated using pair-wise comparison of student work samples; shorter external assessments in applied courses; oral assessments; performances or demonstrations; and portfolios of student achievement. We have also come a long way in measuring student capabilities within inclusive learning environments, particularly for students with disability and additional needs. Individual Education Plans, also known as Individual Learning Plans, can be used for students with disability or complex learning profiles to allow fine-grained measurement of achievements and changes in capabilities. This is another example of the shift from the 'one-size-fits-all' approach, toward measuring students' capability in an inclusive and equitable way.

In other jurisdictions, there has been a marked shift away from formal examinations, toward using new models of external assessment that consider the best way to test desired capabilities. For example, in South Australia, SACE assessments are made up of investigations, performances, and other assessment tasks, with end-of-year exams worth a maximum of 30% of a student's overall grade.⁶⁸ New Zealand's National Certificate of Educational Achievement system draws from a wide range of external assessment tasks, such as learning portfolios. Moving to a system where learning goals drive course design and assessment, there is opportunity to also ensure that the Western Australian system is drawing on the full suite of diverse, contemporary methods of assessment.

There are clear benefits to diversifying assessment techniques. The first is that it offers the opportunity to better align the testing of competencies with learning objectives and applied techniques. Diversified modes of assessment provide an opportunity to think about the skills we really want students to be able to demonstrate (for example, oral presentations, investigations, skill demonstrations, and portfolio development all have clear applications to real-world contexts). The second is that formal examinations can present a significant barrier to effective participation for some students. This is acute for many students with additional needs who find the formal examination setting challenging, and in some cases exacerbating health and wellbeing concerns. Recognising that not all students thrive under exam conditions, it is therefore crucial to offer a wide

⁶⁴ Submission: School Curriculum and Standards Authority Board.

⁶⁵ Submissions: The State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia; Sevenoaks College.

⁶⁶ Submission: The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

⁶⁷ Submission: Learning Creates Australia.

⁶⁸ Government of South Australia, 'Welcome to the SACE', <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/documents/652891/070100de-122c-48b5-a032-17b584e14c8a>, p1.

range of avenues for demonstrating capability, especially for students with disability or additional learning needs.

This shift to drawing on a wide range of contemporary modes of external assessment should be undertaken while ensuring that current standards are maintained. Determining the utility and reliability of different methods of assessment that can be externally validated should be an ongoing process.

Recommendation 12. *Western Australian senior secondary course and program assessment should draw from a wide range of contemporary assessment tools. SCSA should determine the utility and reliability of different methods of assessment where necessary to ensure that current standards are maintained, drawing on its recent and ongoing syllabus review and development work.*

5.1.2 Opportunities for consolidation of courses

Because the key difference between ATAR and General courses is the mode of assessment, a major change flowing from the principle that learning goals should drive course design and assessment is that the hard distinction between these two course types will dissolve. Dissolving this hard distinction also offers opportunities to reduce the number of courses on offer through consolidation of offerings, especially where there are ‘shadow courses’ (that is, both an ATAR and a General version of the same course).

To illustrate how this dissolution of the hard distinction between the two course types, and resulting consolidation, would work, consider the following example. Under the current system, many performing arts subjects have two WACE courses: an ATAR course and a General course. The course content of these two offerings is driven by the different modes of external assessment (formal examination for the ATAR course; and an EST for the General course). The result is two versions of the same course, with differences in content to accommodate the required mode of assessment. Under our proposed system, course design would start with the question ‘what should be the desired learning goals for a course in this performing arts discipline?’ Course design and assessment decisions would then flow from these learning goals. In many cases, this would create an opportunity to consolidate an existing pair of ATAR and General courses into a single course (for example, while currently there are both ‘ATAR Dance’ and ‘General Dance’ courses, there may only be a need for a single ‘Dance’ course).

There are major benefits to consolidating offerings in this way. We understand that, in part due to the proliferation of different course types, Western Australia is currently delivering a comparatively high number of WACE courses – even when compared to much more populous jurisdictions like Victoria.⁶⁹ This volume increases the burden on the system, schools, and teachers – especially given schools may deliver both ATAR and General versions of the same course. Reducing administrative burden by consolidating shadow courses could help schools to offer a broader range of subjects and improve study options for individual students. This change promises to be especially beneficial for regional and remote schools, and small schools, given the difficulty of providing multiple pathway options to students under these circumstances.

Consolidation of course options doesn’t mean that all courses need to be equally challenging. Offering courses of different degrees of difficulty can be helpful to cater to individual student need and can be effectively validated through scaling. In some areas of study – for example, English, Mathematics and Languages – retaining different versions of the same course will make sense into

⁶⁹ Our analysis of Western Australian course offerings found over 150 discrete offerings across ATAR, General, Foundation and Preliminary courses, compared to ~90 subjects in Victoria: Victorian Government, ‘Study options in year 11 and 12’, <https://www.vic.gov.au/study-options-year-11-and-12>.

the future. Retaining multiple versions of particular courses that are popular as both ATAR and General offerings (especially if the course content is particularly different) may also make sense, especially in the short term.

We are proposing that the consolidation of course options be undertaken in conjunction with the course-by-course review of offerings in Recommendation 4.

Recommendation 13. *As part of the course-by-course review in Recommendation 4 above, SCSA to consolidate existing offerings where it makes sense to do so based on learning goals, drawing on its current WACE refreshment process.*

An additional benefit of removing the hard distinction between ATAR and General courses is the opportunity to move away from the current terminology. Throughout the review, we have heard stakeholder concern about use of the term ‘ATAR’ courses. As one stakeholder suggested during environmental scan consultations, ‘Rename ATAR. Only in Western Australia is it a rank, a pathway and a course!’⁷⁰ TISC’s submission also suggests rebranding ATAR courses to convey to all students that the level of courses is open to all students interested and capable of studying them, irrespective of their study or career aspirations.⁷¹ By removing the hard distinction between ATAR and General courses, there will no longer be a need for this differentiating terminology.

Recommendation 14. *Once courses have been reviewed, SCSA to cease using the terminology of ‘ATAR’ and ‘General’ courses, to reflect the move away from the hard distinction between the two course categories. This should draw on the SCSA’s work undertaken as part of its current WACE refreshment process.*

5.2 Embracing different learning goals

As well as ensuring learning goals are the driver for course design and assessment, we are proposing a complementary system design principle of embracing different learning goals. A system that embraces different learning goals:

- places equal value on different types of courses and programs – regardless of whether they are ‘academic’, vocational, or serve another purpose
- recognises that individual students may have multiple, overlapping learning goals – and we should maximise their opportunities to pursue and be recognised for these
- is inclusive for learners from diverse backgrounds (for example, students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and CALD students)
- seeks to strengthen course and program offerings to deliver on specific learning goals.

Our recommendations in this chapter follow on from the changes proposed in 5.1 above, guided by this principle of embracing different learning goals.

5.2.1 Reducing complexity in WACE requirements

An opportunity that arises from the dissolution of the hard distinction between ATAR and General courses is to reduce complexity in how a WACE is attained. At present, students must meet requirements relating to breadth and depth, an achievement standard and the literacy and numeracy standard. School sector stakeholders find these requirements complex to navigate, and insufficiently flexible to support students to meet their learning goals.

Throughout the review, many stakeholders have raised concerns about the complexity and inflexibility of the WACE requirements. Though it is true that the existence of discrete streams

⁷⁰ Pathways to Post-School Success review, ‘Environmental scan’, <https://www.pathwaysreview.wa.edu.au/environmental-scan>.

⁷¹ Submission: Tertiary Institutions Service Centre.

within the WACE (specifically, the possibility of achieving a WACE through ATAR, General, or VET pathways) means students have some flexibility to choose between pathways, they have little flexibility within the pathway once they have selected it. As the Anglican Schools Commission submission notes, ‘the pass/fail nature of the WACE and the inconsistent achievement requirements between pathways makes the selection of the “correct” pathway high stakes’.

Stakeholders also stressed that while the existence of multiple streams provides flexibility at a system level, this is not the reality on the ground in many locations. Many schools are limited by resourcing, determining what course and program options they can offer, particularly for small schools, and those in regional and remote areas. This can result in timetabling issues (for example, students struggling to schedule VET requirements alongside attendance for other courses), and students having limited choice over their study options in practice.⁷²

“There are flexibilities in WACE but capacity for schools to recognise these are sometimes limited.” – Environmental scan stakeholder

The existence of multiple discrete pathways also leads to perceptions that pathways are not equally valuable. Students providing feedback to the Expert Panel described the perceived divide between students undertaking an ATAR pathway and those undertaking a General pathway, and the stigma associated with ‘dropping down to General’. Stakeholders raised concerns that the current model is ATAR-centric, and that other WACE pathways are less valued by schools, parents, and even the Department of Education.⁷³

The structure of the current system, with its multiple streams, has also created perverse incentives – both for schools and for students – which appears to have resulted in students selecting courses of study that are not sufficiently challenging. While median ATAR has been removed from the list of school KPIs, there is still concern that schools are very focused on this number. The SCSA Board’s submission notes that some of the factors influencing student decisions on study options include median ATAR being used as a measure of school performance; and the practice of schools counselling students likely to achieve ATARs below 70 out of ATAR courses.

Students also face perverse incentives due to the structure of the system. The ‘pass/fail’ nature of the WACE means that some students are avoiding ATAR courses due to concern about getting D grades, which would mean not meeting the achievement standard of ‘14 C grades’ and thereby not achieving their WACE.

Many stakeholders were eager to see a more flexible learning model to accommodate students’ different learning goals, interests, and life circumstances.⁷⁴ Some suggested moving to single flexible approaches, such as a credit point system, to allow students to ‘bank’ a variety of learning experience to meet senior secondary graduation – to give them more options and flexibility, and better cater to individual student circumstances.

The University of Western Australia recommended drawing inspiration from the SACE, which offers students flexibility in learning pathways by allowing them to choose a range of subjects and tailor their studies to align with their interests and career goals. Its submission argued that increasing the flexibility of the WACE system could allow students to personalise their learning based on their interests and ambitions, including a wider range of subject choices and recognition of non-traditional learning experiences.⁷⁵ Taking such an approach in Western Australia could mean that

⁷² Targeted consultation with sector stakeholders.

⁷³ Submission: Principals’ Federation of Western Australia.

⁷⁴ Submissions: Individual (Parent, teacher, community member employee); Individual (School leader); University of Western Australia; Fogarty Foundation; FutureNow.

⁷⁵ Submission: University of Western Australia.

students can be recognised for a more diverse range of achievements (for example, recognition of on-country experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students).

In their review of Australia's SSCE, Polesol *et al* describe a 'rigid and highly politicised model of individual senior certificates which seem to lack a clearly articulated purpose and which represent a complex maze of rules and regulations adapted over the years to accommodate a range of needs'.⁷⁶ In many ways, this description is true of the system that has evolved in Western Australia. Following on from the dissolution of the hard distinction between ATAR and General courses, we are proposing a redesign of the WACE requirements to ensure that they are simple, reflect equality between different course and program types, enable students to be credited for as much of their learning as possible, encourage students to select study options that will challenge and engage them, and allow for greater tailoring of a course and study program to meet individual student circumstances.

Recommendation 15. *Ensure that median ATAR is not used as a measure of school performance, including removing it from the school dashboard used in Department of Education schools.*

Recommendation 16. *As a temporary measure and drawing on the work undertaken through the WACE refreshment process, SCSA to explore whether D grades in ATAR courses could be credited toward WACE achievement, to counteract students avoiding ATAR subjects on the basis that D grades do not meet WACE achievement requirements.*

Recommendation 17. *SCSA to review the WACE achievement requirements, with a view to reducing complexity and increasing the ability for students to tailor their course and program options, and allow for more of their course and program achievements to be counted toward the WACE (for example, removing barriers to mixing and matching course and program types, removing requirements to study from both 'List A and 'List B' courses to fulfil breadth requirements).*

5.2.2 Expanding what counts toward an ATAR

While the ATAR is a national ranking, states are responsible for determining what can be counted toward it. At present in Western Australia, the ATAR calculation is based on a student's four best scaled scores. Only ATAR courses (or equivalent) can contribute to the calculation of an ATAR, and a student must complete the final examination, worth 50% of the course grade. Other states take a different approach, allowing courses to be counted toward an ATAR through some other form of externally validated assessment (not necessarily a written examination).⁷⁷

Dissolving the hard distinction between ATAR and General courses creates an opportunity to explore which courses and programs can be counted toward an ATAR, with a view to expanding these. Expanding the number and type of courses and programs that can count toward an ATAR would enable the system to recognise a broader range of student achievement. It could also have benefits for breaking down the perceived 'ATAR-centric' nature of the system, relieve timetabling pressures, and help students to make study choices that match with their individual learning goals.

For some students, the ability to count a broader range of achievements toward an ATAR might mean they can 'keep their options open', even if they are not sure whether tertiary study is for them. This may be particularly important for students with limited exposure to information on post-school pathways or suitable career role models (for example, students in regional or remote areas;

⁷⁶ Polesol *et al* 'The Australian Senior Certificates: After 50 years of reforms', *The Australian Educational Researcher* (2021), p581.

⁷⁷ For example, in South Australia not all subjects that count toward an ATAR have formal written examinations; most other states allow VET courses without written examinations to count toward an ATAR.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, CALD students, students that are the first in their family to attend tertiary education; students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and those that attend smaller schools). Over time, this may support greater diversity in students accessing post-school pathways.

At a technical level, enabling a broader range of student achievement to count toward the ATAR means increasing the number of course and program types that are scored, rather than just graded. At present, some types of courses and programs are numerically 'scored' (out of 100), while other course and program types receive letter grades (A-E). For a course or program to count toward the calculation of an ATAR, a numerical score is required in most cases. Expanding the number of courses and programs that are scored, rather than just graded, is therefore an important step toward enabling a broader range of offerings to be counted toward the calculation of an ATAR.

Recommendation 18. *SCSA to increase the number of courses that have a numerical score as well as letter grade reported.*

Recommendation 19. *SCSA and TISC to work to expand the types of courses and programs that can contribute to an ATAR, with a view to expanding what students are able to have recognised through an ATAR.*

5.2.3 Recognition of VET toward ATAR

The most pressing issue to resolve regarding ATAR calculation is recognition of VET achievement toward an ATAR. A clear theme that has emerged during this review is the need for better alignment between vocational and 'academic' education offerings. VET pathways are often stigmatised and seen as a 'lesser option' than academic pathways. This issue is not unique to Western Australia. Other jurisdictions, both in Australia and overseas, have sought to address this issue in various ways. For example, Victoria has recently ended the formal bifurcation between academic and vocational pathways by introducing a vocational major within the Victorian Certificate of Education; and in England, 'T-Levels' have been introduced as a new, high-quality vocational education offering.⁷⁸

The divide between vocational and 'academic' pathways has several unfortunate consequences:

- Academic pathways are often seen as more valuable, and vocational pathways receive less care and resourcing.
- The distinction obscures the fact that academic pathways should also have 'vocational' elements, such as appropriate opportunities for applied learning; and linkages with industry and possible future careers.
- Systems that formally stream students into vocational and 'academic' pathways do not allow students to have diverse interests, and some may wish to undertake some VET study to supplement an otherwise 'academic' study load.

“Why are vocational pathways called alternative pathways? Why are they considered the poor cousin to ATAR?” – Environmental scan stakeholder

All Australian jurisdictions recognise VET courses in their respective SSCEs. Except for Western Australia and Tasmania, every other jurisdiction allows at least some VET offerings to contribute to an ATAR, though practice differs significantly in how the contribution is calculated.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Pathways to Post-School Success review, 'Discussion Paper', <https://www.pathwaysreview.wa.edu.au/review-discussion-paper>.

⁷⁹ NCVER, 'VET for secondary school students: a research synthesis', https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0047/9671996/VET-for-secondary-school-students-a-research-synthesis-F.pdf, p12.

| State jurisdiction | Can VET contribute toward ATAR? | Method of VET contribution toward ATAR score |
|---|---|---|
| ACT ⁸⁰ | Yes, where the course has been accredited by the Board of Senior Secondary Studies as preparing students for higher education (classified as 'T/V'). | The completion or partial completion of a VET qualification within a T/V course does not contribute to the calculation of an ATAR – rather, final course scores generated from A-E assessments. Final course scores following the completion of the ACT Scaling Test may be used in the calculation of an ATAR. |
| New South Wales ⁸¹ | From 2025, 240-hour VET courses that are part of an Industry Curriculum Framework can contribute to the ATAR, and only if the optional exam has been taken. | Calculated based on marks in the optional exam. However, the normal rules still apply – a student's ATAR will be calculated on 2 units of English plus their results in the next best 8 units, so the VET result will count if it is in the student's next best 8 units. |
| Queensland ⁸² | Completed VET courses can be used as one of the five inputs into a student's ATAR. | Each VET qualification will have a single scaled score that can be included in the ATAR calculation. Relevant VET qualification levels for the ATAR are Certificate III, Certificate IV, and Diploma. |
| South Australia (includes Northern Territory) ⁸³ | VET courses can be considered as Recognised Studies in the ATAR calculation if they are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate III level (or higher) in the AQF • Recognised in the SACE at Stage 2 for at least 10 credits. <p>Recognised Studies can only count to a maximum of 20 credits in an ATAR.</p> | The South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC) calculates the ATAR for SACE and Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training students who qualify for a university aggregate. SATAC assigns scaled score equivalents to Recognised Studies. For VET studies, it takes the average of a students' best 70 credits of tertiary admissions subjects to give a scaled score. |
| Tasmania | VET cannot contribute toward an ATAR. | |

⁸⁰ ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies, 'Guide to Vocational Education and Training in ACT Colleges', https://www.bsas.act.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/512932/A_Guide_to_Vocational_Education_and_Training_in_ACT_Senior_Secondary_Schools.pdf, updated January 2023.

⁸¹ NSW Government Department of Education, 'ATAR changes – student information', <https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/parents-and-carers/pathways-after-school/atar-changes-student#:~:text=Only%20240%2Dhour%20VET%20courses,can%20contribute%20to%20the%20ATAR.>, updated 5 December 2023.

⁸² Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre, 'All about your ATAR: A guide for Queensland Year 11 and 12 student', <https://www.qtac.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/All-About-Your-ATAR-Nov-21.pdf>, 2021, p17.

⁸³ South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre, 'Recognised Studies', <https://www.satac.edu.au/recognised-studies>.

| State jurisdiction | Can VET contribute toward ATAR? | Method of VET contribution toward ATAR score |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Victoria ⁸⁴ | Scored Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) VET courses with a Units 3 and 4 sequence can be included in the calculation of ATAR. | Scored VCE VET programs provide a study score, achieved through school-assessed coursework and an externally set examination. This contributes to the ATAR, either as one of a student's primary four studies or as a fifth or sixth study increment. Non-scored VCE VET programs may contribute toward the calculation of the ATAR in some circumstances. |

There is complexity associated with recognition of VET studies toward an ATAR – specifically, determining how the VET contribution is factored into the ATAR calculation. This can be a particular challenge given VET courses may not be scored. While some system stakeholders consider moving to scored assessments in VET courses to be possible in Western Australia, such a move would need to be supported with appropriate resourcing.⁸⁵

Despite this complexity, the table above makes clear that there are numerous options that can be employed to ensure that VET achievement can count toward an ATAR. To operationalise this shift, SCSA could also consider a staged approach. For example, adopting the South Australian approach in the short-term would provide an immediate avenue for students to see their VET achievements reflected in the ATAR, facilitating early recognition of their skills and enhancing their opportunities for pathways post-senior secondary. Over time, Western Australia could then transition towards a system like Queensland's single-scaled score methodology, given this will require more extensive consideration and planning (though in the long run, this would demonstrate commitment and promise to ensure equitable treatment of all students across diverse educational pathways). SCSA could also consider conducting a pilot of the Queensland single-scaled score methodology for a select number of courses, to build understanding on the best approach for Western Australia.

Enabling VET to be counted toward an ATAR is a critical change that is needed to bring Western Australia into line with the majority of other states and ensure that the system maximises opportunities for students to have their achievements formally recognised. We welcome SCSA's current efforts to explore how VET could contribute to ATAR calculation and would like to see this recommendation implemented as soon as possible.

Recommendation 20. SCSA to commit to working with DTWD and TISC to enable as many VET qualifications as possible to contribute to the combined score from which an ATAR is calculated; and to implement this change as quickly as possible, drawing on SCSA's current WACE refreshment process.

5.2.4 Strengthening university enabling programs

A category of programs that has been of great interest to stakeholders throughout the review is university-developed 'enabling programs' (see Section 2.6 above). The emergence of enabling programs is part of a broader trend toward universities 'wanting to diversify their campuses...

⁸⁴ Victorian Government, 'Study options in year 11 and 12', <https://www.vic.gov.au/study-options-year-11-and-12>; VCAA, 'VCE VET Programs', <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/studentguides/getvet/Pages/VCEVETPrograms.aspx#:~:text=Scored%20VCE%20VET%20programs%20provide,fifth%20or%20sixth%20study%20increment>.

⁸⁵ Targeted consultation with WA Government stakeholder.

looking for different ways to identify, attract and support young people on non-ATAR pathways'.⁸⁶ While different types of enabling programs exist, we have focused on those that provide an alternate pathway to university for senior secondary students ('school-based enabling programs').⁸⁷

Enrolments in enabling programs have increased significantly in recent years. Studies have reinforced the effectiveness of enabling programs as outperforming other pathways to higher education for students from non-traditional or equity cohorts.⁸⁸ Multiple school sector stakeholders told us that the academic writing skills components of enabling programs were more useful than the ATAR English course as preparation for university.

"The enabling program was my Uni pathway as there is no other real alternative to University here." Environmental scan stakeholder

Some stakeholders raised concerns with the way enabling programs are operating. Stakeholders noted that while the courses worked well to get students to university that would not otherwise have been able to attend, there is no data to demonstrate how successful they are once they get there. Both Curtin University and the University of Notre Dame Australia called for greater commonality across enabling programs, with the University of Notre Dame Australia suggesting that universities work together to benchmark their offerings, ensuring parity and addressing any potential disparities.⁸⁹ TISC called for students to complete at least one ATAR course concurrently with any school-based enabling program.⁹⁰

Stakeholder feedback on enabling programs indicates that these programs are largely delivering on their intended learning goals, and that these may be a particularly important pathway for particular cohorts (for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; students in regional and remote areas). We note that there are opportunities to strengthen enabling programs, to ensure they are working well for students that elect to pursue them.

Recommendation 21. *Universities to strengthen collection and analysis of data on students that accessed universities through enabling programs, to contribute to the evidence base on the effectiveness of these programs and how universities can support students that elect to use these pathways.*

The SCSA Board's submission notes that some universities are increasingly requesting it to endorse university-developed enabling programs. There appears to be a role for SCSA to play to provide quality assurance, ensure there is commonality across these offerings, and improve transparency. We propose that SCSA should play such a role, especially given the increasing prominence of enabling programs offered by universities in Western Australia.

Recommendation 22. *SCSA to play a role in establishing and moderating achievement standards in university-developed enabling programs, as a way of ensuring transparency, parity and quality and increasing consistency among these offerings. This should draw from SCSA's current WACE refreshment process.*

⁸⁶ Learning Creates Australia 'Learning Beyond Limits: Insights and learnings from visionary schools and communities working toward a fit-for-purpose learning system', 2023, p6.

⁸⁷ 'School based enabling programs' are not a separate course category but are a subset of Endorsed Programs.

⁸⁸ Submission: The University of Notre Dame Australia.

⁸⁹ Submissions: Curtin University; The University of Notre Dame Australia.

⁹⁰ We have not included this as a recommendation, given the proposed dissolution of the hard distinction between ATAR and General courses.

6 More fully recognising student diversity and achievement

The case for change

“We have a good system that caters for 80% but need greater flexibilities and to cater better for the other 20%” – Environmental scan stakeholder

While the existing system in Western Australia has key strengths, there is a clear need to more fully recognise student diversity and achievement. Students are diverse, as are the achievements throughout their senior secondary education – but too often our tools for recognising student achievement are too narrow to capture this broader picture. Stakeholders have delivered a clear message that we need a system that recognises and celebrates the ‘whole student’, beyond pure academics.

As discussed in section 4.1.2 above, it is important that any improvements and changes made to the senior secondary education system in Western Australia reflect students’ interests and ambitions. They must be grounded in a strengths-based approach that values and celebrates the achievements of all students; and sees the diversity of students in Western Australia as a source of strength rather than a deficit. It is critical that the system caters to the diversity of Western Australia’s senior secondary population, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- students with disability or additional learning needs
- students in regional and remote areas
- CALD students
- students who do not complete Year 12
- students in low-socioeconomic areas.

Many of the earlier recommendations in this report will result in structural shifts that will enable the school system to more fully recognise student diversity and achievement – for example:

- increasing the flexibility of WACE and ATAR requirements, to better reflect individual student learning goals
- broadening the range of available assessment tools, noting that not all students excel in formal examination settings
- strengthening enabling programs, given the importance of these offerings for diverse cohorts.

The recommendations in this chapter build on the structural shifts recommended earlier in this report, but go one step further, and identify areas in which further targeted interventions are required to ensure student diversity and achievement are recognised.

6.1 Recording student achievement

In Australia as well as other jurisdictions, there is emerging interest in more holistic recognition of a student’s school achievement, beyond just their school grades or their ATAR. As Learning Creates argues, ‘we know paths to further learning and work are becoming more flexible, yet still we define success at the end of schooling by a narrow measure that excludes more young people than it celebrates’.⁹¹ Criticism of the prominent role that ATAR plays as an indicator of student

⁹¹ Learning Creates Australia ‘Learning Beyond Limits: Insights and learnings from visionary schools and communities working toward a fit-for-purpose learning system’, 2023, p6, p3.

achievement has been particularly robust, especially given fewer students are now solely relying on their ATAR for university entry.⁹²

This debate has led to the emergence of alternative credentialing systems, such as the Big Picture. The Big Picture is currently implemented in 55 schools in Australia, including 16 schools in Western Australia, where it places students at the centre of decisions regarding what, how, and when they learn. The intent of the Big Picture is that learning is personalised around each student's passions and interests, linked to five mandated learning goals. Assessment focuses on learning and attainment of complex competencies both in school and in the community. The approach combines academic coursework with real-world internships, enabling students to plan tailored pathways to future employment, study, or enterprise. Some stakeholders were enthusiastic about the potential of such alternative credentialing systems. The Big Picture was described by a group of public school principals currently implementing the program as a 'different way of doing school that works for all students, including where mainstream school has failed to fully engage them in their learning'.⁹³

The ATAR system – and the debate around it – exist at the national level, and clearly will continue to do for some time. We don't consider it appropriate for Western Australia to seek to overhaul its approach to these issues in isolation (for example, by moving away from using the ATAR). That said, we anticipate that debate around the role of ATAR and interest in alternative credentials such as the Big Picture will continue to grow. We propose that Western Australia should remain engaged in the national conversation relating to recognition of student achievement, with a view to enabling Western Australia to evolve its approach over time as required – especially if we see more pronounced shifts in other jurisdictions.

There may be benefits for particular school communities and groups of students to allow alternative credentialing approaches to be used within the existing system (as is currently the case with the IB Diploma Programme, which is an alternative that can be used to achieve an ATAR in Western Australia). But we propose that this be done on the basis of clear, transparent requirements to ensure validity and reliability of such alternative approaches. Developing and communicating a clear set of criteria for considering alternative credentialing approaches would be a sound way of 'future-proofing' the Western Australian system to adapt as new approaches become available.

Recommendation 23. *SCSA to develop a transparent set of criteria against which emerging credentialing approaches will be assessed.*

6.1.1 Enhancing the WASSA

Our review of reforms in other jurisdictions found a shift toward increasing the range of information included on school completion certificates. Traditional school leaver certificates, which reflect only course completion and grades, are increasingly seen as too narrow a snapshot of what a student has achieved throughout their schooling. Many stakeholders were optimistic about the possibility of reflecting a broader range of student achievement through Western Australia's existing school completion certificate – the WASSA. In fact, stakeholder interest in the value of the WASSA as a standalone tool suggests that it may currently be underutilised.

The WASSA does already capture a range of information other than academic grades (for example, achievement of exhibitions and awards; and number of community service hours undertaken, if reported by the school). But stakeholders believe there is room for further

⁹² Education Council, 'Looking to the future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training'; Pilcher S and Torii K, 'Crunching the number: Exploring the use and usefulness of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)', Mitchell Institute, March 2018.

⁹³ Submission: A group of 12 public schools using the Big Picture Learning design.

enhancement. As the University of Western Australia submission notes: ‘school leaving certificates can be enhanced to recognise and communicate a broader range of specific skills suited for work, employment, and university access more effectively. This may include highlighting practical skills, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, and creativity, alongside academic achievements. This can ensure that certificates reflect the holistic development and capabilities of students’.

Capturing a broader picture of student achievement is seen as particularly important for communicating competencies and skills to future employers, enabling students to develop a stronger sense of their own skills, attributes, and areas for further development. More holistic records of student achievement may be a particularly beneficial tool for students seeking to navigate direct entry to the workforce, given the greater need to communicate existing skills to employers.

Moving towards a more holistic approach to assessing achievement, rather than solely focusing on scores and grades, benefits everyone – but is particularly crucial for students with disability, whose achievements may not be reflected through traditional metrics. As Kiind’s submission notes, ‘Many students have capabilities and knowledge that is not reflected in results, due to poorly designed assessments... Educators need to think creatively about how students can demonstrate their learning, beyond written assignments and exams’.

We strongly support SCSA’s efforts as part of its WACE refreshment to explore expanded reporting on the WASSA, which includes assessment and reporting on students’ digital literacy skills and general capabilities. We propose an approach that goes beyond this, increasing the types of student achievement that can be recorded for the WASSA to provide a more holistic picture of individual student achievement.

Recommendation 24. *SCSA to explore expanding the information included in the WASSA, in order to reflect a more holistic picture of student achievement, drawing on the current WACE refreshment process. This could include listing the achievement of alternative programs subject to further exploration of the reliability and validity of assessments.*

Currently, all students receive a WASSA at the end of Year 12 (as opposed to a WACE, which is awarded/not awarded). We believe that there is a missed opportunity to provide WASSAs to students who leave school prior to the end of Year 12. There are several key reasons to do so.

First, issuing WASSAs to early school leavers enables students that leave school prior to the end of Year 12 to receive a record of their achievements and skills. This may be particularly important for those students who are leaving school to enter the workforce directly and need to be able to communicate their skills to employers. Being issued with a WASSA may encourage students to reflect on the skills they have gained through their time in education, rather than feeling that they are graduating with ‘nothing to show’ for their time in school.

Second, it is a way to celebrate student achievement. As Kiind’s submission notes, ‘high school completion is an important rite of passage’, and there are good reasons to celebrate students regardless of their performance, attendance or when they finish their schooling (including if this is in Year 11 or earlier). Providing WASSAs creates an opportunity to host graduation celebrations for students leaving school in Year 10 and 11 – an opportunity to extend recognition of learning that may be particularly profound for students with disability and their families. As school system stakeholders stressed during targeted consultations, a student may be a ‘success story’ even if they didn’t finish Year 12.

Recommendation 25. *SCSA to make WASSAs available to students who leave school prior to the completion of Year 12, in order for all students to leave school with a record of achievement.*

6.1.2 Learner profile

A potential reform that goes beyond adding to the categories of information available on the WASSA is moving to a 'learner profile' approach. The concept of a 'learner profile' has emerged in acknowledgement of the need to move beyond traditional graded assessment scores. Learner profiles typically encompass a broader range of information about a student's achievements at school, including skills, interests, and experiences. They offer a more comprehensive insight into a student's learning journey than what is available from conventional information on course marks.

Proponents of learner profiles argue that benefits include identifying developmental needs, allowing teachers to personalise learning experiences to address individual requirements. It also helps students to understand themselves and make informed choices by providing a richer understanding of their strengths and progress across various subject areas. Stakeholders argued that, in Western Australia, learner profiles could contribute to student wellbeing, as they are a way of relieving the pressure of Year 12 exams. They are also seen as having the potential to increase transparency within the education system, and aligning with the needs of industry, higher education, and vocational providers.⁹⁴

The idea of learner profiles has been steadily gaining traction. The *Shergold Report* argued that all students should leave school with a learner profile, 'identifying the range of their skills, knowledge and experiences... gained inside and outside of school'.⁹⁵ South Australia has undertaken a Learner Profile Project, which aimed to develop a valid and reliable assessment system. But there are challenges in moving to a learner profile approach – mainly, questions around how to reflect this broader array of information on a student's performance in a way that is fair and consistent and does not add an unmanageable administrative burden – especially for teachers and other school staff. The SCSA Board argues that designing a profile to capture every aspect of an individual learner may compromise its integrity as an assessment tool.⁹⁶

We believe that learner profiles have considerable merit – though the complexities associated with moving to such a system mean this reform would need to be pursued over a longer time horizon. For this reason, we recommend taking a phased approach: expanding the information contained on the WASSA as an immediate priority, while continuing to investigate what would be required to move toward a reliable, valid, and robust system of learner profiles over time.

Recommendation 26. *SCSA to investigate moving to learner profiles over the longer term, in order to reflect a more holistic picture of student achievement, drawing on SCSA's current WACE refreshment process.*

6.1.3 Complex competencies

Within the context of the shift toward seeking to measure student achievement more holistically, there is particular interest in measuring specific capabilities or competencies – which we will refer to as 'complex competencies'. The idea is that there are particular evidence-based skills and abilities that go beyond academic knowledge and are essential for various aspects of modern life.

For example, Melbourne Assessment, a division of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, has developed a suite of 'complex competencies' through research-based assessment tools, credentials, and services that go beyond subject-specific knowledge. Students are evaluated based on their application of these skills in real-world scenarios. The skills are:

- *Acting ethically*: acting in a way that is guided by moral principles (what we ought to do) in any situation.

⁹⁴ Submissions: Bob Hawke College; Anglican Schools Commission.

⁹⁵ Education Council, 'Looking to the future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training', p13.

⁹⁶ Submission: School Curriculum and Standards Authority Board.

- *Active citizenship*: contributing to the wellbeing of a community.
- *Agency in learning*: knowing what to learn, how to learn it and who to learn it from.
- *Communication*: the ability to transmit, receive and interpret information, ideas, arguments, feelings and beliefs to support the purposes of an individual or group.
- *Collaboration*: working with others to achieve a common goal.
- *Quality thinking*: thinking things through to achieve better outcomes for yourself or your group.

Complex competencies can either be assessed through standalone modes of assessment or integrated into course delivery and assessment.

We consider complex competencies to be another emerging reform that merits serious exploration. So as to not increase the assessment burden on students and schools, we propose focusing this exploration on how complex competencies could be assessed through course content, rather than through standalone assessment tasks.

Recommendation 27. *SCSA to explore how complex competencies could be delivered, assessed, and certified through course content, and reflected on the WASSA (in the short term) or Learner Profiles (in the longer term), drawing on SCSA’s current WACE refreshment process.*

6.2 Students with disability or additional learning needs

It has become clear throughout this review that more needs to be done to ensure that Western Australia’s senior secondary system can support students with disability or additional learning needs. Targeted consultation stakeholders told us that there is a general feeling that students with special educational needs are not served well at present. The Kiind submission notes that the experience of students with disability or chronic conditions in senior secondary schools involved low expectations of student capabilities, inadequate adjustments for successful educational attainment, and negative social experiences.

We believe many of the whole-of-system recommendations in this report will be particularly beneficial for students with disability or additional learning needs. For example, the recommendations on increasing flexibility of WACE/ATAR requirements, enhancing the WASSA (see above) and the literacy and numeracy requirement (see below). Beyond this, the review identified specific opportunities to strengthen the system in order to better support students with disability or additional learning needs.

6.2.1 Strengthening reasonable adjustments and special consideration

“For those students with disabilities who are academic, they do not fit systems such as SCSA and are traumatised by the lack of understanding and this leads to not reaching / fulfilling potential”
[Stakeholder quoted in Kiind submission]

For students with disability or additional learning needs, the way the existing senior secondary system is delivered and assessed can be too rigid to allow students to engage to the best of their ability. This is true despite the fact that obligations of education and training providers regarding reasonable adjustments are clearly set out in the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, in order to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability.

Kiind's submission provided tangible examples of the types of reasonable adjustments/special consideration that could make a difference for the students they support, calling for greater flexibility around:⁹⁷

- permission to use devices in class
- additional accommodations relating to external final exams
- online classroom links for children who struggle to attend class in person
- flexibility around deadlines
- relaxation around attendance requirements
- offering alternative methods of showing competencies
- ability for self-paced learning so students with chronic conditions can manage their study around treatments.

In addition to ensuring students have access to reasonable adjustments throughout their schooling, there is a particular need to ensure there is sufficient access to special consideration arrangements relating to examinations. On this point, we believe it would be beneficial to expand schools' capacity to validate arrangements at a school level, without deferring to SCSA, in some cases (especially where the assessment isn't leading to a ranked score).

We see a strong case for ensuring that the current systems in place with regard to reasonable adjustments and special consideration are sufficiently inclusive to support different kinds of learners. This ensures more students can be supported to undertake their preferred courses of study and complete the relevant assessments accordingly.

Recommendation 28. School system and sectors to review reasonable adjustments in the context of senior secondary pathways, to identify opportunities to strengthen inclusive practices.

Recommendation 29. SCSA to undertake a review of special consideration arrangements, especially in context of new modes of assessment, with a view to expanding schools' capacity to validate arrangements that are supportive of learners with disability, chronic conditions, or additional learning needs. For clarity, this should include what opportunities there are for schools to make decisions around special considerations (for example, with regard to timing; rest breaks etc). This should build on SCSA's *Equitable Access to Assessment Policy and Guidelines* noting that SCSA has recently undertaken reviews of special considerations for students which have informed this Policy and Guidelines.

6.2.2 Improved access to equitable pathways

While the Western Australian system provides courses that are intended for students with disability and additional learning needs, there are issues around equity of access to these courses. As the Kiind submission notes, 'We have learned that many schools do not offer Foundation or Preliminary courses because of lower demand/smaller numbers of students requiring these... This unequally disadvantages (and arguably discriminates against) students with disability, for whom these courses were designed to assist, limiting student choices and their access to the most appropriate educational pathway for their individual needs and strengths.' This is confirmed as shown in Figure 1 in Chapter 2, which outlines the course and program types delivered by schools.

Lack of availability of Foundation and Preliminary courses may be a particular concern in contexts where schools are struggling to deliver a full suite of pathway options due to resourcing constraints or staff shortages (for example, smaller schools; and schools in regional and remote areas). Limited availability of suitable course options can severely constrain the ability of students with disability to select pathways that are suitable for them and reflect their learning goals.

⁹⁷ We note that SCSA's *Equitable Access to Assessment Policy* currently allows for reasonable adjustments relating to some of the examples listed.

Recommendation 30. *School system and sectors to work with schools to enhance opportunities of access for Foundation and Preliminary courses. In many cases, this will be a question of resourcing.*

Stakeholders thought that there might be an opportunity to develop a new learning offering similar to the Life Skills courses in New South Wales. Life Skills courses, offered by the New South Wales Education Standards Authority, are provided in Year 11 and 12 for students with disability. They are designed to provide students with practical skills and experiences that go beyond traditional academic learning. Life Skills courses focus on developing competencies related to daily living, personal care, social interactions, communication, and community participation.⁹⁸ Life Skills courses can be used to meet the requirements for a Record of School Achievement and Higher School Certificate (though they do not count toward an ATAR). The development of an equivalent in Western Australia could improve the experience of some students with disability by creating a targeted, relevant education offering.

Recommendation 31. *SCSA to explore the possibility of developing a new offering for students with disability, similar to the New South Wales Life Skills course.*

Preliminary courses do not count toward the WACE, while Foundation courses can contribute to the WACE in combination with ATAR and/or General, or a VET qualification. This raises the question of whether a new certification would be desirable for students with disability for whom the WACE is not a suitable course of study. Through its WACE refresh, SCSA is currently exploring the possibility of development of a senior secondary certificate for students with a recognised disability.

Victoria has recently introduced the Victorian Pathways Certificate as an inclusive Year 11 and 12 certificate, designed to meet the needs of students who, for various reasons, are not able or ready to undertake the VCE. The Victorian Pathways Certificate is benchmarked at Australian Qualifications Framework Level 1 and is not recognised as a senior secondary certificate of education.

Stakeholder views on the need for new approach to certification vary. Some stakeholders support the idea of a new certification pathway for students with disability. One submission suggested that the Western Australian Government explore the feasibility of developing an inclusive alternative WACE program that “recognises and certifies students’ abilities and achievements throughout their secondary schooling, aligning them with their peers”, which provides a “holistic representation of their capabilities” thus “bridge[ing] the gap in recognition and certification”.⁹⁹ Another submission also argues that “there also need to be more equitable opportunities for Year 12 Certification for students with disability”.

In contrast, stakeholder groups with a particular focus on supporting students with disability did not call for this change. One disability-focused stakeholder group we spoke to did not see a ‘separate certificate’ as desirable, but favoured a solution that is ‘comparable, elegant and simple’, and doesn’t create additional bureaucracy. Kiind’s submission specifically notes the need for equitable access to tailored pathways but does not go so far as to recommend a change to certification arrangements (instead calling for better transition planning for students with disability in senior secondary).

The Final Report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability noted that there are different views on what amounts to inclusive education

⁹⁸ Education Standards NSW, ‘Life Skills’, <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/diversity-in-learning/special-education/life-skills>.

⁹⁹ Submission: Chamber of Commerce Industry Western Australia.

for students with disability.¹⁰⁰ As the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA noted: ‘On one view, special or segregated education settings amounts to segregation of people with disability and should be closed. Another view considers that special educational settings does not amount to segregation, but that educational authorities should ensure students with complex support needs engage regularly with their peers in mainstream schools in a variety of contexts.’¹⁰¹

We are supportive of the development of a fit-for-purpose certification for students with disability or additional learning needs, as long as this is auspiced within, and adopts the nomenclature of, the WACE (for example, a ‘WACE Pathways Certificate’ or a ‘WACE Access’). There are important reasons for this – including that some courses and programs would be available to students pursuing either version of the WACE (such as Foundation courses) and ensuring that any new certification arrangements introduced for students with disability are not viewed as a lesser pathway. We acknowledge that the standards required to achieve this qualification would need to be suited to the students that are intended to complete it, and that these would be different to the standards of the existing WACE pathway.

This is a complex reform, and one we must get right if any new approach to certification is to suit the needs of students with disability. For this reason, we are proposing that SCSA undertake extensive consultation with students with disability, their families, schools, and other stakeholders in order to determine what a new approach to certification could look like in practice.

Recommendation 32. *SCSA to develop an additional level within the WACE to accommodate students with a recognised disability, following a period of consultation with students with disability, their families, schools, and other stakeholders. This should draw on SCSA’s work undertaken as part of its current WACE refreshment process, and which reflects similar offerings in other jurisdictions.*

6.3 The literacy and numeracy requirement

Throughout the review, we heard strong, mixed views from stakeholders on the WACE literacy and numeracy requirement.

Many stakeholders raised concerns about the requirement – particularly, the OLNA. Some pointed to the disproportionate impact the literacy and numeracy requirement has on particular cohorts (particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, CALD students, students with disability, and those from low socio-economic areas).¹⁰² The Principals’ Federation of Western Australia argued that ‘OLNA is a source of stress and anxiety for students, especially when they continually fail’.¹⁰³ Stakeholders suggest re-examining the need for the standard, or looking at alternative ways to assess the desired competencies.

*“As an educator, it is heart-breaking to have to tell a Year 12 student they are not going to achieve their WACE, based solely on their OLNA results”
[Submission: Girrawheen Senior High School]*

Stakeholders that support maintaining the literacy and numeracy requirement stress the importance of confirming that students achieving a WACE have achieved minimum skills in both literacy and numeracy – which was a concern prior to the introduction of the standard in 2014. The SCSA Board’s submission notes that there has been a steady improvement in the percentage of eligible students achieving the standards since 2016, as well as a trend toward an increased level

¹⁰⁰ This was also included in the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA’s submission.

¹⁰¹ Submission: Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

¹⁰² Submissions: Regional Education Commissioner; Dr Fiona McGaughey (Parent University employee).

¹⁰³ Submission: Principals’ Federation of Western Australia.

of achievement in the three relevant areas of Year 9 NAPLAN.¹⁰⁴ At least one tertiary provider was concerned that, far from being too onerous, the current standard is actually too low to ensure students succeed in post-school education and training. During targeted consultation, we heard that some major employers such as Rio Tinto consider passing the WACE literacy and numeracy requirement, a condition of employment, indicating that the standard is currently serving a purpose for employers.

We agree that the literacy and numeracy standard should remain as a requirement of the WACE. But we are extremely concerned about the disproportionate impact of this requirement on students from diverse cohorts. We propose expanding the methods by which students can demonstrate their achievement of the literacy and numeracy standard, to better support students – particularly, students from diverse backgrounds – to show that they are capable of meeting the standard. Alternative methods of demonstrating the literacy and numeracy test would need to be robust and externally assessed, noting that experience prior to the introduction of OLNA indicates that the use of unmoderated course grades allocated by schools is insufficient to ensure application of a common standard.

Recommendation 33. *The literacy and numeracy standard remain as a requirement to achieve the WACE.*

Recommendation 34. *SCSA to expand methods of demonstrating the literacy and numeracy standard with a view to addressing the disproportionate impact on diverse cohorts.*

Stakeholders were concerned that current special consideration arrangements for the OLNA were insufficient. Stakeholders told us that there was a disparity between the accommodations that can be made for students in some other modes of assessment, compared to the accommodations allowed for OLNA. Options for special consideration also appear to be more restrictive than similar provisions in New South Wales, which has a similar literacy and numeracy standard.¹⁰⁵

We are concerned that insufficient special consideration arrangements may be having a disproportionate impact on diverse students (such as students with disability or additional learning needs). We propose that SCSA expand the availability of special consideration arrangements as part of its review into special consideration in Recommendation 29 above.

Recommendation 35. *Consistent with Recommendation 29, SCSA, working with schools, to expand the current conditions for special consideration for OLNA achievement.*

¹⁰⁴ Submission: School Curriculum and Standards Authority Board.

¹⁰⁵ Education Standards NSW, 'Disability provisions and exemptions', <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/hsc-minimum-standard/disability-provisions-exemptions>.

Appendix 1: Expert Panel and Advisory Committee membership

Expert Panel members

- Emeritus Professor Bill Loudon AM (Chair)
- Emeritus Professor David Andrich
- Ms Kya Graves, Principal, Coastal Lakes College
- Ms Esther Hill, Director of Djoowak: The Beyond Boundaries Institute, All Saints' College
- Mrs Annette Morey, Principal, Mater Dei College (CEWA)
- Mr Michael Morgan, Senior Principal Advisor, Department of Education
- Dr Alec O'Connell, Headmaster, Scotch College (AISWA)
- Ms Elizabeth Ritchie, Principal, Roebourne District High School.

Advisory Committee members

- Emeritus Professor Bill Loudon AM (Chair)
- Mr Kane Blackman, Chief Executive Officer, Good Sammy Enterprises
- Ms Linda Dawson, Deputy Director General, Industry, Science and Innovation, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation
- Mr Tyrone Garstone, Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Land Council
- Ms Tracey Gray, Principal, Frederick Irwin Anglican School
- Professor Peter Klinken AC, Chief Scientist of Western Australia
- Mr Chris Palandri, Regional Managing Director Western Australia, Multiplex
- Emeritus Professor Andrew Taggart, Chair, Tertiary Institutions Service Centre Board of Directors
- Ms Jodie Wallace, Executive Director, Policy, Planning and Innovation, Department of Training and Workforce Development
- Professor Andrew Whitehouse, Professor of Autism Research, Telethon Kids Institute.

Note: Position titles are as at each members' date of appointment.

Appendix 2: Terms of Reference

Pathways to Post-School Success

A comprehensive review to provide the Western Australian State Government with advice, recommendations and options to strengthen pathways from secondary school so all students can fulfil their learning potential and transition into further education, training and/or work.

Terms of Reference

Objectives

The review will:

- explore the efficacy of pathways into and beyond secondary school in preparing young people for further education, training and/or work
- investigate whether current certification and university entry requirements assist students to make the study choices that are right for them to develop the skills and knowledge they need to access the most appropriate pathways into further education, training and/or work
- investigate barriers to students being able to access equitable pathways, particularly for students from rural and remote areas, Aboriginal students, students from CALD backgrounds, students with a disability and potential early school leavers.

In undertaking the review and developing options and recommendations, consideration should be given to:

- applications of potential pathways across all schooling sectors in WA, including public, Catholic and independent schools
- the needs of higher education, vocational education and training, employers and communities
- emerging practices in WA (and elsewhere), including credentialing approaches
- inclusive practices and the particular needs of Aboriginal students, those from rural and remote areas, students from CALD backgrounds, students with a disability and other students at risk of not making a successful transition from school to further education, training and/or work
- promising, innovative and/or ambitious practices in other jurisdictions in Australia and beyond
- future proofing approaches given wider and national conversations about the future of ATAR
- practicalities and implementation approaches for any relevant reform.

At its conclusion, the review will provide a final list of recommended options and potential timelines for implementation.

Methodology

The review will undertake a two-stage consultation process:

- an open-ended public consultation process, which will seek to clarify and define the problem and identify potential reform options
- a more targeted consultation process with experts and key stakeholders on specific reform options, including determination of preferred approaches.

Structure

The review will be undertaken through, and comprised of, three core components:

- a small expert panel that will steer the review and endorse its findings and recommended options

- a larger advisory committee comprised of representatives of the key stakeholder groups, which will provide direction for the review and validate its findings and recommended options
- a secretariat that will manage the logistics of the review, including the consultation process, meetings and papers for the expert panel and the advisory committee, and delivery of the final report.

Timelines

The review will commence in April and conclude by 1 October 2024.

A final report including the review's advice, recommendations and options should be provided to the Minister for Education by 1 October 2024.

Appendix 3: Submissions made in response to the discussion paper

There were 85 submissions made to the discussion paper, which consisted of individual and organisational submissions.

Individual submissions

There were 27 submissions from individuals, which included parents, school leaders, teachers, community members, university employees, students, trainers, school support staff, employers, and government employees.

Organisational submissions

There were 58 submissions from organisations. Organisations that elected to have their submission made public are listed below:

- A group of 12 public schools using the Big Picture Learning design
- Australian Council of Education Leaders (ACEL) WA Branch
- ADHD WA
- The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (includes the views of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia)
- Anglican Schools Commission
- Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering
- Australian Skills Quality Authority
- Big Picture Learning Australia
- Bob Hawke College
- Career Education Association of Western Australia
- Catholic School Parents WA
- Catholic Education Western Australia
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA
- Commissioner for Children and Young People WA
- Community Skills WA
- Curtin University
- Cyril Jackson Senior Campus
- Department of Training and Workforce Development
- Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science, and Innovation
- Edith Cowan University
- Edstemic
- Engineers Australia
- Fogarty Foundation
- FutureNow Creative and Leisure Industries Training Council
- Girrawheen Senior High School
- Kiind (Parents of Children with Special Needs, Inc)
- Learning Creates Australia
- Logistics & Defence Skills Council WA
- Mental Health Commission
- Murdoch University
- Pilbara Kimberley Universities Centre
- Polly Farmer Foundation Aboriginal Corporation
- Principals' Federation Western Australia
- Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council
- Science Teachers' Association of Western Australia
- Sevenoaks Senior College

- State Training Board
- Tertiary Institutions Service Centre
- The School Curriculum and Standards Authority Board
- The Smith Family
- The State School Teachers' Union of WA
- The University of Notre Dame Australia
- The Western Australia Council of State School Organisations
- University of Western Australia
- WA Primary Principals' Association
- Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association
- Year 13 Pty Ltd.

Appendix 4: Alignment between key imperatives and recommendations

This table shows the alignment between the key imperatives outlined in Chapter 3, and the recommendations contained throughout the report.

| Key imperatives | Increasing retention and engagement | Supporting positive student wellbeing | Recognising the value of all students and their achievements | Better support for students from diverse backgrounds | Recognising new opportunities in the world of work | Incorporating changing models of assessment |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Rec 1: Western Australian Government to commit to developing a statement setting out the multiple inter-related purposes of senior secondary education, which centres on the concept of 'students' interests and aspirations'. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Rec 2: School system, sectors, and SCSA to conduct an inclusive process to develop and refine a statement on the purposes of senior secondary education, drawing on consultation with students, schools, families, other education sector stakeholders, and industry. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Rec 3: SCSA to incorporate the new statement of purposes as agreed above to guide its activities through its Strategic Plan. When the <i>School Curriculum and Standards Authority Act 1997</i> is next reviewed, the Western Australian Government should ensure that it incorporates this statement of purposes into the legislation, along with any other changes required to allow SCSA to deliver on the recommendations contained in this report. | <i>Enabling recommendation</i> | | | | | |

| Key imperatives | Increasing retention and engagement | Supporting positive student wellbeing | Recognising the value of all students and their achievements | Better support for students from diverse backgrounds | Recognising new opportunities in the world of work | Incorporating changing models of assessment |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| <p>Rec 4: As part of its senior secondary syllabus review process, SCSA to commit to a course-by-course review of Year 11 and 12 courses and programs, to ensure that course rationale, aims, and design are consistent with the new statement of purposes of senior secondary education. SCSA to advise on: reasonable timeframes for this process to take place; priority courses for review; alignment with other activity; and how to engage with students in the review process.</p> | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| <p>Rec 5: Western Australian Government, through SCSA in partnership with the three school sectors, to review the role that young people play in education system design, including periodically consulting students on senior secondary course rationales, aims, and design.</p> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| <p>Rec 6: Western Australian Government to commit to periodically evaluating the effectiveness of these recommendations on an agreed schedule. We suggest: 18 months following the Western Australian Government’s response focussing on fidelity of implementation, and again three years later with a focus on achievement of new purpose and outcomes for students.</p> | <i>Enabling recommendation</i> | | | | | |
| <p>Rec 7: Education sector organisations to work together to strengthen data collection and integration, particularly to enable understanding of school and post-school outcomes for all priority cohorts.</p> | | | | ✓ | | |

| Key imperatives | Increasing retention and engagement | Supporting positive student wellbeing | Recognising the value of all students and their achievements | Better support for students from diverse backgrounds | Recognising new opportunities in the world of work | Incorporating changing models of assessment |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Rec 8: The Western Australian Government, on behalf of the three school sectors and SCSA, to assess resourcing implications of all recommendations in this report, in order for this package of recommendations to be fully funded. | <i>Enabling recommendation</i> | | | | | |
| Rec 9: Department of Education and DTWD to work with the school system and sectors to strengthen delivery of career education and pathway planning, consistent with the principles outlined above in conjunction with appropriate course selection processes, where applicable, particularly for students in regional, remote, and lower socio-economic areas. | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Rec 10: Department of Education and DTWD to hold first principles discussions with key stakeholders, which includes SCSA, schools, the system and sectors, training providers and employers, on the purposes of VET in schools, including for the purposes of student retention and engagement, with a view to establishing a shared understanding. This should be seen as a pre-condition to addressing issues relating to delivery of VET in schools or assessing the suitability of particular offerings. This process should draw on SCSA's work undertaken as part of its WACE refreshment process. | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Rec 11: Western Australia to shift to an approach in which, for any particular course or program, learning goals, rather than course category, should define course design and assessment requirements. This should draw on SCSA's recent and ongoing syllabus review and development work. | | | | | | ✓ |

| Key imperatives | Increasing retention and engagement | Supporting positive student wellbeing | Recognising the value of all students and their achievements | Better support for students from diverse backgrounds | Recognising new opportunities in the world of work | Incorporating changing models of assessment |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Rec 12: Western Australian senior secondary course and program assessment should draw from a wide range of contemporary assessment tools. SCSA should determine the utility and reliability of different methods of assessment where necessary to ensure that current standards are maintained, drawing on its recent and ongoing syllabus review and development work. | | | | | | ✓ |
| Rec 13: As part of the course-by-course review in Recommendation 4 above, SCSA to consolidate existing offerings where it makes sense to do so based on learning goals, drawing on its current WACE refreshment process. | ✓ | | | | | |
| Rec 14: Once courses have been reviewed, SCSA to cease using the terminology of 'ATAR' and 'General' courses, to reflect the move away from the hard distinction between the two course categories. This should draw on the SCSA's work undertaken as part of its current WACE refreshment process. | ✓ | | | | | |
| Rec 15: Ensure that median ATAR is not used as a measure of school performance, including removing it from the school dashboard used in Department of Education schools. | | | ✓ | | | |
| Rec 16: As a temporary measure and drawing on the work undertaken through the WACE refreshment process, SCSA to explore whether D grades in ATAR courses could be credited toward WACE achievement, to counteract students avoiding ATAR subjects on the basis that D grades do not meet WACE achievement requirements. | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |

| Key imperatives | Increasing retention and engagement | Supporting positive student wellbeing | Recognising the value of all students and their achievements | Better support for students from diverse backgrounds | Recognising new opportunities in the world of work | Incorporating changing models of assessment |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| <p>Rec 17: SCSA to review the WACE achievement requirements, with a view to reducing complexity and increasing the ability for students to tailor their course and program options, and allow for more of their course and program achievements to be counted toward the WACE (for example, removing barriers to mixing and matching course and program types, removing requirements to study from both ‘List A and ‘List B’ courses to fulfil breadth requirements).</p> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| <p>Rec 18: SCSA to increase the number of courses that have a numerical score as well as letter grade reported.</p> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| <p>Rec 19: SCSA and TISC to work to expand the types of courses and programs that can contribute to an ATAR, with a view to expanding what students are able to have recognised through an ATAR.</p> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| <p>Rec 20: SCSA to commit to working with DTWD and TISC to enable as many VET qualifications as possible to contribute to the combined score from which an ATAR is calculated; and to implement this change as quickly as possible, drawing on SCSA’s current WACE refreshment process.</p> | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| <p>Rec 21: Universities to strengthen collection and analysis of data on students that accessed universities through enabling programs, to contribute to the evidence base on the effectiveness of these programs and how universities can support students that elect to use these pathways.</p> | | | | ✓ | | |

| Key imperatives | Increasing retention and engagement | Supporting positive student wellbeing | Recognising the value of all students and their achievements | Better support for students from diverse backgrounds | Recognising new opportunities in the world of work | Incorporating changing models of assessment |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Rec 22: SCSA to play a role in establishing and moderating achievement standards in university-developed enabling programs, as a way of ensuring transparency, parity and quality and increasing consistency among these offerings. This should draw from SCSA's current WACE refreshment process. | | | | ✓ | | |
| Rec 23: SCSA to develop a transparent set of criteria against which emerging credentialing approaches will be assessed. | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Rec 24: SCSA to explore expanding the information included in the WASSA, in order to reflect a more holistic picture of student achievement, drawing on the current WACE refreshment process. This could include listing the achievement of alternative programs subject to further exploration of the reliability and validity of assessments. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Rec 25: SCSA to make WASSAs available to students who leave school prior to the completion of Year 12, in order for all students to leave school with a record of achievement. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Rec 26: SCSA to investigate moving to learner profiles over the longer term, in order to reflect a more holistic picture of student achievement, drawing on SCSA's current WACE refreshment process. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Rec 27: SCSA to explore how complex competencies could be delivered, assessed, and certified through course content, and reflected on the WASSA (in the short term) or Learner Profiles (in the longer term), drawing on SCSA's current WACE refreshment process. | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |

| Key imperatives | Increasing retention and engagement | Supporting positive student wellbeing | Recognising the value of all students and their achievements | Better support for students from diverse backgrounds | Recognising new opportunities in the world of work | Incorporating changing models of assessment |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Rec 28: School system and sectors to review reasonable adjustments in the context of senior secondary pathways, to identify opportunities to strengthen inclusive practices. | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Rec 29: SCSA to undertake a review of special consideration arrangements, especially in context of new modes of assessment, with a view to expanding schools' capacity to validate arrangements that are supportive of learners with disability, chronic conditions, or additional learning needs. For clarity, this should include what opportunities there are for schools to make decisions around special considerations (for example, with regard to timing; rest breaks etc). This should build on SCSA's <i>Equitable Access to Assessment Policy and Guidelines</i> noting that SCSA has recently undertaken reviews of special considerations for students which have informed this Policy and Guidelines. | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Rec 30: School system and sectors to work with schools to enhance opportunities of access for Foundation and Preliminary courses. In many cases, this will be a question of resourcing. | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Rec 31: SCSA to explore the possibility of developing a new offering for students with disability, similar to the New South Wales Life Skills course. | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |

| Key imperatives | Increasing retention and engagement | Supporting positive student wellbeing | Recognising the value of all students and their achievements | Better support for students from diverse backgrounds | Recognising new opportunities in the world of work | Incorporating changing models of assessment |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Rec 32: SCSA to develop an additional level within the WACE to accommodate students with a recognised disability, following a period of consultation with students with disability, their families, schools, and other stakeholders. This should draw on SCSA’s work undertaken as part of its current WACE refreshment process, and which reflects similar offerings in other jurisdictions. | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Rec 33: The literacy and numeracy standard remain as a requirement to achieve the WACE. | ✓ | | | | | |
| Rec 34: SCSA to expand methods of demonstrating the literacy and numeracy standard with a view to addressing the disproportionate impact on diverse cohorts. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Rec 35: Consistent with Recommendation 29, SCSA, working with schools, to expand the current conditions for special consideration for OLNA achievement. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |

Appendix 5: Timeframes for implementation of recommendations

We envisage all recommendations being implemented within three years of the Western Australian Government responding to the review. The table below provides an overview of timeframes for implementation of the recommendations.

| Key imperatives | Comment | Immediately following govt. response | Within first year of govt. response | Within second year of govt. response | Within third year of govt. response |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Rec 1: Western Australian Government to commit to developing a statement setting out the multiple inter-related purposes of senior secondary education, which centres on the concept of ‘students’ interests and aspirations’. | | | | | |
| Rec 2: School system, sectors, and SCSA to conduct an inclusive process to develop and refine a statement on the purposes of senior secondary education, drawing on consultation with students, schools, families, other education sector stakeholders, and industry. | Dependent on Rec 1. | | | | |
| Rec 3: SCSA to incorporate the new statement of purposes as agreed above to guide its activities through its Strategic Plan. When the <i>School Curriculum and Standards Authority Act 1997</i> is next reviewed, the Western Australian Government should ensure that it incorporates this statement of purposes into the legislation, along with any other changes required to allow SCSA to deliver on the recommendations contained in this report. | We anticipate that this would be a multi-year process. | | | | |
| Rec 4: As part of its senior secondary syllabus review process, SCSA to commit to a course-by-course review of Year 11 and 12 courses and programs, to ensure that course rationale, aims, and design are consistent with the new statement of purposes of senior secondary education. SCSA to advise on: reasonable timeframes for this process to take place; priority courses for review; alignment with other activity; and how to engage with students in the review process. | We anticipate that this would be a multi-year process. | | | | |

| Key imperatives | Comment | Immediately following govt. response | Within first year of govt. response | Within second year of govt. response | Within third year of govt. response |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <p>Rec 5: Western Australian Government, through SCSA in partnership with the three school sectors, to review the role that young people play in education system design, including periodically consulting students on senior secondary course rationales, aims, and design.</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Rec 6: Western Australian Government to commit to periodically evaluating the effectiveness of these recommendations on an agreed schedule. We suggest: 18 months following the Western Australian Government’s response focussing on fidelity of implementation, and again three years later with a focus on achievement of new purpose and outcomes for students.</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Rec 7: Education sector organisations to work together to strengthen data collection and integration, particularly to enable understanding of school and post-school outcomes for all priority cohorts.</p> | Ongoing | | | | |
| <p>Rec 8: The Western Australian Government, on behalf of the three school sectors and SCSA, to assess resourcing implications of all recommendations in this report, in order for this package of recommendations to be fully funded.</p> | To be done at time of govt. response. | | | | |
| <p>Rec 9: Department of Education and DTWD to work with the school system and sectors to strengthen delivery of career education and pathway planning, consistent with the principles outlined above in conjunction with appropriate course selection processes, where applicable, particularly for students in regional, remote, and lower socio-economic areas.</p> | Ongoing | | | | |

| Key imperatives | Comment | Immediately following govt. response | Within first year of govt. response | Within second year of govt. response | Within third year of govt. response |
|--|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <p>Rec 10: Department of Education and DTWD to hold first principles discussions with key stakeholders, which includes SCSA, schools, the system and sectors, training providers and employers, on the purposes of VET in schools, including for the purposes of student retention and engagement, with a view to establishing a shared understanding. This should be seen as a pre-condition to addressing issues relating to delivery of VET in schools or assessing the suitability of particular offerings. This process should draw on SCSA's work undertaken as part of its WACE refreshment process.</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Rec 11: Western Australia to shift to an approach in which, for any particular course or program, learning goals, rather than course category, should define course design and assessment requirements. This should draw on SCSA's recent and ongoing syllabus review and development work.</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Rec 12: Western Australian senior secondary course and program assessment should draw from a wide range of contemporary assessment tools. SCSA should determine the utility and reliability of different methods of assessment where necessary to ensure that current standards are maintained, drawing on its recent and ongoing syllabus review and development work.</p> | SCSA efforts to be ongoing | | | | |
| <p>Rec 13: As part of the course-by-course review in Recommendation 4 above, SCSA to consolidate existing offerings where it makes sense to do so based on learning goals, drawing on its current WACE refreshment process.</p> | Undertaken in conjunction with Rec 4. | | | | |
| <p>Rec 14: Once courses have been reviewed, SCSA to cease using the terminology of 'ATAR' and 'General' courses, to reflect the move away from the hard distinction between the two course categories. This should draw on the SCSA's work undertaken as part of its current WACE refreshment process.</p> | Dependent on Rec 13. | | | | |

| Key imperatives | Comment | Immediately following govt. response | Within first year of govt. response | Within second year of govt. response | Within third year of govt. response |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Rec 15: Ensure that median ATAR is not used as a measure of school performance, including removing it from the school dashboard used in Department of Education schools. | | | | | |
| Rec 16: As a temporary measure and drawing on the work undertaken through the WACE refreshment process, SCSA to explore whether D grades in ATAR courses could be credited toward WACE achievement, to counteract students avoiding ATAR subjects on the basis that D grades do not meet WACE achievement requirements. | Temporary until Rec 17 implemented. | | | | |
| Rec 17: SCSA to review the WACE achievement requirements, with a view to reducing complexity and increasing the ability for students to tailor their course and program options, and allow for more of their course and program achievements to be counted toward the WACE (for example, removing barriers to mixing and matching course and program types, removing requirements to study from both 'List A and 'List B' courses to fulfil breadth requirements). | We anticipate rollout would be multi-year. | | | | |
| Rec 18: SCSA to increase the number of courses that have a numerical score as well as letter grade reported. | | | | | |
| Rec 19: SCSA and TISC to work to expand the types of courses and programs that can contribute to an ATAR, with a view to expanding what students are able to have recognised through an ATAR. | | | | | |
| Rec 20: SCSA to commit to working with DTWD and TISC to enable as many VET qualifications as possible to contribute to the combined score from which an ATAR is calculated; and to implement this change as quickly as possible, drawing on SCSA's current WACE refreshment process. | | | | | |

| Key imperatives | Comment | Immediately following govt. response | Within first year of govt. response | Within second year of govt. response | Within third year of govt. response |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Rec 21: Universities to strengthen collection and analysis of data on students that accessed universities through enabling programs, to contribute to the evidence base on the effectiveness of these programs and how universities can support students that elect to use these pathways. | Requires ongoing effort. | | | | |
| Rec 22: SCSA to play a role in establishing and moderating achievement standards in university-developed enabling programs, as a way of ensuring transparency, parity and quality and increasing consistency among these offerings. This should draw from SCSA's current WACE refreshment process. | | | | | |
| Rec 23: SCSA to develop a transparent set of criteria against which emerging credentialling approaches will be assessed. | Can be done later than some other SCSA actions. | | | | |
| Rec 24: SCSA to explore expanding the information included in the WASSA, in order to reflect a more holistic picture of student achievement, drawing on the current WACE refreshment process. This could include listing the achievement of alternative programs subject to further exploration of the reliability and validity of assessments. | | | | | |
| Rec 25: SCSA to make WASSAs available to students who leave school prior to the completion of Year 12, in order for all students to leave school with a record of achievement. | | | | | |
| Rec 26: SCSA to investigate moving to learner profiles over the longer term, in order to reflect a more holistic picture of student achievement, drawing on SCSA's current WACE refreshment process. | We anticipate this being implemented after Rec 24. | | | | |

| Key imperatives | Comment | Immediately following govt. response | Within first year of govt. response | Within second year of govt. response | Within third year of govt. response |
|--|---------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Rec 27: SCSA to explore how complex competencies could be delivered, assessed, and certified through course content, and reflected on the WASSA (in the short term) or Learner Profiles (in the longer term), drawing on SCSA's current WACE refreshment process. | | | | | |
| Rec 28: School system and sectors to review reasonable adjustments in the context of senior secondary pathways, to identify opportunities to strengthen inclusive practices. | | | | | |
| Rec 29: SCSA to undertake a review of special consideration arrangements, especially in context of new modes of assessment, with a view to expanding schools' capacity to validate arrangements that are supportive of learners with disability, chronic conditions, or additional learning needs. For clarity, this should include what opportunities there are for schools to make decisions around special considerations (for example, with regard to timing; rest breaks etc). This should build on SCSA's <i>Equitable Access to Assessment Policy and Guidelines</i> noting that SCSA has recently undertaken reviews of special considerations for students which have informed this Policy and Guidelines. | | | | | |
| Rec 30: School system and sectors to work with schools to enhance opportunities of access for Foundation and Preliminary courses. In many cases, this will be a question of resourcing. | Ongoing | | | | |
| Rec 31: SCSA to explore the possibility of developing a new offering for students with disability, similar to the New South Wales Life Skills course. | | | | | |
| Rec 32: SCSA to develop an additional level within the WACE to accommodate students with a recognised disability, following a period of consultation with students with disability, their families, schools, and other stakeholders. This should draw on SCSA's work undertaken as part of its current WACE refreshment process, and which reflects similar offerings in other jurisdictions. | | | | | |

| Key imperatives | Comment | Immediately following govt. response | Within first year of govt. response | Within second year of govt. response | Within third year of govt. response |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Rec 33: The literacy and numeracy standard remain as a requirement to achieve the WACE. | | | | | |
| Rec 34: SCSA to expand methods of demonstrating the literacy and numeracy standard with a view to addressing the disproportionate impact on diverse cohorts. | | | | | |
| Rec 35: Consistent with Recommendation 29, SCSA, working with schools, to expand the current conditions for special consideration for OLNA achievement. | To be undertaken with Rec 29. | | | | |