4. **ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE: CONCEDING ELC FOR YEAR 12 STUDENTS – REF: F983, F7334**

Members considered a proposal to automatically concede English Language Competence for WA Year 12 students who had satisfied all other entry requirements for UWA, but whose scaled English, English Literature or English as an Additional Language/Dialect score was below 50, where either the standardised school assessment mark or standardised examination mark in the same subject was 60 or more.

It was noted that each year a significant number of students had been admitted to the University having satisfied English Language Competence through a second-chance English test because their scaled score in English or English Literature was less than 50. These students normally sat the Special Tertiary Admissions Test early in January after receiving an invitation on their Universities Admissions Advice Letter in late December. However, this occasionally presented difficulties, particularly for country students, given the inflexibility of session times and venues (with only one metropolitan and no country sessions available). The cost of the test was also prohibitive for some students.

Members were advised that this was a very low-risk group. The data indicated that nearly all of the students in this cohort who accepted the invitation to sit the second chance English test, and who had completed both sections of the STAT, subsequently passed (68 out of 69 test-takers in 2007). It was also noted that the proposed ELC concession was in line with that adopted by the other WA public institutions.

**RESOLVED – 11**

To recommend to Academic Council that English Language Competence be automatically conceded for WA Year 12 students who have satisfied all other entry requirements to UWA, but whose scaled English, English Literature or English as an Additional Language/Dialect score is below 50, where either the standardised school assessment mark or standardised examination mark in the same subject is 60 or more.
ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE – CONCEDED ELC FOR YEAR 12 STUDENTS

Introduction
The University’s fundamental specification of English Language Competence (ELC) for admissions purposes is a scaled score of 50 or more in WACE English, WACE English as an Additional Language/Dialect (from 2008) or TEE English Literature.

Each year, however, a significant number of students are admitted to the University having satisfied English Language Competence through a second-chance English test, because their scaled score in English or English Literature was less than 50. Students who otherwise satisfy UWA’s admission requirements are invited to sit the test in early January. This occasionally presents difficulties, particularly for rural students, given the inflexibility of session times and venues (there is only one metropolitan and no country sessions available). The $160 cost for sitting both sections of STAT (a UWA-only requirement) also presents a difficulty for some students.

Other WA public universities maintain the same ELC specification as UWA; however, they are prepared to concede ELC for applicants who have achieved standardised school or examination marks of 60 or more, thus obviating the need to sit the second-chance STAT.

This paper proposes that UWA adopt the same concession of English Language Competence for WA Year 12 students who have satisfied other UWA admission requirements (WACE, TER >= 80.00) and attained a standardised school or examination mark of 60 or more, but whose scaled score in English, English Literature or English as an Additional Language/Dialect is less than 50.

Scaling
The Average Marks Scaling process statistically adjusts combined TEE subject marks to compensate for the varying degrees of subject difficulty for the purpose of averaging/aggregating those marks into a Tertiary Entrance Score/Aggregate. It is influenced by the relative strength of the cohort of students attempting each subject. It is not uncommon for students who have achieved marks of 60 in both their school assessment and examination performance to emerge with a scaled mark below 50.

While a scaled mark of 50 may serve as a convenient, easily-expressed proxy for ELC (replete with notions of ‘passing’), it is by no means a definitive, objective measure of competence. The standardised, school assessment or standardised examination mark is a better measure of actual mastery of subject content.

Data
The following table shows the outcomes of STAT tests for two groups of students (who listed UWA as one of their preferences) who had TERs of 80 or more, but who achieved a scaled score of less than 50 in English or English Literature in the 2007 TEE. For the purposes of comparison: Group A students achieved a standardised school or examination mark of 60 or more; Group B students did not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2007 Western Australia TEE applicants</th>
<th>Group A: Standardised school or exam mark &gt;=60</th>
<th>Group B: Standardised school or exam mark &lt;60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 English scaled score &lt;50</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Did not sit STAT (both sections)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sat STAT (both sections)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Passed STAT/ELC conceded¹</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 STAT fail (number)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 STAT fail (percent)</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ A small number of students have ELC conceded by the Manager, Admissions Centre, where their scaled score was between 49 and 50, or where a component STAT score slightly under the required level was compensated-for by a stronger score in the alternative component.
The data reflects a clear difference in the likelihood of passing STAT between students with standardised scores of 60 or more and those without.

In fact, given the performance of Group A students in the STAT, continuing to require them to sit the test is redundant – they are a comparatively low-risk group; on the other hand, a supplementary test of English is still warranted for those students who have not achieved a standardised score of 60 or more in either their school assessment or examination.

A further observation to be made from the data is the number of students invited to sit STAT, who choose to not take the test, or do not take both sections (a requirement unique to UWA). For Group A students, this is most likely due to their having ELC conceded by other universities. UWA’s reluctance to concede ELC for these students, when three other universities have done so, may be a factor in them deciding to study elsewhere. Certainly, almost half the cohort in Group A elected not to sit STAT for UWA purposes, thus ensuring they were ineligible for consideration by the University.

An examination of the performance of the 46 Group A students who enrolled at UWA and completed first semester studies in 2008 shows that 41 of them achieved Weighted Average Marks of 50 or more (three others had WAMs between 43 and 49).

**Recommendation**

Given that:

1. Scaled marks are the product of statistical processes rather than objective measures of competence;
2. Students with standardised marks of 60 or more in either school assessment or examination are highly likely to satisfy ELC if required to sit STAT;
3. Limited opportunities for sitting STAT in January result in major inconvenience for a number of such students (as well as additional expense);
4. These students demonstrate comparable performance in their tertiary studies to other commencing students;

it is recommended that:

English Language Competence be automatically conceded for WA Year 12 students who have satisfied all other entry requirements for UWA, but whose scaled English, English Literature or English as an Additional Language/Dialect score is below 50, where either the standardised school assessment mark or standardised examination mark in the same subject is 60 or more.

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1 August 2008