Curriculum

Central to the quality of education is the quality of the curriculum. The Government’s reforms ensure the Higher School Certificate curriculum is rigorous, externally assessed, and relevant to the broad range of needs, interests and capacities of students in Years 11 and 12.

In any consideration of the rigour, breadth and coherence of a school curriculum, there are some fundamental questions: what is made available to students; what is demanded of students; what choices students are able to exercise; and the principles of quality and equity that ought to underpin the construction and delivery of the curriculum. These questions provided a focus for the Review in relation to the content and standards of curriculum for the Higher School Certificate.

RAISING CURRICULUM STANDARDS

The Government’s purpose is to ensure that the Higher School Certificate curriculum is of the highest standard, with rigour and subject integrity underpinned by explicit criteria. It endorses the development of a clearer and more coherent curriculum structure. The approach outlined in this White Paper involves a measured and considered reshaping of the current structure.

This White Paper builds on the reforms proposed by the panel, chaired by Professor Eltis, which in 1995 undertook the Government’s review of primary and secondary curriculum outcomes. The Eltis Review recommended that syllabuses should clearly define the content (knowledge, skills and understanding) that students are expected to learn in each subject.

Government policy is that the curriculum for each subject should be of the highest quality and developed within a context of research, expert advice, and best national and international practice. The community expects no less.

The Government endorses the need for explicit criteria that ensure the integrity and standard of subjects offered in the Higher School Certificate. The Government has built on the criteria proposed by Professor McGaw. These criteria, listed below, are central to the Government’s plans for the Higher School Certificate. They establish clear guidelines for a systematic investigation of the range and rigour of existing courses, and any proposed new courses, for the Higher School Certificate.

Taken together, these criteria will provide a Higher School Certificate that is equitable and of the highest standards.
CRITERIA FOR HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE COURSES

For any new courses developed or endorsed by the Board of Studies, there must be satisfactory evidence of the need for the course and an assurance of its quality, through:

- a detailed explanation of the nature of the subject content (knowledge, skills and understanding);
- a clear rationale and statement of purpose for the course;
- a review of national and international research and practice;
- the learning outcomes students are expected to achieve;
- evidence that the learning outcomes for students are set at an appropriate standard;
- prior knowledge assumed in students enrolling in the course, and the manner in which that prior knowledge will be built upon;
- an identification of the subsequent uses students might make of the learning from the course;
- internal and external assessment procedures to be used;
- the relationship of the course to existing courses with which it might appear to overlap;
- evidence of potential demand for the course;
- an analysis of the likely impact on school timetables;
- evidence about the availability of appropriate numbers of suitably qualified teachers; and
- evidence that the course can be taught and examined within the resources usually available to schools.

Each new Higher School Certificate course proposed by the Board of Studies must have a clear statement of how it meets these criteria.

These criteria will also be applied to all existing courses, placing on notice for removal or re-organisation all courses that fail to satisfy the criteria.

The Review process identified concerns about the extent to which these criteria would be met by existing curriculum in a number of areas. Many submissions raised these concerns in relation to General Studies, Applied Studies and Life Management Studies.

The current level of participation in General Studies arises largely from its use as a way in which students can complete a one unit course to meet the current requirement of at least 11 units for the Higher School Certificate. It also enables many students specialising in Mathematics and Science to meet the requirement of at least one unit from the ‘humanities/social sciences/creative arts’ key learning areas.

Professor McGaw noted that many submissions to the Review were critical of the lack of rigour in General Studies and that it was not taken seriously by many students. He also showed that there is substantial overlap between General Studies and at least seven other subjects.

Professor McGaw also reported a significant degree of overlap between Applied Studies and other subjects, particularly in Mathematics and Science. For those students not attempting a course in Mathematics and...
Science, enrolling in Applied Studies is seen as a less demanding way of satisfying the requirement for at least one unit in the ‘mathematics/science/technologies’ key learning areas.

For these reasons, Professor McGaw recommended the deletion of General Studies and Applied Studies from the Higher School Certificate curriculum as Board-developed courses.

Similar concerns were raised in the Review about Life Management Studies. On balance, however, Professor McGaw found that this subject area had potential value under the proposed new curriculum criteria and structure. He recommended that Life Management Studies be retained as a Board-developed course, but that it be revised to upgrade it and to remove overlap with both junior secondary school courses and other Higher School Certificate subjects.

The Government supports these recommendations.

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**CURRICULUM CHANGES**

The Government accepts Professor McGaw’s advice to make the following changes to the curriculum for the Higher School Certificate:

- delete General Studies;
- delete Applied Studies; and
- evaluate and revise Life Management Studies against the criteria for the introduction of new courses.

In the context of the decision to delete General Studies and Applied Studies from the Higher School Certificate curriculum, the Government will investigate the feasibility of introducing a small number of new 2 Unit subjects, available in Year 12 only, conditional upon these new courses meeting the requirements for the introduction of new subjects and courses as outlined previously. These courses would provide an option for students wishing to change their pattern of study for the Higher School Certificate year and in some cases would encourage breadth of study.

Professor McGaw also recommended that Distinction courses, currently undertaken by a small number of students in the specialist areas of Comparative Literature, Cosmology and Philosophy, be deleted from the Higher School Certificate curriculum. He proposed instead that able students be given access to a greater range of university undergraduate courses, such as those currently offered at the University of Western Sydney and Charles Sturt University. This would give students the opportunity to obtain direct credit at university level.

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**DISTINCTION COURSES**

The Government accepts Professor McGaw’s advice to delete Distinction courses from the curriculum and instead to support more able students to enrol in university undergraduate studies while still at school.

The Government will initiate joint discussions involving the Board of Studies, school education authorities and universities to negotiate curriculum, delivery, and credit transfer arrangements. As an interim measure, however, the Government will maintain Distinction courses until the proposed new arrangements with universities are established.
THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Key Learning Areas

In 1990 the Education Reform Act established new curriculum arrangements requiring subjects to be grouped within broad learning areas. Six Key Learning Areas were mandated in Years K-6, with eight established for Years 7-12.

Submissions to the Review indicated that the Key Learning Area arrangements are of doubtful benefit when applied to the senior years of schooling. There have been particular problems in those areas defined by somewhat arbitrary clusters of previously discrete subjects. Disputes have arisen as to who should be teaching what content to whom within these areas. The traditional territorial boundaries between subjects brought together artificially have often constrained attempts to deliver a coherent curriculum. The existence of Key Learning Areas may have also created pressures for the expansion of the curriculum.

For these reasons, Professor McGaw advised that the use of the Key Learning Area structure in the Higher School Certificate be abandoned. The Government accepts this advice.

KEY LEARNING AREAS

The use of the Key Learning Area structure in the Higher School Certificate will be abandoned.

The structure of subjects and courses in the Higher School Certificate

Professor McGaw’s review of the Higher School Certificate revealed a number of concerns with the current curriculum structure. Significant problems are caused by the excessively differentiated array of Board-developed courses within some subjects. This results in a lowering of student expectations. There is evidence that too many capable students are studying less demanding courses. For example, between 1991 and 1996 the candidature in the two most demanding English courses declined by nearly 50 percent, and for the two most demanding Mathematics courses by over 30 percent. Similar downward trends have been recorded in recent years for the candidature of other 3 Unit subjects, such as Modern and Ancient History, Geography and Economics. Overall, there has been a decline since 1991 of some 35 percent in the number of students undertaking at least one 3 Unit or 4 Unit course (while total candidature of the two years is similar).

Moreover, Professor McGaw found that expectations, not only prior performance, determine whether the more demanding options are taken up. Capable students in the School Certificate from South West Sydney, for example, have been significantly less likely to undertake the more demanding English courses than those from Northern Sydney.

Excessive differentiation has also led to doubts about the quality of courses at the lower end of a series of courses within a subject. The curriculum demands made on students in the lower courses often fail to challenge those students to reach their potential.

To answer these concerns, Professor McGaw recommended a curriculum structure based on 2 Unit courses for Higher School Certificate subjects. Where justified in a particular subject, two courses – a 2 Unit standard and a 2 Unit advanced course, with overlapping content and assessment – could be provided to cater for a range of student abilities. Professor McGaw noted that in most subjects this overlap would be about
one-third of the curriculum content. This would enable the higher-level course to cover more advanced material, while the standard course would consolidate material on which the overlapping part would build.

The advanced and standard courses within a subject would be reported against a single performance scale for the subject. The single performance scale will be structured in such a way that successful students of the advanced course will be more likely to score the highest marks than students attempting the standard course. This will provide an incentive for capable students to undertake advanced studies.

The Government’s primary purpose in revising the curriculum framework is to raise expectations by maximising the opportunity for students to study, and succeed in, more demanding courses. Rigour, subject integrity, relevance, and equity will be assured by application of the criteria for Higher School Certificate curriculum as outlined on page 8.

Students who undertake advanced studies will have their achievements recognised and rewarded. This will be achieved through the use of a single scale for assessing and reporting students’ achievement across courses within a subject. Students’ marks in different courses within the same subject will now be directly comparable, providing students doing the more demanding course with greater opportunities to receive higher marks.

The course structures must also address the issues of low student expectations, the proliferation of courses, and the declining numbers of students taking up advanced level courses, as raised by Professor McGaw in his review, by:

- raising curriculum standards;
- allowing for greater depth of study in subjects where this is warranted;
- providing more students with the opportunity of attempting higher levels of study; and
- raising teacher and student expectations about student achievement.

The Government has already conducted a pilot trial of the 2 Unit curriculum model in a small number of government and nongovernment schools. That trial considered the implications of the model for timetabling, resources and subject choice. It provided encouraging evidence of the potential of the model, taking into account options for patterns of study over both Year 11 and Year 12. The trial suggested that offering both advanced and standard courses is feasible in schools of a variety of sizes. It also indicated that students are more likely to choose more demanding courses than under present arrangements. In most of the schools in the trial, the model had little effect on breadth of study, but indicated a significant increase in depth of study.

The Government endorses in principle a 2 Unit curriculum structure for Board-developed courses, but recognises that, in some areas of the curriculum, further investigation needs to be undertaken. It will do this by fully investigating curriculum models consistent with that proposed by Professor McGaw, including the provision of advanced and standard courses within subjects where justified. The investigation of the curriculum model will extend the findings of the pilot trial noted above.

This investigation will be completed by the end of 1997, to enable the Government to make final decisions in early 1998 on the curriculum model to be used.
**PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING THE CURRICULUM**

Consistent with its commitment to a Higher School Certificate curriculum of the highest standard, the Government supports the development of a simpler and more coherent curriculum structure.

It will investigate the proposed 2 Unit model and, where justified, will introduce advanced and standard courses within subjects.

The investigation will be in the context of the Government’s determination to assess and report the standards of students’ achievements in each subject on a single scale. It will be designed to determine the best structure for each subject to:

- allow for greater depth of study;
- maximise participation in advanced level courses, and reverse the decline in advanced studies in recent years; and
- raise student and teacher expectations about student achievement.

The investigation will take special account of perceived difficulties in:

- flexibility for student choices;
- flexibility of delivery;
- equity principles and objectives;
- enhancement of standards; and
- resources and timetabling – taking into account the requirement for students to study a minimum of 10 units in the Higher School Certificate year.

The investigation will examine the existing 3 Unit subject content to ensure that what is necessary and valuable in these courses is retained. It will also extend the modelling of the curriculum structure in a more extensive range of schools, to guide these judgments.

The outcome of this investigation will be reported to the Minister at the end of 1997.

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**English**

The Government recognises the urgent need to redevelop the Higher School Certificate English curriculum.

The experience with English in the Higher School Certificate over recent years has been one of dramatic decline in enrolments in 3 Unit and 2 Unit Related courses. This is the archetypal example of differentiated courses within a subject without a common reporting scale, leading to a lowering of expectations and outcomes of students. Attempts to remedy this problem have been piecemeal and ineffective. There is now an urgent need to proceed with a structure for English – the only compulsory subject – which avoids the pitfalls identified by the Review. Preliminary modelling of the new structure for the subject of English indicates a significant increase in students’ stated intentions to study more advanced English courses.

The Government will ask the Board of Studies to commence work on the development of new courses, as outlined below.

The Board of Studies will draw on the outcomes of its recent developmental work for the Stage 6 (Years 11 and 12) English syllabus to develop standard and advanced courses in English. These 2 Unit courses will have overlapping content and will be marked on a single scale, as described above.
The study of literature will be a component of both the standard and advanced English courses. This will allow for an increased emphasis on literature within the Higher School Certificate. A new 2 Unit Literature course will also be established to provide the opportunity for some students to focus more intensively on literature in English. The Government will require the new Literature course to be taken in conjunction with another 2 Unit English course. The study of the Literature course alone will not meet the mandatory requirement that English be included within the Higher School Certificate program for all students. While the Literature course will be set at a demanding standard, students will have the option of studying it in conjunction with either the standard or the advanced course in English.

For the first time in the history of the Higher School Certificate, these arrangements will allow students to study four units of English.

The Government recognises the need to support students with a history of low achievement in English to meet the requirements for the Higher School Certificate in English, not only because it is the sole compulsory subject, but because literacy in English underpins success for students across the curriculum. The Government’s strategy is based on a desire to raise the achievement level of students to Higher School Certificate standard rather than to lower the standard that the Higher School Certificate should demand of them. Accordingly, the Government will authorise the development of further strategies for students of low achievement in English, including a Fundamentals of English course in Year 11, to be studied in addition to and complementary with the Year 11 English course. This Board-developed course will enable students to spend more time on, and receive more intensive tuition in, the Preliminary course (Year 11) in English. It will equip them to participate in more satisfying learning and to achieve more successful outcomes across all subject areas in both Years 11 and 12.

The Government will establish a 2 Unit English as a Second Language course, as recommended by Professor McGaw. The Government wants to ensure that students who genuinely need English as a Second Language assistance can receive it.

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**ENGLISH**

The Government will authorise the development of the following structure for English:

- two differentiated courses for the Higher School Certificate, with some common curriculum content and reporting on a single scale – 2 Unit Standard English and 2 Unit Advanced English;
- a new 2 Unit Literature course for the Higher School Certificate, set at a demanding level, providing students for the first time with the opportunity to study four units of English;
- a new 2 Unit Fundamentals of English course available only in the Preliminary Year (Year 11) to assist students needing additional support to reach the level of literacy in English required for the Higher School Certificate Year; and
- a new 2 Unit English as a Second Language course, available in both Year 11 and Year 12. It will have strict eligibility requirements. If undertaken in Year 12, it would meet Higher School Certificate requirements for the study of English.
Science

The Government has determined the following arrangements for Science.

**SCIENCE**

The Government endorses Professor McGaw’s recommendations to retain 2 Unit science courses in Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Geology; 2 Unit General Science will be available for students not studying other science courses.

Further consideration will be given to the structure of General Science, including whether advanced and standard courses in General Science are warranted.

Languages

Prior to release of Professor McGaw’s report, the Government initiated a Review of Languages Policy in New South Wales. A report is due to be presented to the Minister later this year. The Government will require that the Review of Languages Policy examine Professor McGaw’s recommendations for restructuring the provision of languages in Years 11 and 12 and incorporate advice on these recommendations within its report to the Minister.

Subsequently, the Government will investigate the feasibility of the 2 Unit structure as it applies to languages, consistent with the guidelines above, and in the context of the outcomes of the Review of Languages Policy.

Other subjects

The curriculum structure for other subjects will be considered in the context of the investigation of curriculum structure outlined above. The option of studying four units of Mathematics will continue to be available.

Content-endorsed and school-designed courses

In the past, school-designed courses have provided the flexibility for schools to address the particular needs, interests and capacities of their students. As these courses have developed currency in a number of schools, the Board of Studies has taken responsibility for enhancing their consistency and standard by accrediting them as content-endorsed courses.

The Government accepts Professor McGaw’s advice to maintain these arrangements, recognising the need for the Board of Studies to continue to ensure their standard and status by adopting appropriate criteria for their endorsement.

The Government will request the Board of Studies to evaluate its current criteria for the endorsement of school-designed and content-endorsed courses, taking guidance from the criteria for the introduction of new Board-developed subjects and courses noted earlier.
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

The Government strongly supports high quality, industry recognised, vocational education and training in the Higher School Certificate.

Responses to the Review of the Higher School Certificate expressed overwhelming support for extending and strengthening vocational studies through the Higher School Certificate.

Vocational education and training programs within the Higher School Certificate have been developed through TAFE, schools, and industry programs. While there has been value in this curriculum diversity, there is now a need to re-assess these programs, assure their coherence and relevance, and extend recognition by employers, the vocational training sector, and universities.

While vocational education and training programs contribute to the comprehensive Higher School Certificate program, they are also part of the broad range of vocational education and training programs available more generally outside of schools.

The future development of vocational education in the Higher School Certificate should be consistent with the Government's commitments to standards and subject integrity. It should also be coherent with the policies, standards, delivery and assessment framework of the vocational education and training sector more generally, and of the needs of industry.

The Government is committed to achieving these goals within a coherent, integrated pattern of senior studies that does not drive students, explicitly or implicitly, into pre-determined post-school pathways.

Principles for vocational education in schools

The principles for the development of vocational education and training programs within the Higher School Certificate reforms recommended by Professor McGaw address the priorities and policies of both the school and vocational education and training sectors.

The Government accepts this advice, which has been strongly supported by schools, teachers, industry and the community.

Implementation arrangements, however, will need to consider requirements for structured work placements. While structured workplace learning is a highly desirable principle, each industry body would have to determine the amount of work placement relevant to, and available in, the industry. The work placement would need to be consistent with principles of quality training and be suitable to the level of the qualification. The potential for students to combine Higher School Certificate study with apprenticeships and traineeships will also need to be considered carefully, taking into account the possible impact of extended work placement on other Higher School Certificate study requirements.
**PRINCIPLES FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE**

To guide the development of vocational education and training within the Higher School Certificate, the Government affirms that vocational education and training courses should:

- be potentially appropriate for all students in the Higher School Certificate and should be accessible to all, including those who move from secondary to higher education;
- be offered in sufficient variety to satisfy different student needs;
- contribute to the broad education of students;
- be recognised by both secondary and vocational education accreditation authorities;
- be offered in response to demand established from industry needs, using the State Training Profile;
- offer training relevant to the industries in the State Training Profile rather than merely to narrowly focused occupations or the specific needs of single enterprises;
- result, on successful completion, in the award of a vocational qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework or in clearly established credit towards such a qualification;
- have clear links to post-school destinations, particularly further vocational education and training and employment;
- be developed in collaboration between the secondary education and vocational education and training sectors and industry; and
- have a component of structured workplace training to allow for competencies to be developed and assessed in the workplace to the extent deemed appropriate by, and available in, industry.

**Enhancing vocational education and training**

The principles outlined above will ensure the integrity of vocational studies within the Higher School Certificate. They are designed to enhance the status of vocational courses and the recognition afforded them by industry, vocational education and training authorities and universities.

The Government’s objective is to support the development of vocational education and training courses in the Higher School Certificate that enable students also to receive a vocational certificate within the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Vocational courses in the Higher School Certificate will be streamlined and focused more explicitly on the provision of more coherent and comprehensive packages. The range of courses will be reduced to a consistent framework for each industry area. The area of Hospitality, for example, currently has content endorsed courses, Industry Studies strands, and Joint Secondary Schools TAFE offerings. The emphasis now will be on the development of 2 Unit courses within industry areas defined in the State Training Profile.

Consistent with this strengthening of vocational education and training, the Government will support negotiations with universities to expand the range of vocational courses that can be counted for tertiary
entrance. If this is not achieved, the Government will support universities’ reducing the number of Board-developed courses required for their selection index, so that prospective university entrants are not discouraged from undertaking vocational studies.

The Government endorses the strategies recommended by Professor McGaw, below, for reviewing the range of vocational and training programs available through the Higher School Certificate.

**STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

The principles for vocational education in schools should be applied to current vocational education and training curriculum in the Higher School Certificate to:

- remove duplication in offerings in the same content area;
- bring all vocational education and training courses within a coherent curriculum framework under broad industry groupings, consistent with the State Training Profile;
- identify those components of general Higher School Certificate courses that can satisfy the requirements of vocational education and training modules and develop explicit accreditation and credit rules for these components;
- enhance the contribution of the courses to the broader education of students;
- determine which vocational education and training courses can count towards university entrance; and
- make the necessary arrangements to undertake this task collaboratively by secondary, vocational and university education authorities and industry representatives.

**Key competencies in vocational and general education curriculum**

Key competencies are seen as being integral to the application of knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of settings. They are:

- Collecting, analysing and organising information
- Communicating ideas and information
- Planning and organising activities
- Working with others and in teams
- Using mathematical ideas and techniques
- Solving Problems
- Using Technology

The key competencies listed are not new. They are competencies that students frequently use and demonstrate in their learning. They have been accepted nationally as components of vocational education and training curriculum.

The NSW Key Competencies Pilot Project found that assisting students to develop the key competencies in the context of school curriculum can enhance teaching and learning. They are also valued in further education, training and the workplace.

Although not specified as a key competency, the pilot project also highlighted the need for *cultural understanding* to be incorporated into syllabuses across the curriculum.
The development of key competencies requires the integrated application of knowledge, skills and understanding. They are present, at least implicitly, in good teaching and learning practices.

The Government therefore endorses Professor McGaw’s recommendation that revised syllabus documents identify those key competencies present in the content of the syllabus and that are integral to its learning outcomes.

**REQUIREMENTS FOR THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE**

The division of the Higher School Certificate program of study into Preliminary (Year 11) and Higher School Certificate (Year 12) courses was intended as a way of providing flexibility for students wishing to accelerate their studies ahead of the rest of their cohort, or for those seeking to extend their studies over a period of up to five years. Subsequently, schools were provided with the additional flexibility to commence teaching senior studies in Term 4 of Year 10.

Students studying for the Higher School Certificate are currently required to meet prescribed study requirements relating to the number of units and breadth of study. There are also regulations concerning the timing and sequencing of study in the Preliminary and Higher School Certificate courses.

Within the context of his proposal for a curriculum framework based on 2 Unit courses, Professor McGaw has recommended the compulsory study of English in the Higher School Certificate, increasing the minimum study requirements for the Preliminary and Higher School Certificate Years to 12 units, and discontinuing requirements for breadth of study.

**English – the compulsory subject**

The Government notes widespread support for English to be the only compulsory subject in the Higher School Certificate. The Government agrees. The primary, perhaps pre-eminent, means of acquiring and enhancing proficiency in the English language is through reading, writing, reflecting over, critically analysing, and communicating about, the wide range of literary texts, media and other forms of personal and everyday communication. Future opportunities in further education and training, employment and other aspects of economic and social life in Australia are enhanced by mastery of English.

**Required units of study**

The Government accepts Professor McGaw’s advice to retain the existing distinction between Preliminary and Higher School Certificate courses and the resulting assessment requirements.

The Government will vary Professor McGaw’s recommendation for 12 units of study in both the Preliminary (Year 11) and Higher School Certificate Year (Year 12). While endorsing the requirement for Preliminary (Year 11) students to undertake a minimum of 12 units, the Government will require only that Higher School Certificate students undertake at least 10 units.

The Government recognises the complexities involved in ensuring that the curriculum for Years 11 and 12 balances the complementary objectives of ‘breadth of study’ and ‘depth of study’. An unduly narrow curriculum can limit students’ intellectual, social and cultural development as well as constrain their possibilities as far as education, training and life prospects are concerned. At the same time, a degree of specialisation involving an increased ‘depth of study’ is associated with enhanced intellectual achievement. The Government recognises the significant potential within the curriculum for students to specialise. Specialisation supports students wishing to undertake in-depth study in areas appealing to their intellectual strengths, interests and capacities. A degree of such specialisation to support learning at depth is appropriate, so long as a reasonable breadth of study can be maintained.
The Government supports a broad and balanced education providing opportunities to develop knowledge and skills across the curriculum – the arts, humanities, sciences and technologies.

Preliminary modelling of the proposed curriculum structure in schools indicates that most students will undertake a broad pattern of studies without the need for regulations to mandate particular patterns of study. The Government, however, will limit the study of science to a maximum of six units.

By insisting that in the Preliminary Year students study at least 12 units within a reformed Higher School Certificate curriculum, strengthened by the application of the criteria outlined in this White Paper, the Government is assuring adequate breadth of study for these Higher School Certificate students. By having the opportunity to take a load of 10 units in the Higher School Certificate Year, students will have the opportunity to study over a slightly narrower range of subjects. This structure will enable students to exercise more choice, enjoy greater specialisation, and engage in more in-depth study. It will help to reduce the pressure of personal stress on students, which was commented on so frequently in consultations and submissions to the Review.

The reduction to at least 10 units in the Higher School Certificate Year will also provide greater flexibility for students and teachers. These study requirements, together with the 2 Unit courses of one year’s duration (proposed earlier), will enable students to change their pattern of study, if necessary, on entering the Higher School Certificate Year. Schools will have flexibility in timetabling courses and programs.

Consistent with the goal of providing a balance between ‘breadth’ and ‘depth’ of study, the Government endorses the following requirements for the Higher School Certificate.

**STUDY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE**

To qualify for the Higher School Certificate students are required to complete at least:

- 12 units of study in their Preliminary Year;
- 10 units in their Higher School Certificate Year, of which at least:
  - 6 units must be Board-developed courses, and
  - 2 units must be a Board-developed course in English.

**COMMON STARTING DATE FOR PRELIMINARY AND HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE COURSES**

Currently, schools are able to commence Preliminary studies (Year 11) for the Higher School Certificate during Year 10. Many submissions to Professor McGaw questioned the inequitable nature of the current arrangements, seeing the early commencement of Higher School Certificate studies as a means of providing some schools and students with an advantage in the Higher School Certificate examinations that is not available to others.

The Government recognises that the Higher School Certificate is part of a continuum of learning across all years of schooling. By the end of Year 10 students should be able to demonstrate that they have achieved standards that provide a foundation for their Higher School Certificate studies. This raises important questions about the future of junior secondary curriculum and, in particular, the Year 10 School Certificate, which are considered in a later section of this paper.
The Government notes the general support of school education authorities and educational stakeholders for Preliminary studies to commence on day 1 of term 1 in Year 11 – and not before – taking into account the need for flexibility in designing programs for students accelerating their studies for the Higher School Certificate before Year 12.

**COMMENCEMENT OF THE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE PROGRAM**

- Study of the Preliminary course will commence on the first day of term 1 of Year 11.
- Study of the Higher School Certificate course may commence on satisfactory completion of the Preliminary course, normally in term 4 of Year 11.