REFLECTIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA, MADE IN APRIL 2000,
IN THE CURRICULUM COUNCIL POSITION PAPER OF OCTOBER 2000

David Treloar - October 2000

Each recommendation is paraphrased in bold. Comment associated with the recommendation precedes it in normal font. My personal evaluation follows the recommendation in normal font.

There is considerable support at UWA for an outcomes-based education system, although opinions vary as to how well this could be achieved in different discipline areas. It is recognised that for schools and universities to attempt to teach an ever-increasing amount of content will not serve students well in the twenty-first century.

The Position Paper recommends courses of study built entirely on the outcomes focus. Implicitly the Paper's recommendations will involve some reduction of content in some disciplines, to accommodate the extensions.

UWA acknowledges that the schools have a responsibility to meet the needs of all students and to prepare them for TAFE, other vocational training and direct employment as well as for university. The Position Paper aims at better meeting this responsibility by doing away with the discontinuities between TEE subjects, WSA subjects and VET competencies, and having a unitary set of some 45 courses of study, each accessible to students of the whole range of abilities and aspirations.

As demand exceeds places available for commencing students in a number of UWA courses, some form of ranking, or other means of measuring student ability, is essential for selection purposes. It is imperative that the selection criterion used for University entry (currently the TER) is a good predictor of the students' likelihood of success in their UWA studies.

The school-managed and external ratings on every outcome in every course of study would be data available to the universities to use in selection criteria. Each university could use its own considerations of predictive validity or other aspects to determine its own selection aggregates, or there could be collective agreement as at present, in which case there could be a single TER=ITI for all the local universities. The Paper makes no specific recommendation as to the relative weightings by universities of school-managed and external ratings on each outcome.

The university's prerequisites should continue to be accommodated.

The university was hampered in its deliberations by the Curriculum Council's failure to provide examples of the proposed 'courses of study'. The Position Paper presents a detailed example of a Physics course of study. Other examples will be on the Council's web site.

It was noted that there was no mention of relative costs or government funding for the implementation of any alternative new structure. The Position Paper, like the Discussion Paper, does not provide an estimate of relative...
costs, either of the system once in place, or of the implementation period.

**Of the three Concepts in the Discussion Paper, the university prefers a structure based around Concept 2.**

The Position Paper recommends a structure essentially close to Concept 2.

**It will be difficult to describe higher level cognitive skills in outcome terms.**

It is not clear how assessment of levels of technical versus discipline-based skills, and assessment of excellence, will be achieved within the unitary curriculum.

There remains a range of unaddressed issues of assessment, beginning with fundamental issues relating to the outcomes framework and the packaging of the outcomes in the courses of study under broader outcomes in the Curriculum Framework. These will have to be resolved.

**There could be less reliance on examinations for university entrance.**

This is a matter for the individual university. The Paper makes no specific recommendation as to the relative weightings by universities of school-managed and external ratings on each outcome.

**Development of generic skills, especially verbal and written communication, and critical skills, is extremely important.** Changing to an outcomes-based focus will provide an opportunity to create a central structure within which the development of generic skills is embedded in all learning areas. Generic skills must be clearly stated as outcomes and form part of the assessment process.

There could be a willingness to trade content in the school curriculum for improved generic skills.

The Position Paper concurs.

**A basic knowledge of computer technology is desirable, as is familiarity with word processing and the use of spreadsheets.**

The Position paper concurs.

**It is very important that some type of externally administered examination system be retained.**

The Position Paper concurs. There will be external examination of every core outcome in every course of study. The Position Paper recommends that each university construct its selection criteria from the array of school-managed and external ratings on the many outcomes.

**Some form of external intervention is required to moderate school marks.**

**Strengthening the moderation in and between schools is very important.**

The Position Paper concurs.

**The University is reluctant to comment on the degree of breadth and depth that could be achieved in an outcomes-based curriculum without having concrete examples of curricula in specific discipline areas.** There is a general feeling among many academics that students currently do not have sufficient breadth of study. In general, breadth across a wide range of disciplines is favoured, but there is also value perceived in students undertaking in-depth study in at least two learning areas.

The Position Paper recommends that the Council require five courses of study in at least four learning areas. This would be a substantially greater requirement for breadth than the existing two lists set by the universities. In the proposed system there would be depth of study in every course of study.