

Assessment in the Upper Secondary School in Western Australia

Western Australia. Ministry of Education, 1984 (Chair: Barry McGaw)

Overview of the document

70 page report compiled by the Working Party on School Certification and Tertiary Admissions Procedures. The Working Party was designed to report to the Minister for Education on current procedures for the admission of students into tertiary institutions in Western Australia and the influence of those procedures on the educational programmes offered in secondary schools. The report offers 22 key recommendations for proposed changes to the breadth and structure of the upper-school curriculum, methods of assessment and certification of achievement, and tertiary admissions procedures.

Keywords

Upper secondary school curriculum and assessment; certification of achievement; tertiary admissions procedures; breath and structure of the curriculum; structure of subjects; scaling processes; aggregate marks; Tertiary Admissions Examination (TAE) subject syllabuses and exams; Certificate of Secondary Education Subjects (CSE) general subjects; external public examinations; internal school assessments; Board of Secondary Education (BSE); Tertiary Admissions Examination Committee (TAEC); Secondary Education Authority (SEA); 'the status' of various subjects; changing enrolments; complexity of system; implementation of criterion-referenced assessment; Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test (ASAT); three, four or five subject average; Tertiary Entrance Score; restricted set of accredited subjects; establishment of humanities/social studies and quantitative/science subsets.

Terms of Reference

The Working Party is charged with reporting to the Minister for Education on current procedures for the admission of students into tertiary institutions in Western Australia and the influence of those procedures on the educational programmes offered in secondary schools. It is to consider both the obligation on schools to provide for the educational needs of all their students and the requirement that tertiary institutions admit able and well-prepared students, and to recommend any changes it deems to be necessary in the practices of schools and tertiary institutions. Specifically, the Working Party is asked to examine:

1. Procedures for general admission to tertiary institutions, considering:
 - a. the nature of existing procedures used for general admission;
 - b. the desirability of the development of common procedures for all tertiary institutions;
 - c. the need for understanding of the procedures by students and parents;
 - d. the validity of aggregate marks from the Tertiary Admissions Examination presently used for admissions in terms of:
 - (i) provision of equitable access to tertiary study and
 - (ii) prediction of performance in tertiary study;
 - e. the desirability of a greater role for schools in assessing students' performance and suitability for tertiary study;
 - f. the value of other procedures for tertiary admissions:
 - (i) used in Western Australia for mature age students;
 - (ii) used in other Australian States and overseas; or
 - (iii) proposed to the Working party; and
 - g. the potential impact on levels of entry and the adequacy of undergraduate programmes of any broadening of the curriculum in Years 11 and 12.

2. Procedures for selecting students for tertiary programmes with limited enrolments, considering:
 - a. the extent of limitations in availability of student places in different programmes of study;
 - b. the nature of existing procedures used for selective admissions to restricted programmes; and
 - c. the appropriateness of using the same procedures for selective entry as those used for determining general admissions.
3. The curriculum in Years 11 and 12 of secondary schools, considering:
 - a. its suitability for all students in these Years and not only those preparing for tertiary studies;
 - b. the extent to which students should be able to change subjects during Years 11 and 12 and how any such changes might be facilitated;
 - c. influences on students' choices of subjects in Years 11 and 12, including:
 - (i) general admissions procedures of the tertiary institutions;
 - (ii) procedures for selective admission to restricted programmes at tertiary institutions;
 - (iii) specific subject prerequisites of various tertiary programmes;
 - (iv) any requirement that students' choices of subjects be made from prescribed categories of subjects;
 - (v) the requirements that all TAE and CSE (General) subjects be usually studied for two years; and
 - (vi) uses made in selection for post-school employment of aggregates calculated for admission to tertiary institutions; and
 - d. the extent to which certification of students' levels of performance in their subjects studied in Years 11 and 12 might be more broadly based than assessments for tertiary admission.
4. All other matters relevant to the inquiries of the Working Party.

Table of Contents

PREFACE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

- 1.1 Origins of the Current System
- 1.2 Current Upper Secondary Curricula
- 1.3 Current Certification and Tertiary Admissions Procedures
- 1.4 Concerns with the Current System

2. PRACTICES IN OTHER AUSTRALIAN SYSTEMS

- 2.1 Tasmania
- 2.2 South Australia
- 2.3 Northern Territory
- 2.4 New South Wales
- 2.5 Victoria
- 2.6 Queensland
- 2.7 Australian Capital Territory
- 2.8 Current Issues in Other Systems

3. PROPOSALS FOR THE UPPER SCHOOL CURRICULUM

- 3.1 Breadth of the Curriculum
- 3.2 Structure of the Subjects

4. PROPOSALS FOR ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION

- 4.1 Methods of Assessment
- 4.2 Scaling of Subject Results
- 4.3 Certification of Achievement
- 5. PROPOSALS FOR TERTIARY ADMISSION PROCEDURES
 - 5.1 Criteria for Admissions
 - 5.2 Other Paths to Tertiary Admissions
 - 5.3 Admission to Highly Selective Tertiary Courses
 - 5.4 Role of Prerequisites
- 6. PROPOSED ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS
- 7. POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH PROPOSALS
- APPENDIX

Summary of Contents

PREFACE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Origins of the Current System

- Offers a brief historical perspective on the role of universities in shaping the secondary school curriculum through public examinations. Notes that from its beginning 1913, the University of Western Australia conducted public examinations to assess the achievements of secondary school students.

Current Upper Secondary Curricula

- Discusses two-year subjects and notes the following:
 - The Tertiary Admissions Examination Committee (TAEC) was established to develop syllabuses for courses of study to be taken in Years 11 and 12.
 - The Board of Secondary Education (BSE) also has responsibility for syllabuses in Years 11 and 12. Explains details about membership of the board and notes that membership is heavily weighted in favour of schools.
 - The BSE and the TAEC co-operate through the appointment of Joint Syllabus Committees for all subjects for which there is a Tertiary Admission Examination.
 - In 1983 there were 33 Tertiary Admissions Examination (TAE) subjects for which the BSE and TAEC were responsible.
 - In 1983 there were 30 Certificate of Secondary Education (General) subjects (designed primarily for students not expecting to undertake tertiary study and more vocationally oriented) offered under the sole sponsorship of the BSE.
- Discusses one year subjects and notes the following:
 - “A more direct attempt in the upper-secondary school to prepare students for employment is made through a series of one-year courses designed to terminate at the end of Year 11”, for example the Vocational Business Studies course. (p. 5)
 - “In the past few years, a further development has occurred in upper school curricula to accommodate better the increasing numbers of students entering Year 11 with little enthusiasm or aptitude for mainstream academic courses. These students’ needs are not well catered for by the standard two-year courses or the existing one-year course, so individual schools have begun to offer their own Alternative Upper School courses. About 50 percent of secondary schools currently offer such alternative courses, all of them designed to facilitate students’ transition from school to work.” (p. 5)

- Discusses technical and further education and notes the following:
 - “An additional option for students completing the period of compulsory schooling in Year 10 is to leave the secondary school but to continue with full-time study in a technical and further education college.” (p. 5)
 - Admission is on the basis of performance in the Year 10 Achievement Certificate.
 - About 5 percent of students who completed Year 10 in 1981 took this option and a further 11 percent entered employment but undertook part-time technical and further education.

Current Certification and Tertiary Admissions Procedures

- Provides an overview of the current certification procedures and notes the following:
 - “The Certificate of Secondary Education, issued by the Board of Secondary Education to all students on completion of Year 12, reports achievement in each accredited subject studied.” (p. 6)
 - In TAE subjects, all students sit for an external examination and assessments of performance are also obtained from schools.
 - For General subjects, various forms of moderation are used in an attempt to ensure comparability among schools and to assign grades that express a student’s standing in relation to all others in the State taking the particular subject.
 - The Board does two things to facilitate judgements of a student’s overall performance: produce an aggregate of the student’s assessments as a global index of performance and provide a means of comparing the student’s grades (decile ranks) in the different subjects taken.
- Discusses selection processes for tertiary study and notes the following:
 - “The four tertiary institutions in Western Australia give primary consideration, in selecting school-leavers, to their performances in the Tertiary Admissions Examination. For each Tertiary Admissions Examination subject, an examination is set by a panel of three examiners, of whom two come from tertiary institutions and one from the secondary sector.” (p. 10)
 - To adjust for differences in the academic abilities of students studying different subjects, the examination results for all subjects are scaled using the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test.
 - Breadth of study requirements are imposed by UWA and Murdoch through the categorization of subjects and requirements that subjects from some minimum number of categories must contribute to each student’s aggregate.
 - Explains requirements for matriculation (and numbers of students to matriculate each year) to the University of Western Australia and Murdoch University.

Concerns with the Current System

- Discusses the complexity of the system and notes the following:
 - The variety of existing procedures for assessment, certification and tertiary admissions are very complex.
 - Two statements are issued to students at the completion of Year 12: one shows examination performance alone, whereas one takes into account school assessments also; one shows scaled student examination marks, whereas one expresses student performance in decile ranks.
 - TISC reports four separate aggregates for tertiary admission, while the Certificate of Secondary Education reports an aggregate based on a wider range of subjects and converted to a percentile rank.

- Discusses changing school enrolments and notes the following:
 - Over the past few years, there has been increasing public concern “that the requirements for admission to tertiary study are encouraging too many students to select inappropriate subjects, often resulting in distress, frustration and alienation” (p. 13). This concern has been heightened by the changing demography of the upper-school.
 - The retention rate of students into the post-compulsory years of upper-secondary school has risen dramatically.
 - There has been a substantial increase in the proportion of lower secondary students entering upper secondary school.
 - It is likely there will be a further dramatic increase in the proportion of students choosing to continue with some form of education beyond Year 10. “Unless there are major structural changes in the education system, the impact of this increased participation will be felt most keenly in the secondary schools.” (p. 16)
 - “The proportion of Years 11 and 12 students who proceed to tertiary study has declined substantially in recent years because the growth in upper secondary enrolments has not been matched by a growth in tertiary enrolments.” (p. 16)
- Discusses the status of the Certificate of Secondary Education (TAE) subjects and notes:
 - TAE subjects generally have a high status.
 - There is a strong tendency for students to choose only TAE subjects, to keep their options open, but this is clearly an unrealistic choice for many students who are most unlikely to continue to tertiary study: “Nevertheless, the status of these subjects, coupled with the parental hope that new abilities or commitments might emerge, can provide an irresistible pressure for such students to enter the tertiary-bound stream.” (p. 18)
 - The use of six TAE subjects in computing aggregates for admission reduces the opportunity for students to alter their enrolments in this tertiary-bound stream and students are induced to stay with the six subjects of their original choice for the full two years.
 - There are also misconceptions that students can obtain higher aggregates by choosing subjects from physical sciences and higher mathematics.
- Discusses the status of Certificate of Secondary Education (General) subjects and notes:
 - General subjects have a low status and an image problem.
 - There is a failure of the General subjects to attract students.
 - The opportunity TAE subjects offer for tertiary entry is one clear factor in General subjects failing to attract enrolments.
 - “Whether the low enrolments in General subjects in any way reflect on their quality or suitability is not so clear. Certainly such subjects do not have a single clear purpose as have the Tertiary Admissions Examination subjects and that may cause something of an image problem.” (p. 18)
 - Students “see enrolment in low status subjects being interpreted as de facto poor performance in high status ones, though they may well be misjudging employers’ likely interpretations of their Certificates in making this choice.” (p. 18)
- Discusses the assessment for tertiary admissions and notes that there are several concerns expressed about the assessments used for tertiary admissions, which relate to: the almost exclusive use of external exams, meaning that a student’s entire performance over two years is assessed in a single brief examination for each subject; problems with the scaling of results in different examinations against the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test; and the very act of aggregation, including the fact that forming an aggregate means certain information is lost.

- Discusses the tertiary perspective and notes the following:
 - Tertiary institutions have a vital interest in standards of scholarship in schools and their admissions requirements have encouraged both depth and breadth of study by secondary students. Staff members in tertiary institutions are inclined to see the quality of preparation for tertiary study as the most important consideration in upper secondary schooling.
 - TAE subjects provide a strong base in core disciplines and the examinations are seen to play an important role in maintaining academic standards.
 - TAE subjects may be quite appropriate and beneficial for students who do not continue to tertiary study.
 - The external examinations themselves are seen to have important benefits, despite their limitations as they are seen to give a degree of objectivity.
 - “Whatever the advantages or disadvantages of external examinations, it is argued that no more successful method of selecting students for tertiary study has been found.” (p. 22)

2. PRACTICES IN OTHER AUSTRALIAN SYSTEMS

- Provides a brief overview of current practices in operation in other Australian states and territories in terms of Year 12 certification and tertiary selection and briefly canvasses current issues in the other systems’ curricula, assessment and aggregation.

3. PROPOSALS FOR THE UPPER SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Breadth of the Curriculum

- Notes that “The upper secondary school is changing because its population is changing. It cannot be only a place of preparation for tertiary study, whatever its history. For many students, it provides the final years of education before they embark on adult life. For them, neither a narrow focus on academic preparation nor a narrow focus on vocational preparation would be appropriate. They need a breadth of study from which to approach a future which will demand of them considerable flexibility.” (p. 34)
- Argues that “We would like to see added to these accredited courses a more formal provision for schools to develop their own courses to meet particular needs of their students.” (p. 34)
- Makes the following recommendations:
 - Recommendation 1: “That the subjects offered in the upper secondary school include: those formally accredited by a central authority and; those developed and offered by individual school, with individual students able to take appropriate combinations of subjects from both categories.” (p. 34)
 - Recommendation 2: “That general breadth of study requirements for students in Years 11 and 12 be established as conditions for secondary school graduation and that these consist of the successful completion of the equivalent of twelve years of schooling, including: the completion of some minimum balance of studies in humanities, mathematics, science and social studies to be determined by a representative central authority; and the attainment of a satisfactory level of competence at Year 12 in literacy.” (p. 36)

Structure of the Subjects

- Makes the following recommendations:
 - Recommendation 3: “That, for the assessment of students’ levels of competence in literacy: explicit definitions of adequate performance in the range of necessary

skills at Year 12 be developed; and test materials be developed to facilitate schools' assessments of their students' performance levels." (p. 36)

- Recommendation 4: "That subjects offered in the upper secondary school be offered in modules which: have a maximum of one year's duration; occupy a maximum of one-sixth of a full time student's course of study; and where necessary, are developed as sequenced courses with the Year 12 unit presuming the content of the prior Year 11 unit as a basis for successful study." (p. 37)
- Recommendation 5: "That, in implementing more flexible patterns of enrolments in Years 11 and 12, schools ensure that subjects equivalent to the present Tertiary Admissions Examination subjects be offered in as great a range as at present." (p. 38)
- Notes that "We wish to see committees such as the present Joint Syllabus Committees of the Board of Secondary Education and the Tertiary Admissions Examination Committee have responsibility for the syllabuses for accredited courses in both Years 11 and 12." (p. 37)

4. PROPOSALS FOR ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION

Methods of Assessment

- Notes that the assessments currently reported for upper-school performance are all norm referenced (they indicate an individual student's standing in relation to other students).
- Notes that an alternative to measuring by comparison with others is to assess students' performances with respect to predetermined criteria (and that such a measurement system is currently being implemented, in its pilot stage, in Queensland).
- Argues that "We believe there are advantages in seeking to define and use such criteria for assessment of achievement in Western Australia but believe that no rapid transition from the present system can be made or should be attempted." (p. 39)
- Makes the following recommendation:
 - Recommendation 6: "That the central certifying authority experiment with the definition and use of performance criteria for assessing students as an alternative to the present system of assessing students only in relation to the performance of others." (p. 39)
- Notes that a thorough implementation of criterion-referenced assessment should free the system from the use of fixed-distributions of assessment and could provide a more ready means of monitoring rises and falls in standards of performance from year to year.
- Notes that at present final results in subjects are based, to varying extents, on external examinations and school assessments and that both sources of data have strengths and weaknesses. Notes that "A view that the weaknesses of external examinations outweigh their strengths led to their abolition in Queensland more than a decade ago. This is not a view we share." (p. 40)
- Makes the following recommendations:
 - Recommendation 7: "That the external examinations be maintained, at least for all subjects which are central to the tertiary admissions process." (p. 40)
 - Recommendation 8: "That school assessments of performance be obtained in all subjects: covering all aspects of the syllabus, regardless of whether any part is also covered by external examination; and derived according to a structure defined by the central certifying authority to assure consistency of criteria across schools." (p. 41)
 - Recommendation 9: "That the central certifying authority regularly investigate the relationships among various assessments of student performance, particularly between internal and external assessments, and their individual and joint

relationships with measures of subsequent performance, such as results in tertiary studies.” (p. 41)

- Recommendation 10: “That, for all subjects accredited by the central certifying authority, comparability of school assessments be sought: in the case of subjects with external assessments, by moderating the school’s assessments against the external assessments of the students (transforming the distribution of the former against the latter); and in the case of the other subjects, by various means of moderation such as reference testing on aspects of the syllabus, meetings of teachers and visits by moderators.” (p. 42)
- Argues that “The specification of a common structure for school assessments in each subject can only ensure that all schools attend to the same aspects of performance in judging their students. It cannot ensure that similar criteria are used in determining the level of a student’s assessment. More rigorous moderation procedures are required to attempt that.” (p. 41)

Scaling of Subject Results

- Notes that scaling to achieve comparability across subjects is currently undertaken in Western Australia, Queensland and the ACT by using the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test while in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia it is achieved by using average performance in other subjects studied to adjust each subject in turn. Notes there are difficulties with both procedures and there have been some calls for the abandonment of all scaling.
- Argues that the objective of scaling is a valid one: “We believe scaling cannot be abandoned unless a thorough adoption of criterion-referenced assessment becomes feasible, so it becomes for us a matter of what scaling process to use and to which subjects to apply it.” (p. 42)
- Notes that “We are conscious of concerns about bias in the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Tests” (p. 43) and discusses gender bias.
- Notes the difficulties scaling processes pose in some subjects and that “We take the view, then, that scaling is essential for subjects central to the tertiary admissions process but better avoided in the case of some other subjects.” (p. 43)
- Makes the following recommendations:
 - Recommendation 11: “That the scaling of subject results to take account of differences in the academic abilities of the candidates in different subjects: be undertaken at least with all subjects which may contribute to any tertiary admission score; be achieved by scaling a 50:50 composite of external and moderated school assessments against the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test; and that the properties on the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test be regularly and systematically investigated.” (p. 43)
 - Recommendation 12: “That no general aggregate of assessments, such as the Board of Secondary Education’s Index of Academic Standing, be formed to provide some global index of student’s achievement.” (p. 44)

Certification of Achievement

- Notes that the existence of separate statements to students from the Board of Secondary Education and the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre is of considerable confusion at present and that the Committee believes there must only be one certificate which a student receives and that it should carry all the necessary information about performance in the upper secondary school.

- Makes the following recommendations:
 - Recommendation 13: “That for any student who has completed at least one term of Year 11, a formal certificate recording achievements in upper secondary school be provided whenever the student leaves school.” (p. 44)
 - Recommendation 14: That, for each subject studied in Years 11 and 12, the Certificate of Secondary Education show: the size of the unit of study involved; whether it is a subject accredited by the central authority or one developed by the school; if it is a school subject, an unmoderated grade of A, B, C, D, or F or no grade, according to the school’s grading policy for the subject; if it is an accredited subject, a moderated grade of A, B, C, D, or F; and if it is an accredited subject with external assessment, as an optional addition, a mark on a 0-100 scale be obtained as a 50:50 combination of external and moderated school assessments, scaled against the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test, except that this additional mark be mandatory for subjects which may contribute to a tertiary entrance score, with the letter grades being interpreted as: A- excellent achievement, B- sound achievement, C- satisfactory achievement, D- marginal achievement, F- fail. (p. 45)
 - Recommendation 15: “That, where a student has achieved a satisfactory level of literacy and where a student has satisfied all the requirements for secondary school graduation, these be shown by annotation on a student’s Certificate of Secondary Education.” (p. 46)
 - Recommendation 16: “That the Certificate of Secondary Education be issued by the central certifying authority.” (p. 46)

5. PROPOSALS FOR TERTIARY ADMISSIONS PROCEDURES

Criteria for Admissions

- Briefly canvasses current admission procedures. Notes that “Including five or six subjects from the Tertiary Admissions Examination set in the aggregate, as the tertiary institutions currently do, however, places pressure on almost all students to choose five or six subjects from this set to keep alive their hopes of tertiary enrolment.” (p. 48)
- Notes two general strategies which may help to reduce this strong pressure on students to take exclusively TAE subjects and to free students subject choices: removing the distinction between the TAE and General subjects and allowing both to count for tertiary admissions; or maintaining the distinction but legitimating study in a broader range of subjects (outside of the TAE set) and reducing the number of subjects in which a student’s performance is considered for tertiary admissions while not reducing the number of subjects the student studies.
- Discusses the logistics/problematics of allowing performances from both the TAE and General subjects to be considered for tertiary admissions, particularly the notion of compiling an aggregate based on five or six subjects, with at least three of these being TAE subjects. Notes that “we have finally preferred a system in which only subjects from a limited set are considered for tertiary admissions and one in which only a part of the student’s total enrolment needs to be considered”. (p. 49)
- Argues that an aggregate based on best three subjects, predicts success more efficiently than the current aggregate of six.
- Notes that the Working Party considered recommending the use of a simple three-subject aggregate as the ultimate criterion for admission to tertiary admissions, but found this would pose problems, particularly for breadth of study and that “The approach we have finally opted for is one which allows students to gain entry with only three of their six subjects from the restricted set of subjects, while attempting to avoid a penalty on

students more confident of moving on to tertiary study who take more subjects from this set. Our proposal is for an average, rather than an aggregate; and for the average to be based on three, four or five subjects, depending on a student's enrolment and performance." (pp. 50-51)

- Discusses some implications of students choosing a three, four or five subject aggregatable group and notes that a four or five subject group would be advantageous.
- Suggests that not all of the present TAE subjects be included in the proposed restricted set of accredited subjects and lists subjects which may and may not be included.
- Discusses potential subject descriptions to ensure that overlapping courses do not contribute together to an average and suggests that English should not to be a subject that can contribute to an average.
- Makes the following recommendation:
 - Recommendation 17: That, for admission to a tertiary institution, a student normally be required to have: (a) completed the requirements for secondary school graduation; (b) performed satisfactorily in six subjects, of which at least five are accredited Year 12 subjects; and (c) achieved a sufficiently high ranking in the Tertiary Entrances Scores to have gained a place in a course for which application has been made; with (d) satisfactory performance for subjects referred to in (b) being defined by the tertiary institutions in terms of a level of result, A-D and F; (e) the Tertiary Entrance Score being a 50:1 weighted average of the student's best mean score on three, four or five subjects from a subset of the accredited subjects (with at least one humanities/social studies and one quantitative/science subject contributing to the average) and the student's score on the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test; and (f) the subject results contributing to the average referred to in (e) being scaled values of a 50:50 composite of external examination results and moderated school assessments. (p. 55)
- Proposes that the Tertiary Entrance score not be noted on the certificate, as it captures only part of what a student has done and may erroneously be used a global measure of a student's total secondary school achievement.

Other Paths to Tertiary Admissions

- Makes the following recommendation:
 - Recommendation 18: "That tertiary institutions, in consultation with technical and further education authorities, review current arrangements for students moving to tertiary study from technical and further education." (p. 57)

Admission to Highly Selective Tertiary Courses

- Discusses issues regarding the pressure put on Year 12 study and assessment by selection for highly selective tertiary courses. Notes that to reduce these pressures, more may be needed than the addition of other selection variables. Suggests that there are benefits in the deferral of selection for highly selective courses until the completion of the first year of tertiary study.
- No specific recommendation is made, but it is urged that "the effects of competition for places in highly selective courses on subject choice in upper secondary school be monitored by regular investigation of the pattern of subjects taken by students gaining admission. We would not want to see the general benefits of our proposals lost simply because their provisions might be abused in efforts to obtain places in the most selective courses." (p. 58)

Role of Prerequisites

- Briefly notes the confusion that exists around prerequisites for certain tertiary courses and that whilst the term ‘prerequisite’ is usually avoided by the tertiary institutions, “there is an informal recognition of presumed knowledge for particular tertiary courses and, in some cases, students are advised at school to select certain subjects from Years 11 and 12, even though they are not formal prerequisites for the tertiary courses the students intend to undertake.” (p. 59)
- Argues that “We are concerned, on the one hand, about strong informal prerequisites not being declared and, on the other, with prerequisites being set but not being essential for subsequent tertiary courses. We would want tertiary institutions to be realistic in determining prerequisites and clear in their statements of what they are.” (p. 59)
- Makes the following recommendation:
 - Recommendation 19: “That tertiary institutions, in consultation with the central certifying authority for upper secondary school education, review the Years 11 and 12 prerequisites set for courses of study at tertiary level.” (p. 59)

6. PROPOSED ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

- Argues that “We would prefer to see the balance of power over the curriculum and assessment in Years 11 and 12, rather than the present imbalance in favour of tertiary institutions or an alternative imbalance in favour of schools.” (p. 61)
- Argues that “For the administration of the system we have proposed, we suggest that the Board of Secondary Education, the Tertiary Admissions Examination Committee and the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre all be replaced.” (p. 62)
- Suggests that “Since there are no clearly appropriate descriptive labels for our two categories of subjects, we suggest the labels ‘A and ‘B’ and hope that neither will be use pejoratively. We propose A for the set from which averages for the Tertiary Entrance Score may be formed. Category B will include all the present General subjects as well as those of the present Tertiary Admissions Examination subjects we suggest in Table 7 should not be in Category A.” (p. 61)
- Makes three key recommendations in relation to the administrative arrangements required to enact the changes proposed in Recommendations 1-19:
 - Recommendation 20: That the Board of Secondary Education and the Tertiary Admissions Examination Committee be abolished and a Secondary Education Authority be established, consisting of: the Director-General of Education, ex officio, as chairperson; twelve representatives of the secondary education sector, Government and non-Government, and including both administration and teacher representatives; eight representatives of the tertiary education sector, two from each of the four tertiary institutions; and four general community representatives; and that this Authority be responsible for the accreditation of courses of study and the certification of student achievement in secondary education, including the conduct of any external examinations. (p. 62)
 - Recommendation 21: That the Secondary Education Authority establish a Standing Committee, responsible for all subjects in Group A, consisting of equal representation from the tertiary education and secondary education sectors. (p. 62)
 - Recommendation 22: That the staff and support functions of the current Board of Secondary Education and Tertiary Institutions Service Centre be combined into a single agency to service the Secondary Education Authority and to process applications for admission to tertiary studies, on behalf of the tertiary institutions. (p. 63)

7. POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH THE PROPOSALS

- Notes that the proposed changes must be monitored closely to avoid “the risk of creating new problems in place of the old ones with which it attempts to deal.” (p. 64)
- Discusses potential issues regarding subject status as a result of the Category A and B groupings. Notes that it should be an ongoing responsibility of the proposed Secondary Education Authority to monitor these issues.
- Argues that enrolment trends will need to be monitored and “Evidence should be sought to determine whether the availability of four- and five-subject averages acts as a disincentive for weaker students to continue to take too many subjects from Group A or, on the other hand, whether the availability of a three-subject average acts as an incentive for able students to focus narrowly on only three subjects from Group A. Either of these trends would be unsatisfactory.” (p. 64)
- Notes that enrolments in the present TAE subjects, which are proposed to be in Group B, will also need to be monitored. It is expected numbers will increase as freer access to them is created, however, the opposite could occur in response to changes in the purposes of the subjects. Argues that if serious deflections were to occur, the SEA should consider further the ‘3+2’ or ‘3+3’ subjects aggregates discussed in Chapter 5.