



ADVANCED STANDING AT UNIVERSITIES FOR HSC STUDENTS

Briefing Paper for the Committee of Chairs of Academic Boards Meeting, 31 October 2003.

Issue

Recognition of Higher School Certificate achievements for students enrolling in university courses.

Background

A national policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has evolved to provide more effective learning pathways through meaningful and dynamic partnerships. This policy is based upon a set of principles ratified by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) that includes the provision that students be given recognition for outcomes achieved in senior school courses.

This represents a cross-sectoral commitment to co-operate to achieve the best outcomes for students in respect of recognition of achievement so that study time may be optimised. This commitment is part of a key process in building closer relationships between education sectors. RPL is critical to the development of a more efficient, open, integrated and relevant education system that can meet the challenge of rapidly changing needs and priorities for students and institutions.

In his recommendations for the reform of the Higher School Certificate, Professor Barry McGaw proposed that able students be given access to a range of university courses that would provide them with an opportunity to obtain direct credit (*Securing Their Future*, page 9).

More recently, Dr Gregor Ramsey recommended that the Board of Studies develop HSC courses that would give advanced standing to students who are aspiring to become teachers (*Report of the Review of Teacher Education, Quality Matters*, pages 48 and 218).

Current Situation – TAFE

For almost ten years the Board of Studies and TAFE have negotiated arrangements that allow students who have completed certain HSC courses to gain advanced standing in relevant TAFE courses. The similarity of outcomes between courses in the Higher School Certificate and TAFE modules allows for this. These arrangements work very smoothly and are part of the accepted articulation between senior secondary study and TAFE, particularly in relation to participation in VET framework courses.

TAFE credit transfer arrangements give students standard exemptions from course modules that align with HSC course outcomes, thus generally avoiding situations where students are required to repeat the same content in their courses of study. The Higher School Certificate Records of Achievement and Course Reports provide the necessary evidence that students have met requirements. This evidence may also be supplemented by a Statement of Achievement, relating to specific course options, issued through the school. The HSC/TAFE Credit Transfer website has been developed to provide information and is available at www.det.nsw.edu.au/hsctafe. HSC/TAFE credit transfer provides an important link between the senior school curriculum and post-school education, training and work.

Current Situation – Universities

At present there is no equivalent system of recognition for Higher School Certificate achievement in university courses. Currently there is limited advanced standing from HSC to university courses. Advanced standing is largely confined to the relatively small number of students studying Distinction Courses and University Developed Board Endorsed Courses. These arrangements are usually negotiated on an individual course and university basis.

Each year, since the inception of the Distinction Courses program in 1994, the Board of Studies has obtained from all NSW and ACT universities, through their Chairs of Academic Boards, individual statements from each university indicating the extent to which each Distinction Course can be recognised. Distinction Courses have Board Developed status and can be counted towards the calculation of the UAI. All of the universities have agreed to acknowledge the university-level content and outcomes of these courses. Each application is dealt with on a case-by-case basis and recognition ranges from advanced standing to credit.

University Developed Board Endorsed Courses (UDBECs) are courses for high-achieving students designed by universities in conjunction with schools. They may count towards the award of the Higher School Certificate but not towards the UAI. The delivering university provides some recognition of these courses, although this varies within and between courses and faculties. The Board endorsement process has shown that considerable overlap exists between HSC courses and some proposed UDBECs.

Many existing HSC courses enable students to achieve, or even move beyond, first-year university-level study. Such courses include extension courses in English, Mathematics, History and languages as well as other courses that have traditionally attracted high calibre students such as Physics and Chemistry. Board of Studies standards packages produced on CD-ROM for all 2001 and 2002 HSC courses provide a new context within which professional judgements can be made about the level of achievement of HSC students.

An opportunity now exists to formalise arrangements across the range of appropriate HSC courses so that students are not required to repeat content and/or outcomes in first-year university courses. This would be a logical extension of the comprehensive arrangements for recognition that already exist between the Board of Studies and TAFE.

While it is not anticipated that all universities would grant the same recognition for achievement in HSC courses, nevertheless the national RPL policy requires that the appropriate recognition of prior learning should apply across all educational sectors. It is envisaged by the Board of Studies that a process for HSC/university recognition should be developed and that universities should be able to reach agreement on such a process.

Achievement could be recognised as:

- credit transfer for study successfully completed in university-level Higher School Certificate courses;
- advanced standing whereby students may be exempted from certain study requirements of a particular university course if they are able to demonstrate that they have already achieved the relevant outcomes.

Proposal

It is proposed to establish a project team for the development of a system of recognition for Higher School Certificate achievement in university-level courses. Higher School Certificate courses to be considered will initially include English Extension 1 and 2, Mathematics Extension 1 and 2, History Extension, Music Extension, Physics, Chemistry and selected extension courses in Languages Other Than English. The focus will be on the achievement of students in the highest HSC bands: Band E4 for extension courses and Band 6 for 2 unit courses.

Recognition of achievement in these courses will be determined using the Board of Studies standards package CD-ROMs that have been produced from the 2001 and 2002 Higher School Certificate examinations. The standards package CD-ROMs contain the descriptions of the standards for HSC courses, examination papers and marking guidelines, certain key statistical reports, and samples of responses typically produced by students whose achievements place them on the borderline between two bands. Exemplary responses of students achieving the highest marks in courses have also been included in the 2002 Standards package CD-ROMs.

The Board will provide standards package CD-ROMs to the Committee of Chairs of Academic Boards at all participating universities to facilitate investigation of the possibilities of extending recognition arrangements. The Chairs will distribute these to the relevant faculties and to their first-year course co-ordinators who would then be able to propose appropriate levels of recognition, such as advanced standing, to students who have completed courses at particular band levels.

This project will involve complex negotiations due to the number of tertiary courses across different faculties in more than ten universities. Detailed work will be required to prepare any application to the Commonwealth Government on the funding of this project. However, experience gained from the development of the HSC/TAFE Credit Transfer Website project indicates that such an initiative takes several years from commencement to implementation of provisions and may involve two full-time officers at SEO2 level.

A review of the project's work will need to be undertaken after the first year of its operation, by which time it will become clear whether or not it is feasible to extend the term of the project. Therefore, the initial application to the Commonwealth Government should provide for funding of a pilot phase of the project. Upon submission of a positive report on the first year's work and the feasibility of extending the project's work, the Commonwealth would be requested to provide additional funding for the remaining phases of the project.

Outcomes of Pilot Project

Notional Timeline

End 2003	-	Application to DEST
Early 2004	-	Positions advertised
April 2004	-	Work commences
October 2004	-	Interim progress report to Committee of Chairs