

Professor Barry McGaw assessment seminar responses to questions

The following questions were generated during the group discussion session at the principals' assessment forum held at Gloucester Park on Tuesday, 3 March 2008. Answers have been generated by the Curriculum Council.

School-based assessment

Within this section, several groups asked questions on external assessment. These and associated responses are covered under the examinations section.

Q. *How do we manage the tension between ensuring adequate instructional time and time to ensure rigour and comparability of assessments?*

A. In writing the new courses, careful attention was paid to ensuring assessment requirements are more straight-forward and there are equal or fewer of them than in current courses. This is always a tension and teachers are encouraged to keep assessment in proper perspective.

Q. *Will assessment for new courses adopt an 'assessment for learning' approach?*

A. The principles of assessment outlined in the Curriculum Framework and in courses strongly reinforce the 'assessment for learning' approach, although not described in this way.

Q. *Will standards packages similar to those produced in NSW be available in courses and, if so, when?*

A. Yes similar packages are being developed now.

Essentially each course will have the following, and this will be the 'standards package':

- course syllabus
- sample programs for each unit
- grade descriptors for stage 1, 2 and 3 units and associated annotated assessment tasks
- guidance on setting up an assessment program and on marking in the course
- marking guides
- state-wide grade descriptions over time and their school's grade descriptions relative to this
- sample examinations and marking guides
- other assessment support material

Q. *Where will the resources come from to produce those 'standards packages'?*

A. Council currently has these resources and a lot of the work has already been completed. Each course has a course officer. Last year, these people focussed on rewriting courses in line with jury recommendations, developing sample programs, grade descriptors and sample examinations. Their work this year and in 2009 will be to continue to refine sample examinations, to build on quality assessment support material and to further refine grade descriptors as more assessment examples become available.

Q. *Is it an advantage for a Year 11 student studying unit 2A and 2B and leaving school at the end of Year 11 to complete all assessments?*

A. Yes, otherwise these studies will not be recognised on their statement of results for studies completed towards the WACE. Many students return to complete studies at a later date.

Q. *What measures are being put in place for the transfer of credit from Year 10 to Year 11 if students complete or partially complete programs such as community service or endorsed programs in Year 10?*

A. This has emerged as a recent issue, particularly when students change schools at the end of Year 10 having part-completed their community service requirements. Council is currently working with school administrator associations such as WASSEA and sector/system representatives to ensure the effective transfer of data.

Q. *What is the in-built socio economic index bias in examinations as a form of assessment?*

A. Exams (both written and practical/performance) can provide a balanced and valid sampling of the syllabus that reflects what is taught. Quality assurance procedures endeavour to remove or minimise bias.

As a consequence, high quality exams that allow students from all backgrounds to demonstrate their knowledge, understandings and skills are less subject to socio-economic bias than school-based assessment.

Students with access to additional resources from their home environment normally have an advantage over students from less resourced home backgrounds. Other areas of obvious advantage are more difficult to control such as access to tutors or siblings/parents who may assist and support students completing assessments.

Q. *What support will there be for remote and isolated schools to implement courses?*

A. A number of strategies are in place:

- separate professional development programs are being planned for and provided to teachers from these schools
- course documents and support materials are on the Curriculum Council website
- professional development will be available through our on-line learning management system
- the Curriculum Council and sector/system representatives are working closely with the leadership groups from these schools to identify needs and support teachers accordingly
- the Curriculum Council has recently appointed a moderator for integrated programs. This officer will work collaboratively with schools and their sector/system support staff to develop programs that suit their students' needs and at the same time ensure recognition for these studies through the WACE
- the Curriculum Council is working with the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) to support their teachers so they can deliver highly customised programs to students in remote and isolated government schools.

Q. *Is consideration going to be given to the amount of content in syllabuses so they can be taught in the time available?*

A. It has been. This was one of the key questions asked of teacher juries last year and necessary adjustments were made to courses in response to that feedback. An ongoing review of courses as they are implemented will monitor this.

Q. *Has there been consideration of the effect of a very tight timeline on the health and wellbeing of our students?*

A. The content to be taught and standards required are similar to existing subjects. It is not envisaged that there will be any more work pressures on students. Again, this will need to be monitored during the implementation of courses. Students aspiring to highly competitive courses may continue to feel pressure.

Q. *How do teachers rank students in two different contexts; for example one class of Materials Design and Technology in metals and another in fabrics, or even in Physical Education Studies having students in swimming and tennis?*

A. It is advised that within school-based assessment there will be a common set of assessment items across the different contexts. The school would then use these results to moderate the assessments of non-common items from the different contexts.

Q. *Will consensus meetings continue to be important and when will the 2009 list be available?*

A. Consensus meetings will continue to provide the main forum for teachers to meet and develop a common understanding of standards in each course. The focus of future meetings will be the application of 'standards packages' in each course.

The schedule for 2009 will be available in September this year.

Q. *What support is being provided to teachers who may have little or no experience of marking assessments using numerical marking keys and using marks to allocate grades? This is particularly true for teachers of wholly-school assessed subjects and for many beginning teachers.*

A. A number of strategies are in place:

- policy in this area is now very clear
- the focus of assessment seminars in all new courses this year is marking and it will be a major focus of all professional development over the next two years
- The Curriculum Council website will have all assessment policies and assessment support materials available for teachers.

Q. *If students study 3A/3B units in Year 11, they should be able to sit the exam in Year 11?*

A. They can, provided they have a school assessment for each 3A and 3B unit and are exiting the course. Essentially this is the same as what happens now if a student studies an E-code subject in Year 11.

Q. *Will the Curriculum Council come out and take ownership of the standards and their amplification now?*

A. The Curriculum Council, and its predecessor the SEA, clearly have responsibility for standards and ensuring comparability of these standards in Year 11 and Year 12. This will be reinforced through communications to re-focus attention on this aspect of work by using a term such as 'standards package' for each course.

Examinations

Who will sit exams?

Q. *Who has to sit exams and who is exempt?*

A. For 2008 only, examinations will assess stage 2 and 3 units in a single examination. The main purpose of these examinations is for university selection. The examinations are not compulsory.

From 2009, the examination situation will change:

- There will be separate examinations for stage 2 and stage 3 units.
- In their final year, students studying at least one stage 2 unit pair (e.g. 2A/2B) or one stage 3 (e.g. 3A/3B) unit pair will sit an examination.
- Each exam will assess the specific content, knowledge and skills described in the syllabus for the units studied.
- Practical and performance examinations will be held for some courses.
- VET course examinations will test underpinning knowledge and skills of specific training packages.

The following exemptions apply:

- Students enrolled in three or fewer stage 2 and/or stage 3 unit pairs (for example 3A and 3B), and who are working towards completion of an Australian Qualification Framework VET Certificate I or higher in the year they plan to complete WACE requirements. This includes students completing a school-based traineeship or apprenticeship and those involved in the School Apprenticeship Link program.

Exempt students may choose to sit examinations.

Examinations will not be held for stage 1 units. Students enrolled in stage 1 units can sit stage 2 or 3 unit examinations as private candidates.

In the long-run it is estimated that about two thirds of our Year 12 cohort, or about 20,000 students, will sit exams. Currently about 10,000 Year 12 students sit the TEE.

Purpose of exams

Q. *What is the purpose of exams at Stage 2?*

A. Results from Year 12 examinations at Stage 2 and Stage 3 will complement and support school-based assessment by enabling the following:

- Students will obtain a 'course report' for each 2A/2B or 3A/3B pair of units completed as part of their WACE certification. Each course report will show each student's moderated school-based and examination performance, the number of students in each stage, combined score located on a state-wide distribution of scores for all students and a description of standards demonstrated by candidates. This provides a description of how the student performed in the unit pair studied referenced to the standards demonstrated (i.e. it provides a comprehensive description of how the student went in the course).
- The reporting of both school-based and external assessment results in a comparable manner on the WACE will strengthen state-wide certification.
- The production of diagnostic feedback to teachers about how each of their students performed on each question in absolute terms and also relative to others in their school and state-wide. This gives teachers a quantitative basis to review and refine their future teaching practices.
- The development and monitoring of standards for each stage in all courses and the comparison of standards applied across schools in all courses.
- Results from students in stage 3 and stage 2 will be considered for university entrance.

- The means for others (employers and TAFE) to have access to more meaningful and comparable data for future selection.

Limiting exams to stage 3 would perpetuate the TEE/non TEE divide. The elimination of this was one of the key drivers of this senior school reform.

Q. *What happens if students choose not to do examinations?*

A. The student will not get a course report. Nor will the grades for those units be counted towards the C grade average for the WACE.

Q. *Are exams only going to be used for university entrance, or will they also be used for selection to other post-school study (e.g. TAFE) or employment?*

A. The principal purpose of the exams will be to 'validate' school assessments and use the information from the school-based assessment and the examination to report standards-reference a performance information to the student on their course achievement.

Examination results will continue to be used in conjunction with school-based assessment for university selection. Students may choose to use their course report for all or some courses in their portfolio of achievements when applying for a job or further training.

Q. *Has the Curriculum Council seriously thought through the impact of examinations?*

A. Yes, very seriously.

At the general level, NSW and Victoria have close to 100% of their Year 12's sitting at least one exam. SA has about 82% and NT about 74%, and this will increase in the next few years as the new SACE is implemented. In Tasmania, approximately 80% of the Year 12 age cohort sits exams. The move to have examinations in all courses and to have all year 12 students (unless exempt) sit these exams brings Western Australia in line with the majority of other states.

At a more specific operational level, plans are in place to produce sample stage 2 and stage 3 examinations in all courses, including practical examinations. Detailed budgets have been finalised and planning for the production and conduct of the exams is underway.

Experienced school timetablers are currently working with six to eight schools to model future examination timetables for schools' mid-year and end of year exams and also the end of year WACE exams. This information will be provided to schools - possibly through a deputy principal/curriculum coordinator forum - in second term.

Q. *How do exams improve standards? (We do not agree for all students).*

A. By providing a focus for student learning. Also, they provide a means by which standards can be reviewed and refined annually and teachers get direct feedback about how their interpretation of standards compares with others state-wide. This allows them to hone their teaching and assessment the following year.

Q. *Are exams intended to measure the performance of the students against standards set out in the grade descriptors and syllabus or are they for norm-referenced ranking?*

A. Exams assess the syllabus for stage two or stage three unit pairs. The results from the exams will be used to statistically moderate school-based assessments and to describe standards of student achievement. This information will then be used in a normative manner by TISC to produce a university entrance rank.

- Q *Is it possible to have external Year 11 examinations to provide feedback to students going into Year 12?*
- A No, this is not planned. However, many schools will set school exams that will serve this purpose. The statewide stage 2 exams and marking guides will provide a useful resource to help set school-based exams.

Conduct of exams

- Q. *Will the Curriculum Council schedule three written exams in one day if they adopt 2½ hour written exams (or shorter if there is a practical/performance exam as well)?*
- A. This will be considered in the timetabling schedule. It will only be done in small candidature courses and students will not have any more than two exams in one day; and even this would be unlikely.

For country regions where students rely on bus transport, three exams in one day may be better because the second session will finish at around the time school normally finishes instead of 5.00 pm as now. The majority of students will do their exams in the first two sessions as only small candidature subjects would be scheduled in the last session.

- Q. *What will be the timing of practical exams? Will they be held before the term 3 holidays?*
- A. Practical examinations will be conducted after term 3 finishes.

- Q. *Will there be an exam for the new Workplace Learning course?*
- A. No, that is why it is restricted to stage 1.

- Q. *Do all exams have to be three hours?*
- A. All examinations will total three hours. Where there is a practical examination, the written exam will be 2.5 hours duration. For a 3 hour written exam, it is expected that good students will be able to complete it comfortably in 2.5 hours.

- Q. *With more exams to be completed, will the end of year exam timetable erode Year 12 teaching time (how are all external exams going to be scheduled without eroding teaching time)?*
- A. No, the WACE written examination timetable will start on the first working day in November (as it does now).

Efficiencies will need to be introduced into the marking processes and by using 3 examination sessions in a day to allow this to occur.

- Q. *People are saying there will be over 100 exams because Stage 2 and Stage 3 WACE exams are separate.*
- A. Stage 2 and Stage 3 exams will be sat on the same day at the same time. This will mean there will be about 52 exam sittings plus some small candidature language exams 'borrowed' from eastern states examining boards.

- Q. *In timetabling for exams, how can a fair and reasonable exam load be ensured?*
- A. In timetabling exams, every effort will be made to spread students' loads. Enquiries in NSW and Victoria indicate this is not an issue.

- Q. *What are the consequences of stage 2 and stage 3 examinations being held currently?*
- A. If they weren't, the exam timetable would need to be significantly longer. Also, students will not be able to sit as private candidates.

- Q. *How will exam markers be trained and where will they be located?*

- A. Training will occur at marker meetings as it does now. However, there are plans to have on-line marker training through an on-line learning management system. This, together with on-line marking, will allow a greater number of country markers to be involved.

Practical exams

Q. *Does there need to be a 3 hour written exam if there is a practical exam as well?*

A. No where there is a practical exam, the written exam will be 2.5 hour duration for example:

- Aviation has a flight simulator practical component worth 20%. The written exam is 2½ hours.
- Media Production and Analysis will have a production submission worth 50%. The written exam will be 2.5 hours in duration.

Q. *What exams will have practical/performance components and has consideration been given to the logistics of staging practical exams?*

A. Currently there are 12 exams that involve students in performances (all languages, Aviation, Drama Studies and Music), so Council staff have experience in running such exams. However, practical/performance exams will be a larger exercise because it will include:

- performance examinations in Physical Education Studies, Dance, Aboriginal Languages of WA, Aboriginal and Intercultural Studies and English as an Additional Language/Dialect
- submission of a portfolio in Media Production and Analysis, Materials Design and Technology, Design, Applied Information Technology and Computer Science
- submission of a piece of work in Visual Arts
- all students completing stage 2 and stage 3 in Year 12.

Q. *What is the model for practical exams (e.g. will examiners go to schools)?*

A. Different courses have different approaches, but in general they will be similar to now:

- Where there are production components (Visual Art, Materials Design and Technology, etc), student responses will be sent to one or more central locations, including centres in Bunbury and/or Albany in larger candidature courses. Examiners will mark at these central locations.
- Where there are performance components (e.g. Drama, Dance, LOTE, Music) students will go to metropolitan or some regional centres.

Alternative ways of using technology to record performances and products are being explored. For example the use of solid state sound recorders for LOTE or video recorders for recording dance performances are being investigated. These will not be introduced until equity issues are resolved.

In addition, computer simulation tasks may be used as proxies, as is occurring with the flight simulator task in Aviation.

Q. *What are the issues associated with some courses having practical examinations (e.g. Physical Education Studies) while others that have a large practical component (e.g. Food Science and Technology) do not?*

A. In general, if there is a major practical or performance component to a course that is fundamental to the nature of the course, then it should have a practical examination. In some courses, the course experts have judged that process-related questions can be a reasonable 'proxy' for exams. This will need to be carefully monitored.

Q. *Why have two exams (i.e. stage 2 and stage 3) in small cohort subjects?*

A. In fairness to students, an exam must assess the knowledge, skills and understandings taught in a particular syllabus. It is extremely difficult to set an exam that would not

disadvantage stage 2 students because they will not have been taught the material from the stage 3 syllabus. Setting an exam that allows stage 2 students to answer all questions will result in questions that don't allow stage 3 students to be fully extended.

- Q. *How will the range of practical examinations (e.g. Physical Education Studies) be managed?*
- A. This will take more resources than are currently used for this purpose. It does not pose problems in NSW or Victoria so it is not expected to be insurmountable in Western Australia.

Technical issues

- Q. *In courses where there are different contexts (e.g. in Physical Education Studies the different specialist sports, in Material Design and Technology, wood, materials and fabrics), how will the assessment across these contexts be equated?*
- A. There will be a common set of assessment items across the different contexts within the examination. The analysis would then use these results to equate the assessments of non-common items from the different contexts.
- Q. *How will 'non-triers' be determined?*
- A. Using procedures currently used in TEE to identify 'anomalous performers'. This involves examining differences between moderated school assessments and standardised examination scores. This issue will need to be monitored very carefully during the implementation.
- Q. *What is 'a genuine attempt' to be eligible to receive the WACE?*
- A. This has yet to be confirmed but it is likely to include the following:
- students must be present at the exam and
 - stay for some designated time (e.g. 1 hour) and
 - have an examination mark
 - above a certain threshold (e.g. 20 marks) or
 - be within a certain range of the school assessment.
- This will be resolved within the next month.
- Q. *Why could we not have a similar approach to NSW where the focus is on internal and external assessment?*
- A. Our emphasis in WA appears too heavily focussed on external exams for university entrance. WA needs to focus on internal monitoring using standards that are annually reviewed in the light of external assessments.
- Q. *Why not adopt the Queensland or ACT model where a generic external exam (the Queensland Core Skills Test and the Australian Scaling Test) is used to moderate school assessments?*
- A. It is more valid to moderate or scale school-based assessment using examination results based on the same syllabus.
- Q. *Is this session preparing people for a National Curriculum?*
- A. No, this was not considered in planning. Professor McGaw was asked to participate well before he was appointed chair of the National Curriculum Board. The purpose of the session was to consider external and school-based assessment issues in senior school.
- Q. *When will we see what stage 2 and stage 3 exams will look like?*
- A. In courses currently being implemented, and thus to be examined at the end of 2009, exam design briefs and sample exams and questions will be available in term 2 this year. Indeed, many are currently available.

Exams will be discussed at all professional development sessions this year and next year.

- Q. *Can we be assured that the sample exams will genuinely follow the course content and be close models for the actual final exam?*
A. Yes, and we have adjusted the examination setting process to ensure this occurs.

Communications

- Q. *What information has been sent to schools on examinations?*
A. Regular information was sent to schools about examinations in the transition years 2007 and 2008 and also that separate stage 2 and stage 3 exams would be held in all courses from 2009 (as the new courses are implemented). In addition, the brochure outlining changes to the senior school reform was produced and sent to all schools. Schools were asked to send this home to all Year 10 students.
- Q. *How will the community be informed of the important changes to assessment, including exams? Who is responsible?*
A. We share responsibility (Curriculum Council, schools and school sector/systems). The Council will produce information brochures that will be available to schools for distribution to students and parents.
- Q. *How will public relations and media relating to examinations be managed?*
A. As it is now, through the Curriculum Council.
- Q. *Can we persuade the universities and TAFE to push back their selection timelines?*
A. This is not a question for the Curriculum Council.
- Q. *Is the introduction of compulsory exams at stage 2 and stage 3 going to result in a greater workload for teachers?*
A. The requirements on teachers of new 'TEE equivalent' courses like History, Human Biology, etc. are the same. For teachers of students studying wholly school assessed subjects, it is anticipated that the total time involved in assessment in new courses will be about the same.
- Q. *Is assessment driving curriculum or vice versa?*
A. No, assessment is not driving the curriculum. However, we should ensure that as far as possible we take the same level of care and precision with assessment for all students and that we use quality assessments. If we don't do this, certain groups will feel that their assessment is not as important or as highly valued as others.

Professional Support

Q *Where are the specialists going to come from to run professional development?*

A We are using curriculum officers from all three school sectors and the Curriculum Council, in conjunction with experienced teachers, many of whom have been involved in the course development and contracted to write support materials. This has not been a problem until now and the same approach has been used to plan the 28 April professional development day. We are also very mindful of the extra pressure placed on school-based professional development presenters and where possible are paying contracts outside school hours.

Q *Will the Curriculum Council consider out of school time professional development with overtime to be paid to teachers instead of relief being paid to schools?*

A Yes, this is occurring to a small degree now. When there are multiple workshops it will be offered as an option.

Q *Is professional development going to be resourced with additional FTE to schools?*

A Professional development days on 28 April and 13 October have been set aside for senior schools changes. Also, schools may choose to be involved in professional development activities planned for 30 May.

Almost all curriculum resources are now available including final courses, assessment advice and sample programs. Teachers, in consultation with their principals, may choose to use designated professional development days in 2008 and 2009 for their own planning during these days rather than attending the designated days.

Q *Of the new course how many have new content that will require significant support for teachers?*

A The new content and skills required in all courses is currently being documented. Professional development in these areas will be offered through a range of formats including on-line through the Curriculum Council's on-line learning management system, the universities and TAFEWA, professional associations and sessions coordinated by system/sector curriculum officers using expert teachers or industry-based experts.

There are a small number of new courses such as Psychology, Philosophy and Aboriginal and Intercultural Studies. Schools will only offer these course if they have teachers with the required knowledge and skills, and other resources needed. Most new courses are being implemented in a small number of schools and teachers have already developed close support networks.

For many of the new courses that relate to former or current wholly school-assessed subjects, there are some significant changes to required knowledge and skills required, particularly to teach the higher level stage 3 units. Professional development sessions that clearly outline the new knowledge and skills required to teach these courses will be provided as part of on-going professional development.

Many of the traditional 'academic' courses have minimal changes to what is currently taught. This includes most of the TEE courses. However, there are some new areas in almost all courses (e.g. biotechnology in Biological Sciences, cosmology in Physics, etc). Professional development modules will be developed for these.

Q *Where can I find the latest and most reliable information about the reform? The website has old information as well as new.*

A A new website www.curriculum.wa.edu.au was launched in January to resolve this. If old information is still on the site can you please email info@curriculum.wa.edu.au and let us know the details.

- Q *What type of professional development will be offered to former wholly school-assessed subject teachers (eg physical education studies) to ensure they can assess using numerical assessments and percentages?*
- A Clear assessment policies have been developed. These are on the website for all teachers and students to access. Support materials in each course provide advice and examples of how to set quality assessments and marking keys. This is also one of the main topics in assessment seminars and will be a key focus for professional development for former wholly school-assessed subject teachers.
- Q *Does the Curriculum Council have the staff to do the moderation required? Using school-based people in a short year is not the answer.*
- A Currently all new courses have a course officer who is responsible for the development of support materials, especially assessment support materials, sample exams (in collaboration with examining panels and grade descriptors). Once the course is implemented these people will take on more of the moderation function.
- The Council will continue to use school-based moderation officers on a contract basis. This provides an outstanding professional development opportunity for these teachers and helps build expertise relating to standards in schools.
- Q *Is there a plan to open up resources and communications between DET, the independent and Catholic sectors.*
- A The Curriculum Council and system/sector curriculum staff work closely together on a range of initiatives. For example, the upcoming Physical Education professional development on 30 May is planned for Catholic and AISWA schools and government schools are invited. Where possible collaboration such as this will be extended.
- Q *Will there be continued funding available for teacher relief?*
- A There will be some continued funding for the implementation of the new courses that is over and above the designated professional development days.
- Q *What is the plan? Can we have copies of it? Will it be stuck to? Are the timelines achievable? Are all the people involved informed?*
- A There is now a clear plan for course implementation, assessment and examinations. The implementation plan is outlined in the brochure sent to all schools last year and also in the Curriculum Council circulars. However, in response to this question a consolidated implementation plan will be posted on the website by the end of term for easy reference. The timelines are all achievable and will be adhered to. School administrators and teachers have been informed of changes.
- Q *Will the Curriculum Council ask schools what they need for the professional development days organised by them?*
- A Yes, and this has already happened through surveys of schools, teachers' feedback from the last professional development day, reference groups and school system/sector representatives.
- Q *How can consistent messages concerning the senior school reform be achieved?*
- A Consistent messages should be occurring. Within the Curriculum Council we have confirmed policies and prepared presentations that all officers use. We then spend significant time discussing these to ensure internal consistency of key points.
- Q *What professional support is planned for the next three years?*
- A Like all government departments, the Curriculum Council budget is set until 2011. The level of funding will reduce slightly as courses are implemented. The main activity of course officers will be in developing quality assessment support materials and

formalising 'standards packages' for all courses. The systems/sectors will continue to support the implementation

- Q *How can principals and deputies keep up to date with changes so they can fulfil their role in leading the implementation of the senior school changes in their school.*
- A All of the latest information about the reform is available in the 2007 WACE Manual (white cover) that was sent to schools in February. A summary of the main elements of the reform are on the Curriculum Council website linked to a notice box on the front page. Some ways to keep up to date are to be familiar with this information, participate in professional discussions about the reform with colleagues and staff, invite Gail Taylor to speak to principals, leadership teams and staff about the reform and to talk regularly with teachers implementing the new courses. In addition, the e-Circular every 3 weeks provides a quick reference update.
- Q *How do grade descriptors relate to the outcome progressions and what professional development is available to let teachers know about grading?*
- A There is not an explicit or direct relationship between these. Grade descriptors at stage 1, 2 and 3 are to help teachers determine grade cut-offs at the conclusion of a course. They may also be used to help teachers and students target teaching and learning. Outcome progressions may be used to help plan programs and assessments. They should not be used to directly assess student achievement.

Assessment seminars and consensus meetings will focus on the application of grade descriptors in assessment. Their use is clearly spelt out in the WACE manual and on the website.

Other

Q. *Is the GAT happening in 2008?*

A. No.

Q. *How can the use of SIRS be made more effective and the data more accurate. Currently is it error-ridden, with data entered and data uploaded not always matching.*

A. The fundamental concept of the SIRS database into which schools upload and download their own data is excellent. However, there are several key issues that need to be managed:

- Training to ensure school personnel know required download and upload procedures. To help in this area:
 - Training sessions are running in term 1 (these are being well received)
 - School databases need to be current at all times
 - The helpdesk at Curriculum Council
 - The WACE Procedures Manual documents all processes required.
- When there is change in school personnel, the new people need to be trained
- Uploads and downloads have been refined to be more customer focused

Q. *How can schools manage the resources required to teach new courses?*

A. In developing and refining new courses, very close attention has been paid to resource requirements. In general, these requirements are similar to previous courses.

There are some courses where additional requirements are required (eg computerised accounting in the new Accounting and Finance course). School systems have undertaken to ensure training of teachers in these 'new areas' is available and that physical resources (access to computers and accounting software such as MYOB or QuickBooks is available).

As has always been the case, schools should only offer courses they can resource with appropriate facilities and staff.

Q. *How do schools resolve problems with the cost of running some courses (eg Outdoor Education, Marine and Maritime Technology, Geography)?*

A. Care has been taken to ensure that the resources required to teach new courses are about the same as were required to teach former equivalent courses (eg Outdoor Education course requirements are the same as the existing WSA course).

Q. *Is there a possibility of extending the school year for Year 11 and 12 students?*

A. No, but the Curriculum Council will work to ensure that Year 12 teaching time is optimised by not starting written WACE exams until November each year.

Q. *Which courses will have IC and ID units?*

A. There are 20 of these, and there is absolutely no appetite to extend beyond that number.

Q. *Is it reasonable to assume a student will not graduate because of an inability to complete community service?*

A. Yes. However, particular cases where students cannot complete community service for equity issues should be addressed to the CEO of the Council.

Q. *VET results are often not available from training organisations in time to send to the Curriculum Council?*

A. Schools will normally have an auspicing agreement with external training providers. This agreement should specify when results will be provided to the school. This is typically by mid/end November. Schools should ensure this agreement is met.

- Q. *Is it true that we are having a list 1 and list 2 to demonstrate breadth rather than the overarching learning outcomes.*
- A. Yes, details are in eCircular, sent to schools in March 2008. Students must have one pair of units from each list in their final WACE year. English is included as one of the list 1 or humanities/ languages courses.

- Q. *How do you counsel 'middle road' students?*
- A. In general, students who definitely aspire to university entrance should take units 2A/2B in Year 11 and 3A/3B in Year 12 (maybe top 25-35% of students). Middle road students (from 25-35% to 65-75% of students) should take units 1A/1B or 1C/1D in Year 11 and 2A/2B in Year 12. It would also be expected and desirable that many of these students would complete a VET Certificate as part of their studies.

Students with lower general capability, but who are practically-oriented (from 75% to 100% of students) should take units PA/PB in Year 11 and then 1A/1B in Year 12 (or repeat PA/PB) if they are in an Education Support context or study units 1A/1B in Year 11 and units 1C/1D in Year 12.

Some new courses may require specialist facilities and staff. It is expected that schools will make decisions about what courses they can offer based on student numbers and available resources. This is not a new problem.

- Q. *Will the reporting of scaled scores and the tertiary entrance score continue to be reported jointly by the Curriculum Council and TISC?*
- A. This will be considered over the next four weeks.

- Q. *How can the overarching learning outcomes be phased out given that the Curriculum Council Act provides the legislative basis to the Curriculum Framework, including the overarching learning outcomes?*
- A. The overarching outcomes and learning area outcomes provided the basis for the design and development of courses. Nothing in the legislation or the Framework requires breadth of study to be determined in a particular fashion in Year 11 and 12.

- Q. *What options are there for young people who struggle with exams?*
- A. Students who do not wish to study units that require exams at the end of Year 12 should undertake a Certificate 1, 2 or 3 in vocational education and training.

Prior to assuming students will not be able to 'cope' with exams, teachers and principals should carefully examine the sample exams in each course.

- Q. *Why does WA do consistently better than NSW in the PISA tests?*
- A. This is not a question for the Curriculum Council

National Directions

The following questions were raised by the groups. Most of the questions raised do not have answers yet as the National Curriculum Board is being formed now and will not meet until after Easter.

Professor McGaw made some general comments relating to his new role and the National Curriculum Board. The transcript is presented for information.

Are we going to adopt a NSW approach?

No, this is what I think we'll do at the National Board. The Board is being formed now by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Hon Julia Gillard. She has written to the state ministers and invited them to name their delegates. Each state has one delegate and the non-government school sector has three. The board will have 13 members; eight

state/territory representatives, three from the non-government sector, Tony McKay, who is the deputy chair, and me.

Once the Board is formed it should first decide on the kind of curriculum documents we should have; how extensive they should be and what the balance should be between the content and the expectation of students' learning and performance and so on.

To start that process in an open way, I will recommend to the Board that a national conference be held. Participants would include people from state curriculum agencies, academics who see their field as curriculum theory and principals of schools who manage curriculum throughout their school. I am also going to suggest that states give us a small number of what they consider are their current best curriculum documents. From these the degree of consistency in vocabulary will be seen. We should also look at documents from outside Australia. For example, Finland which is a country we often look at since the OECD PISA results have been published, but why not other countries that out-perform us in some areas like Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Korea.

So that's the general approach. The question is what is the best of our current practice, and that should be what we are trying to build upon and generalise across the system.

So what does a national curriculum mean for teachers and students?

Well I think I have indicated what it should mean but my touchstone will be this; whatever documents are produced - whether they are called syllabus, curriculum guidelines, curriculum frameworks or whatever - they ought to be accessible to beginning teachers. Experienced teachers have got a whole lot of other experience on which to build; they can use the documents but if we are writing in ways, or writing at a length that is inaccessible and unhelpful to beginning teachers, then what's the point. We have a lot of examples in Australia, and in other places as well, of major curriculum change having no impact in the classroom because teachers can't be bothered, it just can't be done. So, if it's not helpful, there is no point.

Will we have national exams?

I don't know. My brief is to talk about the curriculum. My view about the assessment through primary school at the moment is, for the first time we are moving now to a common national assessment instead of state assessments re-scaled to some common scale. Those are assessments that have been designed without reference to the curriculum - because there isn't a common curriculum. We should decide what the curriculum will be and then let that shape the assessments. The curriculum must drive the assessment not the other way round.

Have the national directions been set?

No

What is the timeline?

English, Maths, the Sciences and History from kindergarten to Year 12 completed by the end of 2010, ready to start implementation in 2011.

Will WA have a say on the national agenda?

Yes, everyone will. We have got to find a way to gather all the best experiences from around the country.

What's the relationship between national curriculum and Year 11 and 12 courses in Western Australia?

Well the expectation is there will be a national course in Chemistry, there will be a national course in English, that's the expectation. Now how that's going to come about and whether it comes about will depend upon many political considerations. We were about to get a national Australian history curriculum for years 9 and 10 and it was going to be mandatory -

if you didn't do it, you wouldn't get certain funding. Now we're in the year of co-operative federalism so you'll all adopt it because you'll like it.

Will there be a GAT?

That's got nothing to do with what we're doing. So we won't be proposing a GAT and if we do ever get engaged with assessment, it's going to be assessment linked with curriculum.

Why have our top performers declined (reference to what Barry was showing about the PISA results for 15 year olds)?

Well we don't know for sure, it's just interesting that the top has come down and the bottom has held constant, I suspect that if there is a preoccupation in much of the national debate about minimal performance, that's where the system begins to focus, and it would be even worse if we expressed our results only in terms of the per cent of students who make it over some minimum threshold. I mean if that were how we used our results, we would say Australia's results have not declined. The proportion of students getting over the minimum threshold hasn't declined. That measure would give you no indication that the top comes down; you've got to look at the whole distribution to know what's happening.

Will it be a curriculum or a framework?

We have got to decide that. I have said what I think are the key things, not too much detail, some indication of balance between content and what students should know and be able to do and some clear provision for professional responsibility and discretion. Some of the national discussion has been based on the assumption that, if we have a national curriculum it will be prescriptive in a way that's state curricula or not. That's a nonsense - it doesn't have to be at all, the only difference between a national curriculum (if we have one) and a state curriculum is its geographic coverage. It's not more or less prescriptive by definition.

The following questions will be sent to Professor McGaw and provided to the Western Australian member of the National Curriculum Board (when the nominate is known) as a record of issues raised by secondary school principals in Western Australia:

- If we move to a national curriculum will it be a 'curriculum' or a 'framework'?
- Will hours of instruction be mandated in learning areas to meet national curriculum guidelines?
- Why English, mathematics, science and history for the national curriculum?
- What is Barry McGaw's brief in establishing national board?
- What does national curriculum mean for schools, students, teachers and subjects?
- What is the timeline for a national curriculum?
- What do you foresee as the direction for national curriculum and testing for senior schooling? Which State will be the model?
- National curriculum (and testing) raises the issue of national age alignment. How will this be dealt with?
- What consideration is being given to a common entry for all states (e.g. high school Year 7 entry)?
- What is the Curriculum Council's attitude to the NSW model?
- Is this a precursor to a national curriculum?
- Are these kinds of seminars happening Australia wide?
- How long before we have national Year 12 exams?
- What is the vision with respect to national directions?
- Are we going to be changing again?
- Will a Year 11 exam be set?
- Why did our top performers lose ground in the 2006 PISA results?
- If WA has such a high PISA score, why adopt another curriculum/syllabus?
- Will we have something consistent for transient students?
- Has the National direction been set for curriculum, syllabus and reporting?
- What input will WA teachers have?
- Has the time-line for the implementation of a national curriculum been set?

- What input will WA have on the national agenda?
- Will there be a situation where the same exam will be held at the same time nationally?
- What will the alignment look like for K-10 national curriculum and year 11 and 12? Will 11-12 flow from k-10?
- What is the focus of the questions for the national testing program when the statements of learning are for a year completed, but the tests are in the middle of the next year?
- If the national curriculum is coming, then does all of our work go 'in the bin'?
- When is the announcement about the national curriculum coming?
- What resourcing will be available to implement the national curriculum?
- What is the relationship between national curriculum and year 11 and 12 courses?
- Will the introduction of a national curriculum require national assessment at state level?
- Will there be enough scope for teacher to respond to local needs and contexts in the national curriculum?
- Will we have to go through another round of changes with the implementation of the national curriculum?
- With national curriculum and national testing, will there be national reporting?
- What type of testing will we have; comprehensive or sample of cohort?
- Will the national curriculum include other areas of society and environment, not just history? How will the focus on this be managed?
- Will there be a GAT or nation-wide scaling test for the national curriculum?
- Will the new national curriculum make the WACE courses redundant?
- Where does VET stand in National Curriculum?
- Will the nationally consistent statements of learning inform the national curriculum?
- Where will national certification fit - Year 10, Year 12?
- Are we confidently working towards national syllabus/exams/agenda?
- Will it be done in consultation or will it be tied to funding as were flags, etc?
- What are the real implications in years 8-10? Are we going to have a Year 10 exam as well?