The School Certificate

The Review of the Higher School Certificate noted widespread dissatisfaction with the current Year 10 School Certificate. The Government is concerned that the extension of Higher School Certificate studies into Year 10 has contributed to the devaluing of Year 10 as an essential component in the schooling of young people. The fact that the majority of students now proceed to senior secondary schooling, changes to the labour market and the extended period of high levels of youth unemployment have all contributed to the diminished status of the School Certificate as an exit credential. The belief that Year 10 students essentially mark time while waiting to commence the Higher School Certificate program, however, is not sufficient justification for bringing Higher School Certificate studies forward. It is, rather, a rationale for re-examining and strengthening what happens in Year 10.

Although schooling in Years 7-10 was not directly addressed in the terms of reference or in the Green Paper, many submissions to Professor McGaw criticised:
- the lack of preparedness of many students for Year 11 and 12;
- the apparent lack of challenge posed by Year 10 studies for more able students;
- the ‘low stakes’ nature of the external assessment where students were not accountable for their own individual results;
- perceptions that the timing of external examinations in the middle of Year 10 has lessened the significance of subsequent Year 10 studies; and
- concerns about a perceived discontinuity between junior and senior secondary school studies.

Professor McGaw recommended that the School Certificate be abolished and replaced, for students leaving school, with a statement of achievement which would include each student’s results on statewide tests in literacy and numeracy as well as school-based results in all courses completed in Year 10.

The Government will respond immediately to the concerns identified.

The School Certificate, however, will be retained and strengthened by taking steps to enhance the form, purpose and outcomes of this stage of schooling.

The Government’s intention is to return significance and purpose to Year 10 studies by providing students with a credential that is valued and reports meaningfully on their achievement. It will be awarded on the basis of external statewide tests in four curriculum-based areas, and on strengthened school assessment of subjects studied.

The Government will discontinue the use of Reference Tests and replace them with statewide curriculum-based tests in four areas: English literacy; Mathematics; Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics; and Science and Technology. The tests in each of these areas will be based on Board of Studies curriculum and will be reported against standards achieved by students. The Board will specify the scope of these tests and make this information available in early 1998.

This decision is based on the Government’s commitment to ensuring that students at all stages of schooling have strong foundations in their education.

These foundations are needed for the successful study of the range of subjects within the Higher School Certificate. They are necessary for analysing and evaluating texts; making appropriate use of technology; analysing data; evaluating arguments; appreciating art forms; and critically assessing the ideas and opinions of others. They enhance the expression of students’ own ideas and arguments, their gathering and analysis of data, the development of research skills, and their artistic creativity. These all depend on students’ having developed the knowledge, skills and understanding that will enable them to participate effectively in their Years 11 and 12 studies, and for their role in society as adults.
The new statewide tests will be administered in November each year, with students to receive their own results before the end of Term 4. Year 10 students will now maintain their studies until the end of the school year.

The Government will also allow students to re-sit these tests in Year 11, if they wish, as an opportunity to improve their results on such tests as a part of a portfolio of results that they might wish to present to an employer or training provider.

The Government’s commitment to expanding the range of subjects externally assessed in Year 10 and to enhance the study of Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics will also be met.

The English literacy and Mathematics testing will commence for Year 10 students in 1998. Trialling of tests for the other areas will also be undertaken in 1998, with a view to full implementation of the reformed School Certificate in 1999.

These changes to the School Certificate will involve a consideration of mandatory study requirements over Years 7-10. Interim advice will be given to schools to ensure that no student is adversely affected.

The Board of Studies will report on the standards achieved in statewide tests for the School Certificate in ways that are consistent with the model adopted for the Higher School Certificate. Students will continue to receive the results of their own specific performance in all subjects studied.

Students satisfying requirements for the School Certificate will receive a statement of results achieved in statewide tests and in school-based assessments. This reporting will include agreed descriptors of standards, consistent with the review of curriculum outcomes by the panel chaired by Professor Eltis. Students will also be eligible to receive an updated statement of results if they leave school prior to the Higher School Certificate examinations.

Finally, the Government will apply the criteria for evaluating Higher School Certificate subjects to the Years 7-10 curriculum. This process will look, particularly, at the questions raised in the Higher School Certificate Review about the relative difference in standard between junior and senior secondary schooling. Such a process will build on the recommendations of the Eltis Review of curriculum K-10, with the intention of strengthening Year 10 curriculum and adding cohesion to the K-12 continuum.

The Government’s policy for the School Certificate is summarised opposite.
SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

The Government acknowledges the multiple purposes of a credential marking the end of junior secondary schooling. The Government will:

- strengthen the School Certificate so that it has meaning and significance for students, parents and the community;
- discontinue the use of Reference Tests and replace them with statewide tests in four areas: English literacy; Mathematics; Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics; and Science and Technology. Results in these tests will be reported against the standards achieved by students;
- administer the tests in November with students to receive their own scores before the end of Term 4. The mandatory testing of English literacy and Mathematics will commence for Year 10 students in 1998; trial tests in a sample of schools for Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics; and Science and Technology will be undertaken in 1998 with statewide testing to occur in 1999;
- continue to include school-based assessment of the standard of students’ achievement in subjects studied;
- strengthen the Years 7-10 curriculum by evaluating courses in terms of the relevant criteria for introducing new subjects and courses into the Higher School Certificate; and
- provide students who leave school at any time prior to the Higher School Certificate with a School Academic Record. Results in subjects will be reported according to agreed standards framework descriptors consistent with the Eltis recommendations.
Implementing the Changes

The Government recognises the deeply held concerns in the community that the present arrangements for the Higher School Certificate do not cater adequately or fairly for the majority of students. At the same time, the Government will not rush the changes to the Higher School Certificate. Its implementation strategies are deliberate and achievable.

In responding to Professor McGaw’s recommendations, the Government was mindful of:

■ the impact of change on students already engaged in senior study or in the years leading to senior study;
■ the effects on teachers and the organisation of schools; and
■ the need to develop and refine some proposals prior to implementation, while taking advice on the directions being pursued.

The strategic directions for the reformed Higher School Certificate announced in this White Paper will be implemented in ways that meet these needs. They will also be co-ordinated across all agencies with responsibilities for the development and delivery of the Higher School Certificate.

The commitment to consultation, on which this Review was grounded, will extend to the implementation phase.

The changes arising from this Review will be put into place in a considered manner. The Government will avoid the mistakes of the past which saw too little attention given to implementation.

The first graduates of the new Higher School Certificate will begin their Preliminary (Year 11) studies in the year 2000 and sit for their examinations in the year 2001, as set out in the timeline below. The timeline reflects the strong advice of school authorities and educational groups affected by the changes. It also reflects the Government’s commitment to instituting changes that are important, have clear benefits, involve schools and education professionals in their implementation, and are supported by the community.
### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE FOR THE NEW HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE AND THE REFORMED SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ACHIEVEMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 1997</td>
<td>White Paper released</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 1997</td>
<td>Commencement of curriculum investigation and evaluation of courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 1997</td>
<td>Advice from the Languages Policy Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1998</td>
<td>First version (iteration) of performance scales established for all courses. Assessment guidelines on range and balance of school-based assessments distributed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1998</td>
<td>Statewide School Certificate testing in English literacy and Mathematics. Trialling of sample tests in other areas of the curriculum.</td>
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| July 1999 | Revised, quality assured syllabuses distributed:  
- consistent with course structure;  
- acknowledging of performance scales and associated expected learning outcomes; and  
- inclusive of advice on extended assessment strategies, and explicitly acknowledging relevant key competencies.  
New curriculum arrangements in place. Second iteration of performance scales completed.  
New 2 unit VET courses developed. VET courses that can count towards university entrance identified. |
| Nov 1999  | School Certificate testing statewide based on English literacy; Mathematics; Australian History; Australian Geography and Civics; and Science and Technology. |
| Dec 1999  | Students receive School Certificate Reports on the comprehensive range of Year 10 assessments.                                                                 |
| Feb 2000  | Year 11 commences preliminary courses under new curriculum structure.                                                                                      |
| Feb 2001  | Year 12 commences first HSC year.                                                                                                                                 |
| Dec 2001/ Jan 2002 | Students receive HSC results from Board of Studies.                                                                                                      |