

SECTION 7: EXTERNAL EXAMINATIONS

The Curriculum Council sets, administers and marks external examinations for WACE courses and TEE subjects.

7.1 Purpose

Results from WACE examinations at Stage 2 and Stage 3 complement and support school assessment in the following ways:

- A student obtains a WACE course report for each Stage 2 (e.g. 2A/2B) or Stage 3 (e.g. 3A/3B) pair of units completed. This clearly shows how well the student achieved in the course against the course standards and relative to others in the pair of units studied.
- Teachers receive diagnostic feedback to help them review and refine their teaching.
- Stage 2 and Stage 3 results are considered for university entrance.
- Employers and training organisations have access to more meaningful and comparable data to recruit students.
- Guide the development, monitoring and refinement of course standards.

TEE/WACE examination results will:

- statistically moderate numerical school assessments
- contribute to a score that is used to rank students for university entry – for school candidates this score is based on a 50:50 combination of information from the examination mark and the school mark; for private candidates, this score is based solely on the examination mark.
- assist in the selection of students for Curriculum Council exhibitions and awards
- support public confidence in senior secondary schooling.

Examination arrangements 2009 and beyond

For 2009 only, the remaining accredited E code TEE subjects will be examined (see Appendix 1).

The 21 WACE courses and the Languages: Interstate (including CCAFL) implemented in or before 2008 have compulsory examinations in 2009:

- There are separate examinations for Stage 2 and Stage 3 pairs of units except for Languages: Interstate (including CCAFL) which have Stage 3 examinations only.
- In their final year, students who are studying at least one Stage 2 pair of units (e.g. 2A/2B) or one Stage 3 pair of units (e.g. 3A/3B) will sit an examination in that course.
- Each examination will assess the specific content, knowledge and skills described in the syllabus for the units studied.
- Practical and performance examinations are also held for some courses.

All new courses will be examined in 2010. An examination timeline is included in Appendix 1.

7.2 Principles

The following principles provide the basis for examinations.

Valid	Examinations are based on a representative sampling of the course or subject syllabus. The distribution of examination marks provides a valid and reliable ranking of candidate achievement in the course or subject, as well as a high degree of discrimination for the purpose of university admissions and selection of award winners.
Educative	Examinations provide information to students about their achievement in a course or subject to assist them to make decisions about post-school pathways. Information about student achievement is provided to schools for curriculum planning.
Explicit	Examination items and marking keys are representative of course or subject content and standards.
Fair	The number, length and complexity of examination items are appropriate to the duration of the examination. The difficulty range of examination items is sufficiently large to enable fine discrimination of candidates. <i>The Commonwealth Disability Standards for Education 2005</i> provide the same rights to candidates with disabilities as to other candidates. Examination items and the format and layout are designed to be accessible to all candidates.
Comprehensive	Examinations draw upon a range and balance of item types suited to the course or subject.

7.3 Policy

Examinations:

- assess a representative sample of the course or subject syllabus
- enable students to provide evidence of their achievement in the course or subject
- meet inclusivity standards
- are used to generate information about student achievement in a course or subject that is provided to post-secondary destinations for selection purposes
- are designed and set in accordance with examination design brief
- are administered and conducted under uniform conditions
- are marked and evaluated using the most appropriate statistical and measurement methods to ensure fairness and validity.

7.3.1 Specifications

- An examination may have different components, for example, practical and written.
 - The examination comprises a range of items. The written examination may include an aural or video presentation as a prompt to a written question. Practical components of an examination could include an oral interview, performance, simulation or portfolio presentation, where appropriate.
 - The duration of examinations should not exceed three hours (plus 10 minutes reading time) in total, including those with practical and written components.
- The examination developed for each industry specific VET course will be based on the underpinning knowledge and skills of core competencies from the selected AQF training qualification.
- Each examination is designed to ensure a high level of reliability and validity.
- The range of difficulties of the assessment items is sufficiently large to enable fine discrimination of candidates. Examiners aim to produce an examination that produces a raw mean of about 58 per cent and a standard deviation of about 15 per cent.
- Examinations are constructed so that candidates can complete all the required items in the allocated time.
- In 2009, there are two separate examinations for each course – one examination for Stage 2 and another for Stage 3 candidates. Tertiary entrance examinations will continue in those E code subjects that have not been replaced by a course.
- Examinations use information and communications technology (ICT), where appropriate.
 - Examination panels consider options for examinations that take into account the ways in which ICT is used throughout the school assessment component. These options are being considered for medium and long-term implementation, depending on resource implications for the school systems, schools and the Curriculum Council.
 - The Council is conducting research into ways in which examinations may evolve to reflect the changing ICT environments in which candidates are learning.

7.3.2 Inclusivity standards

Inclusivity standards guide the development of examinations. Items are concise and written in standard English language (excepting the non-English components of Language examinations). Complex terminology is not used unless it is relevant to the course. Items are written in language that is not exclusive and the terms used must not be biased. Language avoids stereotypes, and the context or content of items is not dependent on particular socioeconomic situations, geographic locations or learning styles.

Examinations that contain optional questions are designed so that no candidate is disadvantaged. Within an examination, students may be required to choose from a number of optional questions. The questions are designed and assessed so that the particular variations in units within a stage, and contexts within a unit, are taken into account equitably.

Candidates with disabilities who cannot demonstrate achievement under standard examination conditions are able to apply for special arrangements to be made for them. The arrangements made are in accordance with the provisions of the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. Special examination arrangements for candidates with disabilities are implemented by the Curriculum Council, using explicit criteria and procedures. All decisions are transparent and subject to appeal.

7.3.3 Candidature

Students enrolled in an E code TEE subject or in at least one pair of Stage 2 or Stage 3 units in Year 12 are automatically enrolled to sit the examination. Students who are in their final year of schooling and are enrolled in a pair of Stage 2 or Stage 3 units of a course are required to sit the examination for the course/s. There are two separate examinations – one for students enrolled in Stage 2 units and one for students enrolled in Stage 3 units. Students can only sit one examination in a course as the Stage 2 and Stage 3 examinations for a course are held at the same time.

School students who have completed only Stage 1 units may enrol to sit an examination as a private candidate or as a school candidate if schools can give them a mark on the same scale as students doing Stage 2 or Stage 3 units. Individuals who have not undertaken school assessment during the year in which they sit the examination are able to sit the examination as a private candidate.

Each enrolled examination candidate receives a personalised examination timetable. This timetable provides information about the time, date and location of each examination in which they are enrolled. This document acts as proof of identification when the candidate sits the examinations.

Year 11 students sitting the examinations

WACE examinations are designed for students in their final year of senior secondary school (Year 12) and are structured to ensure that students who have studied Stage 2 or Stage 3 units are able to attempt the paper. However, Year 11 students who are exiting a course before their final year of schooling can enrol to sit a Stage 2 or 3 examination. These students cannot sit the examination in that course when they are in Year 12.

Private candidates

Individuals may enrol as private candidates to sit an examination because the:

- WACE provider does not offer the course or subject
- person is unable to study the course or subject at school or another provider because of timetabling clashes/restrictions
- person is seeking entry to university as a mature-age applicant
- person has been unable to complete the full study load of the course or subject (this could be due to their transferring after Term 1 from another school where the course or subject was not offered)
- person has enrolled in Stage 1 units only
- student has been ill and has not participated in an education program for at least one term during the year.

Students cannot enrol as private candidates if they have attended a school and have been eligible to be awarded a mark out of 100 in the year of enrolment for the course unit or subject.

Mature-age candidates

Candidates who are seeking 'mature-age' entry into university may repeat an examination in a course.

7.3.4 Exemptions from sitting external examinations

Exemption from sitting all external examinations

A student is exempt from sitting all examinations only if the following apply. The student is:

- working towards completion of an Australian Qualification Framework VET Certificate I or higher in the year they complete WACE requirements, **and**
- enrolled in three or fewer Stage 2 and/or Stage 3 pair of units (for example 3A and 3B).

This exemption includes students completing a school-based traineeship or apprenticeship and those involved in the School Apprenticeship Link program. Exempt students may elect to sit examinations. Examinations will not be held for Stage 1 units. Students enrolled in Stage 1 units can sit Stage 2 or 3 examinations as private candidates.

Exemption from sitting one external examination

Additional exemptions apply for students who are studying six or seven examinable pair of units. Students will only be required to sit five examinations. Students will get a grade for each unit completed and, if they sit the examination, they will also get a WACE course score.

Process for applying for an exemption

Students can apply for an exemption from sitting an examination or examinations by completing the appropriate form. A copy of the form is included in the WACE Procedures File and can be downloaded from the Curriculum Council's website at

http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/internet/Senior_Secondary/Exam_Information. The form must

be signed by the student, parent and school. An application for exemption must be approved by the Curriculum Council.

7.3.5 Genuine attempt

Students who sit an examination must make a genuine attempt to be eligible to receive the WACE. The examination mark contributes to 50 per cent of the WACE course score. The WACE course score is recorded on the student's statement of results. Refer to Section 8 for more information about the WACE course score.

A student who should sit an examination and chooses not to, or chooses not to make a genuine attempt in the examination, will not get a course report. Nor will the grades for those units be counted towards the C grade average for the WACE.

A student not making a genuine attempt is determined as one who meets both of the following criteria:

- is identified as an anomalous performer **and**
- is identified by markers as having not made a genuine attempt or not attempting each section of the paper.

A student who has been identified as not having made a genuine attempt in an examination and who has not applied for consideration of sickness/misadventure for the written component of that examination will receive a letter inviting them to appeal the decision. The special provisions committee will review the appeal.

7.3.6 Examination setting

The relevant course working group develops a set of examination specifications (i.e. an examination design brief) in accordance with the examination policy.

Specifications include the length of the examination, the subject/course content to be assessed, the examination structure and permitted materials. In this context, examination refers to all documents of the examination: examination paper, stimulus material, practical examination materials, portfolio specifications and marking guide.

When a new course is introduced, or there is a major change to an existing course, a draft sample examination paper and marking key is produced and circulated to schools approximately 18 months before the first examination of that course. In the year of a course being examined for the first time, a sample paper, grid of content and marking key is produced by the examining panel, which also produces the actual examination paper. The sample material is published early in Term 1.

7.3.7 Examination panels

An examination panel for each course or subject is appointed to set the annual examinations. Examinations are to be set in accordance with specified timelines and the quality assurance process. They must also follow set guidelines (e.g. meet copyright compliance) and reflect the advice of the independent reviewer and technical experts.

The examination group for each subject or course consists of an examining panel which develops the examination materials, and one or more independent reviewers and final checkers who assess these materials at different stages of examination development. The composition and expertise of the examining panels will take into account the context of the subject or course. In every case, the panel is to include representatives from the school sector/systems and the university sector. Where possible, there are to be two university representatives for the Stage 3 panel, and two school (teacher) representatives for the Stage 2 panel.

Ideally, the term of office for a member of the examining group is three years. However, the Curriculum Council recognises the changing demands of timetabling and other factors within educational institutions, and the need for flexibility. Accordingly, each appointment can be reassessed as appropriate.

Sample examination materials for the WACE courses to be examined in 2009 were developed in 2008. Development of the examination material for the November examination is developed annually during the first half of the year.

The following positions are appointed through advertising and merit selection process.

Coordinating examiner (WACE examinations only)

The role of the coordinating examiner is to oversee the development of the Stage 2 and Stage 3 examination materials. This person will also undertake the role of the chief examiner for either the Stage 2 or Stage 3 examinations in a particular course. This person will work with the chief examiner (of the other stage) to ensure continuity between Stage 2 and Stage 3 examinations.

Chief examiner

The role of the chief examiner is to chair the examining panel for a subject or the Stage 2 or Stage 3 examinations in a particular course, and lead the development of the examination material. This position is responsible for writing a report after each examination.

Examiner

There are at least two examiners for each subject and each of the Stage 2 and Stage 3 examinations. The role of examiners is to work with the chief examiner to develop the examination material.

The work of the panel is supported by the Curriculum Council through its reviewing, editing and checking processes.

7.3.8 Quality assurance

The Curriculum Council implements procedures for assuring the quality and security of examinations. The annual process for assuring the quality of examinations involves an interactive process with a range of experts checking different aspects of the examination materials. The Curriculum Council retains the right to make the final editorial changes.

All persons involved in writing, reviewing, editing and checking of examination materials must maintain absolute confidentiality and not discuss the actual or proposed content of the examination paper with anyone other than the examination panel and appropriate officers of the Curriculum Council. Council officers are ineligible to be involved in this process if they are teaching or coaching candidates in the subject/course, or have members of their immediate family who are candidates or are teaching the subject/course or have a commercial interest relating to the subject/course being examined.

There is one or more independent reviewers, depending on the requirements of the particular subject or course. An independent reviewer is nominated by a relevant course working group to check the draft examination materials and write a report which is submitted to the Curriculum Council.

There is one or more final checkers, depending on the requirements of the particular subject or course. Final checkers are nominated by the Curriculum Council to check the complete set of examination materials, act as a trial candidate for the examination, write a report and discuss any concerns with Curriculum Council senior consultants.

7.3.9 Selection criteria

Membership of examining groups is by application. All applicants will be expected to demonstrate:

- appropriate qualifications and experience as a teacher of senior secondary students or first-year tertiary students in the relevant course or subject. In general, a minimum of five years of recent experience teaching is considered necessary.
- high-level professional standing within the teaching community demonstrated, for example, through scholarship in the area to be examined, outstanding teaching or notable contribution to the relevant professional association.
- detailed knowledge of the relevant syllabus.
- high-level written and oral communication skills.
- capacity to apply the Curriculum Council's principles for the development of standards-referenced examinations and marking guidelines.
- capacity to work in a team in the delivery of examination materials to specified deadlines.

In any given year, a person will become ineligible for membership if s/he:

- is teaching, coaching or tutoring (or becomes involved in teaching, coaching, or tutoring) in the subject/course for which the panel has responsibility, **or**
- has an immediate family member who is a candidate or who is teaching, coaching or tutoring in the subject/course for which the panel has responsibility ('immediate family' is defined as including grandparents, siblings, children, grandchildren, spouses, former spouses and any person living with the examination panel member).

Members of the examining group must declare in writing any commercial publishing interest they have pertaining to the particular examination they are involved in setting. If members do have a commercial publishing interest, then:

- they will not base the paper solely or predominantly on the ideological approach to learning, content, assessment practice or any other particular stance used in their publication/s, bearing in mind, however, that it is accepted that a syllabus permits a range of interpretations and ideological approaches, and this range may be fairly reflected in a particular examination paper
- they will not draw on examples used in their publication/s when setting the examination paper
- they will not make reference to any commercial publication produced or authorised by them during their tenure as a member of the examining group
- they will not use their status as an examiner to promote commercial interests during the tenure as an examiner
- they will not use examination materials in the preparation of newspaper/magazine articles, media interviews or on-line/spoken presentations regarding their commercial interest during their tenure as a member of the examining group.

7.3.10 Conduct and administration of examinations

The examinations are conducted at the end of each year, with the written examinations starting on the first working day in November and the practical examinations (performance) held during week one of the Term 3 holidays and continuing into the beginning of Term 4. The written examinations are conducted over a 20-day period.

The examination schedule, with two sessions per day, is determined by the end of July after enrolments are finalised. Once enrolments to sit the examinations are processed, an examination timetable is produced and circulated to candidates. When it is absolutely necessary, for low candidature examinations, a third examination session in a day will be set.

The Curriculum Council establishes examination centres state-wide in which each examination is conducted at the same time, under uniform conditions by trained supervisors.

The Curriculum Council also implements procedures to assure the quality of the conduct of the examinations at each centre. The rules for the conduct of examinations are published in a handbook, which is distributed to all examination candidates and schools in August.

Supervisors conduct the examinations in accordance with instructions provided by the Curriculum Council in the supervisor's handbook. The instructions relate to examination centre preparation, procedures and rules, approved equipment, examination administration and the conduct of sound recordings. If a candidate does not follow the examination rules, this is treated as a breach of the rules, and appropriate sanctions are applied. All decisions are transparent and open to appeal.

Candidates are permitted to bring into the examination stationery items such as pens, pencils, erasers, rulers and sharpeners. In certain examinations, candidates are permitted to use special materials such as dictionaries, calculators or graphics calculators. Electronic dictionaries are not allowed in examinations. Examination items are set to provide equity for candidates, irrespective of the type of calculators they use.

7.3.11 Provisions for sickness and misadventure

The Curriculum Council implements procedures to consider adverse circumstances that affect candidates' capacity to demonstrate their achievement, but which cannot be anticipated and for which candidates are not responsible.

Students who believe their performances may have been affected by a temporary sickness, non-permanent disability, or an unforeseen event occurring during or just before an examination, may apply for special consideration to be given to their examination scores. In such cases, the sickness/misadventure form must be completed and submitted to the Curriculum Council by the date specified in the WACE activities schedule.

A committee, which includes a medical practitioner, assesses each claim. For claims that are approved by the sickness/misadventure committee, students are awarded either derived or actual marks, whichever is the higher. These provisions are designed to apply to students who perform below expectations because of sickness or misadventure. All decisions are transparent and open to appeal.

7.3.12 Practical examination principles

For a subject/course containing a significant performance or production component, a practical examination is administered.

In the conduct of practical examinations, the following principles apply.

- Candidates and/or their portfolios are identified only by their randomly allocated student number.
- The authenticity of candidates' work must be guaranteed. In the case of the submission of work such as a portfolio, it is essential that:
 - the main development of the work takes place in school time
 - work completed away from the school is regularly monitored by the teacher
 - each student signs a statement, witnessed by the supervising teacher and the principal, that the work is his or her own work
 - under no circumstances can another person work directly on any part of a student's work that is submitted for external assessment.
- Markers participate in trial marking to ensure a consistent understanding of the standards.
- Double marking of candidates' examination responses (oral, performance, simulation and/or portfolio) is carried out independently.
- Where necessary, a third marker is used to reconcile significant differences.
- The chief marker ensures marking consistency through the regular checking of marks.
- Practical examinations start during the Term 3 holidays and are concluded before the start of the written examinations at the beginning of November.
- Marking occurs in central locations which are convenient for candidates and markers, but must preserve the anonymity of the candidate and the candidate's school.

7.3.13 Marking

The examination panel writes a draft marking key for each item or sub-item as the examination items are developed. The marking key identifies different categories of responses and the marks to be awarded to them.

Before marking begins, the categories of response are reviewed and refined in view of an analysis of a range of candidates' scripts.

Double marking of each examination answer/response (written, oral, simulation and/or performance, portfolio) is carried out independently.

During the marking process, candidates and/or their scripts/portfolios are identified only by their Curriculum Council number. This ensures anonymity.

In the event that the differences between the marks of the first and second markers are outside an acceptable range (as determined by the chief marker by question or paper) then a reconciliation of marks is undertaken.

Candidates are able to request a results check after the marks have been published and before the second round of university offers. Results checks include a review of the candidate's script to ensure that all responses have been marked and the marks allocated have been correctly recorded. Candidates may also request a copy of their scripts and a breakdown of the marks they scored for each question.

Statistical analysis is used to monitor the standards and consistency of marking and to provide the chief examiner with feedback.

Before the finalisation of examination marks, chief examiners and chief markers are provided with the following reports:

- multiple-choice analysis
- item analysis (giving statistics on the functioning of each item in the examination)
- bundle statistics (showing atypical marking).

A standards-setting exercise for WACE courses is undertaken once all scripts have been marked. This process will determine the cut-score between bands of achievement for the standards to be reported on the WACE course report.

7.3.14 Examination feedback and evaluation

Examinations are evaluated annually through a variety of statistical analyses and through public feedback. The evaluation reports are made available on the Curriculum Council website at http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/Communications/Reports_Statistics/Statistical_Report_WACE_TEE/.

Teachers can provide feedback on the examination through an electronic form available on the Curriculum Council website once examinations have begun. Feedback is provided to the next examination panel. The feedback may indicate the need to convene an examiner/teacher meeting.

Examiner/teacher meetings may be held in February and chaired by Curriculum Council officers. They are held only for those examinations which require discussion with teachers. These meetings provide the opportunity for teachers to seek explanations from the panel about specific issues.

7.3.15 Reporting

The chief examiner compiles a report on the functioning of the examination items. The report includes anecdotal feedback from markers and comments about examination performance. These reports provide valuable information to teachers, students, course working groups and examination panel members, Curriculum Council members, Curriculum Council sub-committees and staff, and new chief examiners. Reports are presented to panels, committees and schools early in Term 1 and made available on the Curriculum Council website at http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/Communications/Reports_Statistics/TEE_Examiners_Reports/.

A variety of statistical analyses is applied to assess the functioning of individual items, sections of examinations and the examination as a whole. These statistics are reported annually to Curriculum Council committees and are used to support the construction of the next year's examination.