REFLECTIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF
THE SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY FOCUS GROUP, MADE IN MID 1999,
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.

Breadth of Study
The Focus Group advocated "Moderate Change" with a willingness to contemplate further change in the light of experience and evidence.
The Position Paper concurs. The "Extreme Change" Concept 3 was not pursued, and the current structure of three different types of curriculum ("Minimal Change" Concept 1) is recommended for abolition.
The suggestion in the Courses of Study documentation is a possible early step, for example -
- study in at least four learning areas
The Position Paper concurs.
- in each of the four at a level appropriate for university entrance
The Position Paper concurs, through the recommending of a structure in which every core outcome in every course of study can be achieved at a level high enough for university entrance, in terms of meeting prerequisites, and high enough for university selection.
- in each of the four at least through one semester in Year 11 or Year 12
The Position Paper concurs.

The universities should be asked to consider amending their requirements along the lines of the foregoing.
The Position Paper recommends that each university construct its selection criteria from the array of school-managed and external ratings on the many outcomes. The Paper makes no specific recommendation as to the extent to which the universities should impose a breadth requirement themselves, akin to the present two lists. Presumably this is because the Council proposes to replace the current breadth requirement, which is imposed by the universities, with the above-mentioned breadth requirement of its own, in the expectation that it would be sufficient.
The universities should be asked to consider amending their most restrictive prerequisites to enable this broader study.
This request has already been made, in the earlier Discussion Paper, the universities' responses to which are referred to on other pages of this report.

The Curriculum Council should investigate and report on the notions of `full-time load' and `level' in the context of the outcomes-based Curriculum Framework, and define a full load over Years 11 and 12.
The Position Paper defines a normal full-time load.

General and vocational outcomes of education
The Focus Group advocated reporting of a range of generic competencies and training competencies in various TEE subjects and the courses of study in which they may be located, with a willingness to contemplate further change in the light of experience and evidence.

The Position Paper concurs. In every course of study opportunities will be taken to embed generic competencies, and VET competencies will also be included in every course of study for which cognate competencies are available.

Values in the curriculum
The values in the Curriculum Framework should be woven into all study in Years 11 and 12. The Position Paper concurs.

The status of TEE and non-TEE subjects
For the immediate future the existence of separate TEE subjects should be retained.
This recommendation was overtaken by the recommendation in the Discussion Paper that there be a uniform structure of courses of study. The universities subsequently responded to that recommendation, as discussed elsewhere in this report.
There could be some expansion of the list of 31 TEE subjects (the subjects that are externally examined in the TEE and count towards the TER and university selection)
The focus group advocates `moderate change' with a willingness to contemplate further increase in the list and/or the use of information on attainments from outside the TEE subjects in the light of experience and evidence of predictive validity and relevance to university studies.
The Position Paper concurs, in the sense that it recommends 45 (or more if each language is counted separately) courses of study, the levels on the outcomes in each one of which 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. Each university would continue to have various of its own selection criteria in which that TER figured more or less prominently.
There should continue to be external examinations in the TEE subjects.
The Position Paper concurs. There will be external examination of every core outcome in every course of study.
Wholly-school-assessed subjects and vocational and training subjects have valuable and distinctive roles to play; and university-bound students could benefit from taking some such subjects.
This recommendation was overtaken by the recommendation in the Discussion Paper that there be a uniform structure of courses of study. The universities subsequently responded to that recommendation, as discussed elsewhere in this report. The effect is to make every course of study potentially available to university-bound students on an equal footing.
The Focus Group advocated that there should not be devolution of responsibility to each school for their own curriculum in Years 11 and 12 and for all assessment in those years.

The Position Paper concurs.

**TEE syllabuses should be rewritten in a learning-outcomes format.**

The Position Paper concurs. All course of study will be in an outcomes format. Meanwhile, Syllabus Committees will be rewriting syllabi in an outcomes format.

**TEE subject syllabuses should be scrutinised for unnecessary and excessive content and overload as part of the process of rewriting them in learning-outcomes format. It is possible that this process, together with their embedding in Courses of Study, might reveal possibilities for redesigning some subjects and groups of subjects, and of adding some new subjects and coalescing some existing subjects.**

The Position Paper concurs, implicitly. Excessive content will have to be pared to make way for the extensions. Though almost all existing TEE subjects will be recognisably present among the proposed course of study, there will have been some coalescing and significant additions.

### Assessment regime

The Focus Group advocated the "existing" calculation in which 50% of the final mark in a subject comes from the external examination. The Focus Group advocates a willingness to contemplate the possibility of reducing the examination component to 40% in the light of experience and evidence.

The Position Paper recommends that each university construct its selection criteria from the array of school-managed and external ratings on the many outcomes. The Paper makes no specific recommendation as to the relative weightings by universities of school-managed and external ratings on each outcome.

**The Focus Group advocated the retention of central control over syllabuses and assessment, at least in the TER subjects, with assessment through something akin to the present systems for school marks, external examination marks, moderating, scaling and aggregation.**

Central control in general will remain. The recommended moderation processes, together with the intention of making the levels of comparable difficulty and demand across all outcomes replace statistical moderation and scaling. Each university should give careful attention to these new proposals.

**The Focus Group acknowledged the possibility of external assessments additional to the current form of formal written examination.**

The Position Paper concurs.

**The Focus Group advocated continuing rigorous investigation of the pros and cons of using examination marks to moderate school marks, with the view of testing whether such moderation could be adapted or phased out.**

The Position Paper recommends a new system of moderation that abolishes the universal statistical moderation of school marks on the basis of external marks, but retains equivalent statistical analysis for the purpose of guiding school assessment in the subsequent year, with an emergency fall-back option of statistically moderating the marks in rare cases of extreme and repeated aberration. The Council has engaged world-class consultants to investigate the recommended assessment regime.

### Standards in terms of outcomes

The Focus Group advocated that standards should not only be implicit in the syllabuses and examinations but made somewhat more explicit through the formulation of expectations of the percentage of the students that should reach...
particular levels of attainment of learning outcomes, especially with respect to literacy and numeracy.
The Position Paper makes no comment on the formulation of such expectations. There remains some confusion as to the meaning of "standards". The draft Position Paper defined "standard" as "description of a specified level of achievement" - which presumably means, in my words, "the words used to describe a level on the scale of an outcome". Other Council documentation uses the word "standard" to refer to some benchmark proportion of some cohort that is expected to reach a prescribed level. It would be better if usage was more consistent. I have expressed the view that it doesn't matter which alternative is adopted, as long as it is only one.

Flexibility issues
Universities should be asked to consider amending their regulations to permit accumulation of a TER over more than one year.
This recommendation was put into effect in the Discussion Paper. It is understood that those universities that did not already allow accumulation have already taken steps to do so.
The Focus Group advocated flexibility that enables part-time study, combining work with study, and other new opportunities.
The Position Paper concurs.

Graduation & Certification
Schools should be responsible for setting the criteria for completion and/or graduation.
The Position Paper does not advocate this point of view, but recommends that there remain central control over certification and "completion". Each school may, of course, have its own "graduation" criteria.
Every student should be able to get a comprehensive Statement of Results from the Curriculum Council, no matter when and where they exit from education.
The Position Paper concurs.

Literacy
The Focus Group advocated literacy requirements for University entry and for school graduation, though the standard would be different. The literacy requirement or graduation should be above that achieved by most students at the end of Year 10.
Literacy (for both purposes) should be related to performance in specific tests of functional literacy, or performance measured against generic functional literacy standards embedded throughout Courses of Study and/or subjects.
The Position Paper concurs.
Literacy should not require grades or marks in the specific TER "English" subjects or performance in a specific "English" Course of Study.
The Position Paper concurs.
Access to information-rich technologies and their forms of discourse should be available to all students to enable development of the necessary abilities.
The Position Paper concurs.

Numeracy
The Focus Group advocated numeracy requirements for University entry and for school graduation, though the standard would be different. The numeracy requirement for graduation should be above that achieved by most students at the end of Year 10.
This is not dealt with very specifically in the Position Paper. Because a student need not study a course of study in the Mathematics learning area, it may be possible for
such a student to have no achievement on a mathematics outcome on their Statement of Achievement yet still receive a WACE.

**Numeracy (for both purposes) should be related to performance in specific tests, or performance measured against generic numeracy standards embedded throughout Courses of Study and/or subjects.**

This is not dealt with very specifically in the Position Paper, but probably implied. **Numeracy should not require grades or marks in the specific TER "Mathematics" subjects or performance in a specific "Mathematics" Course of Study.**

Numeracy is not specified as a requirement of certification in the Position Paper, but mathematics outcomes are likely to exist and have reported levels of achievement in a range of courses of study as diverse as Physics and Economics. **Consideration should be given to an "Information Technology" requirement.**

The recommendations on Certification in the Position Paper do not specify either an IT or a Numeracy requirement, but the Paper gives strong support for universal development of IT skills.

### Courses of Study

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### The Curriculum Framework

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