

# **Background paper — Developing, maintaining and revising senior syllabuses: criteria for decision making**

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Studies Authority**  
*Partnership and innovation*

Developing, maintaining and revising senior syllabuses: criteria for decision making  
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## Introduction

The focus of this paper is the suite of syllabuses developed by the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) that are used by schools to develop courses of study for students in Years 11–12. A key responsibility of the QSA<sup>1</sup> is to develop, approve and revise syllabuses for Years 11–12. These syllabuses are for two types of subjects:

- Authority subjects are based on syllabuses that have been approved and issued by the QSA. Results in Authority subjects can count in the calculation of OPs and FPs, the most common selection devices used by the tertiary sector.
- Authority-registered subjects are developed from study area specifications (SASs) and generally include substantial vocational and practical components. Results in these subjects are not used in the calculation of OPs and FPs.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last twenty years and particularly since the Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) in 2002, the contemporary school curriculum, or the range of courses of study, for Years 11–12 has broadened. The QSA syllabuses make up just one part of the curriculum solutions used by schools to meet the learning needs of their students and their aspirations for different post-school destinations: part-time or full-time study or training, and/or part-time or full-time work.

This paper describes criteria to inform the decision-making processes for:

- the maintenance and revision of the current suite<sup>3</sup> of QSA senior school syllabuses
- the development of new syllabuses.

The criteria for decision-making are:

- Criterion 1: A broad and general education P–12
- Criterion 2: Literacy and numeracy options
- Criterion 3: Equity of pathways
- Criterion 4: Currency and relevance
- Criterion 5: Sustainability

It is proposed that each criterion builds on the other, and that the criteria are used together not in isolation.

These criteria are consistent with Queensland's education settlements focusing on retention, participation, engagement and attainment. They are informed by the underpinning concepts of *Learning P–12*<sup>4</sup> — foundation, continuity and transition — and are aligned with other significant changes that have already occurred, notably:

- the implementation of the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework, which has created a new platform on which to base senior studies
- the development and release of the *Year 10 Guidelines* to establish Year 10 as the beginning of the senior phase of learning

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<sup>1</sup> The QSA is a statutory authority with the responsibility for developing syllabuses for Prep to Year 12.

<sup>2</sup> Study area specifications may offer up to three different approaches — Approach A, a nationally recognised vocational education and training (VET) qualification; Approach B, a school-devised course of study; or Approach C, a combination of approaches A and B.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this paper, the term “suite of syllabuses” refers to syllabuses and study area specifications for Years 11–12.

<sup>4</sup> *Learning P–12* is currently in development.

- the implementation of the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE), a qualification that recognises a broad range of learning in the senior phase.

The criteria can be used so that the QSA can maintain a suite of syllabuses that represents the community's expectation of a broad and general education in the senior phase. With more young people required to remain at school, the QSA syllabuses must continue to provide schools with learning options that:

- ensure the best preparation for post-school destinations for a diverse cohort of students
- are the right blend of knowledge and skills that promote powerful, relevant and deep learning and improve general education attainment for students at school
- reflect the changing needs and priorities within society and the economy
- complement, but do not duplicate, other learning options available to young people in the senior phase.

The paper concludes that the adoption of the criteria provides a consistent, educationally defensible and transparent mechanism for the QSA to undertake ongoing analysis of its suite of syllabuses. The criteria would also provide a starting point for the development of a cohesive, planned and adaptable suite of syllabuses for the senior phase of learning that promotes a broad and general education P–12. This analytic tool will strengthen the current review, maintenance and development processes.

## Criteria for decision making

The criteria are a tool to guide decision-making processes for the development, maintenance and revision of QSA syllabuses for Years 11–12.

The five criteria will facilitate a focused analysis of the current suite of senior syllabuses and proposed new syllabuses. The QSA can use the criteria to determine whether the existing syllabuses or proposals for new syllabuses “fit” with the P–9 syllabuses and the *Year 10 Guidelines*, focus on equity of pathways in the senior phase, and are relevant and sustainable. The use of the criteria will establish a consistent, educationally defensible and transparent process for decision-making.

Each criterion includes a set of focus questions to guide both the revision and maintenance of current syllabuses and proposals to develop new syllabuses for Years 11–12.

### **Criterion 1: A broad and general education P–12**

The QSA has developed initiatives to strengthen learning, assessment and reporting across P–12. *Learning P–12*<sup>5</sup> has been developed around key concepts of foundation, transition, continuity and alignment. These concepts should inform decisions about the development of new syllabuses and the maintenance and revision of current syllabuses.

Criterion 1 guides decision-making processes to consider:

- the continuity of a broad and general education across P–12
- the alignment with Years 1–9 and the *Year 10 Guidelines* as the foundations for Years 11–12.

Research and consultation<sup>6</sup> have consistently emphasised the importance of what is often called a broad and general education. For example, *Learning for the 21st Century*<sup>7</sup> stated that the focus for learning in schools should be on core subjects, in this report identified as English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics, government, economics, arts, history and geography. The report further recommended that these areas of learning “must expand beyond basic competency to the understanding of core academic content at much higher levels”.<sup>8</sup>

Further, in most education systems in the world the following traditional discipline areas are included in the core curriculum promoting a broad and general education: English (or the mother tongue), mathematics, science, history, geography, foreign languages, the arts, and health and physical education.

Professor David Hogan<sup>9</sup>, at the QSA Colloquium, challenged participants to think about education and the philosophical basis for the decisions made about what constitutes “worthwhile knowledge”. He claimed that education is a shared responsibility of the state,

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<sup>5</sup> *Learning P–12* is currently in development.

<sup>6</sup> Reports that have identified the importance of a broad and general education include: Department of Education and Skills 2005, *14–19 Education and Skills*, The Stationery Office, London.  
State of South Australia 2006, *Success for All: SACE review*, report to the Minister for Education and Children’s Services on the review of the South Australian Certificate of Education, State of South Australia, Adelaide.

<sup>7</sup> Partnership for 21st Century Skills 2002, *Learning for the 21st Century*, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Tucson, AZ.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Hogan, D 2006, “From the Tree of Knowledge to the Fields of Learning”, presentation to the QSA Colloquium November 2006, Brisbane. (Available from the QSA website.)

the community, the family and the individual. The community has a responsibility to make informed and considered decisions on behalf of young people about what it believes is necessary for young people to successfully participate in contemporary society and workplaces.

The role of schooling is complex. It includes, among other things, ensuring that young people have the “right skills and knowledge” to secure Australia’s (and their own) economic prosperity and meet the challenge of emerging environmental challenges; promoting social cohesion and equality; and supporting young people’s spiritual, moral, cultural and physical development.<sup>10</sup>

The challenge of what constitutes the “right skills and knowledge” is reflected in the three main objectives of the National Curriculum Board (NCB), to provide:

- a solid foundation in skills and knowledge on which further learning and adult life can be built
- deep knowledge and skills that will enable advanced learning and an ability to create new ideas and translate them into practical applications
- general capabilities that underpin flexible and critical thinking, a capacity to work with others and an ability to move across subject disciplines to develop new expertise.<sup>11</sup>

The establishment of a national curriculum seeks to improve education achievement for all Australian students as well as build greater consistency and portability of learning outcomes. The NCB will develop P–12 curriculum for English, mathematics, the sciences and history in the first instance, followed by geography and languages other than English.

A recent report to the QSA<sup>12</sup> outlines a new set of programmatic, principled and educationally defensible rules for writing and developing syllabuses. This provides a practical way forward for the QSA to address the critical issue raised consistently in consultations — a cohesive P–12 approach to syllabus development. This report challenges the QSA to determine the degree to which the current configuration of key learning areas, the *Year 10 Guidelines* and the senior syllabuses align with and develop a cohesive learning pathway, in which earlier learning builds into later learning in a meaningful way for students.

As a group, the syllabuses send a strong message about what is valued for a community’s young people. If young people’s educational experience is to be geared to meet the ever-changing needs for the future, then the suite of syllabuses must be based on principled decisions about the right knowledge and skills on which further learning and adult life can be built. In addition, the development of the national curriculum puts further pressure on the status of other areas of learning not included in the national curriculum.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Future of Schooling in Australia: A report by the states and territories*, Federalist Paper 2, rev. edn, September 2007, p.16–17.

<sup>11</sup> National Curriculum Board 2008, *The Shape of the National Curriculum: A proposal for discussion*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Luke, A, Weir, K & Woods, A 2008, *Development of a Set of Principles to Guide a P–12 Framework*, QSA, Brisbane.

### **Criterion 1: A broad and general education P–12**

*Focus questions:*

- What are the foundations for the learning in this syllabus?
- How well does the learning align with the learning in Years 1–9 and in the *Year 10 Guidelines*?
- What is the rationale for this syllabus?
- Does the syllabus provide options for the continuing development of high levels of competence in key discipline areas?
- Are there other syllabuses in this area of learning already available in the suite? If yes:
  - Is the level of specialisation necessary in the senior phase of learning?
  - Does the level of specialisation require a two-year course of study?
  - Can the specialisation be included in related syllabus/es?

### **Criterion 2: Literacy and numeracy**

Continuing development of language literacy and numeracy skills and understandings is essential for full participation as citizens in our society.

The focus on pathways and the provision of a broad and general education that develops across P–12 must include learning options that continue to develop high levels of competence in language literacy and numeracy.

In addition, students must have opportunities to demonstrate the language literacy and numeracy requirements in order to be eligible for the QCE.

Criterion 2 guides decision-making processes to consider the language literacy and numeracy options within the suite of Years 11–12 syllabuses.

### **Criteria 2: Literacy and numeracy options**

*Focus questions:*

- When considering the suite, does the syllabus contribute to the range of options that continue the development of high levels of competence in English language literacy and numeracy for a diverse cohort of students?

### **Criterion 3: Equity of pathways — the focus for the senior phase of learning**

In *Learning P–12* the focus for the senior phase is equity of pathways, which includes notions of retention and participation. The senior school curriculum is no longer a selective gateway to higher education for a few, nor is it training for a specific job. Rather the suite of syllabuses in the senior phase must provide schools with a blend of knowledge and skills that ensures the best preparation for a range of post-school destinations for a diverse cohort of students and for continued personal and social development. How any proposed syllabus and each syllabus in the current suite aligns with this focus needs to be considered in the development, maintenance and revision processes.

Criterion 3 guides decision-making processes to consider:

- subject choice and flexibility
- syllabuses and study area specifications (SASs)
- vocational education and training qualifications
- challenge and extension.

## **Subject choice and flexibility**

In Queensland, the policy emphasis has been on choice. The growth in knowledge has been expressed in greater subject specialisation.

Students entering the senior phase of learning can exercise choice and select any combination of subjects that their school offers. This is based on the assumption that choice can be exercised and that the outcomes will be comparable. Research shows that the subjects that students choose in the final years of school can and do have a significant influence on the education and career options available to them after finishing school.

David Hogan<sup>13</sup> commented that student choice is important and consistent with core liberal democratic principles. Student choice recognises the complex social demography of the senior secondary population and facilitates higher levels of student engagement, participation, attainment and achievement. However, unregulated student choice results in the stratification of curriculum choices and student outcomes and so undermines equity principles of liberal democratic education and limits maximisation of capital formation. What is sometimes referred to as the “shopping mall” approach to subject selection has been shown to disadvantage the most vulnerable young people, further increasing their disadvantage.

Subject choice in education systems regarded as high quality and high equity is guided by clearly stated rules or requirements for specified areas of learning for the end-of-school qualification. The compulsory areas of learning usually cover those subjects generally associated with a broad and general education, for example English (or the mother tongue), mathematics, science, health and the arts. However, unlike the Queensland system, these courses are not necessarily undertaken for two years.

In *The Curriculum of the Future*<sup>14</sup>, Professor Michael Young states that there are two key issues: increasing flexibility and improving coherence. He describes flexibility as the opportunity for individual students to make choices and combine different kinds of learning in new ways. Coherence is the sense of clarity that students need in order to know what they need to learn and where a particular course of study or cluster of modules will lead them. Young advocates small blocks of learning that can be combined in different ways as a strategy for moving to a high participation–high achievement system of post-compulsory education.

These views suggest that in terms of subject choice, it is imperative to balance the amount of choice and flexibility with clear guidelines about what is important and in some cases necessary. In a system where no specific subjects are prescribed, students must be assured that their subject selection sets them up well for a range of post-school destinations.

## **Syllabuses and study area specifications (SASs)**

The practice of developing a syllabus and a matching SAS has been an attempt to accommodate the different learning needs of a more diversified cohort. However, there are significant equity issues which need to be considered in the development and revision processes.

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<sup>13</sup> Hogan, D 2006, “From the Tree of Knowledge to the Fields of Learning”, presentation to the QSA Colloquium November 2006, Brisbane. (Available from the QSA website.)

<sup>14</sup> Young, M 1998, *The Curriculum of the Future: From the new sociology of education to a critical theory of learning*, Farmer Press, London, p. 80.

While Approach A of a SAS includes nationally recognised vocational education and training qualifications providing students with a valued outcome, there is concern about the purpose, relevancy and adequacy of Approach B.

There are syllabuses and SASs which are identified as “incompatible” for certification purposes. Incompatible subjects are defined as being sufficiently similar that achievements may not be reported as two whole separate subjects on the Senior Statement. It needs to be asked whether there is sufficient justification to maintain both.

From a school perspective, having a syllabus and a SAS in the same learning area splits the potential cohort. Schools often manage this human and physical resource issue by offering these subjects as composite classes.

An analysis of enrolment data for some syllabuses with corresponding SASs in the current suite show that the enrolments are low even when combined.

The ability to contextualise learning for specific cohorts of learners using the flexibilities already in some syllabuses has been demonstrated by the project lead by the QSA in collaboration with the construction industry. Rather than developing new syllabuses, this project demonstrated that it is possible to contextualise Mathematics A and Science21 for apprentices. Significant learnings have been gained from this project in terms of syllabus development for specific cohorts and alignment of syllabus innovation and quality assurance procedures including work program requirements.

## **Vocational education and training qualifications**

A further issue is the development of syllabuses that embed vocational education and training (VET) qualifications and/or closely replicate VET qualifications.

A VET qualification has greater standing with industry and hence greater value to the student than a similar school subject.

Encouraging students to undertake a VET qualification rather than a similar school subject is consistent with the policy position outlined in the *Joint Ministerial Statement — Future Directions for Vocational Education and Training in Queensland Schools*<sup>15</sup>, which prompted the reorganisation of the SASs and the gradual phasing out of embedded VET qualifications in Authority subjects.

Maintaining some Authority subjects with embedded VET qualifications has allowed Queensland to meet the requirement that VET in Schools programs undertaken as part of a senior secondary certificate be recognised for tertiary entrance purposes. This requirement was set out in the MCEETYA Framework for vocational education in schools, which was agreed to in 2001 for implementation by 2004.<sup>16</sup> While outside the scope of this paper, the direct role of VET in the calculation of the tertiary entrance score will need further consideration.

## **Challenge and extension**

There are currently five “extension” syllabuses: English Literature, Music, French, German and Indonesian. Participation in these subjects since their introduction remains low.

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<sup>15</sup> Department of Education and the Arts and Department of Employment and Training 2004, *Joint Ministerial Statement — Future Directions for Vocational Education and Training in Queensland Schools*, Brisbane.

<sup>16</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2001, *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools: A comprehensive guide about pathways for young Australians in transition*, Curriculum Corporation, Melbourne.

In the development and revision processes, consideration needs to be given to the role of this very narrow range of subjects and who is served by them. For example, the extension syllabuses for languages do not accommodate the learning needs of native speakers or schools offering immersion courses. In the main, the extension syllabuses attract high achieving female students; they do not attract male students.

If their purpose is to extend talented students then it could be argued that rather than have a limited number of stand-alone syllabuses, the notion of “extension” should be included in all areas of learning, perhaps through assessment requirements and ways of working rather than additional content coverage. This would be consistent with other jurisdictions such as New South Wales and Victoria.

### **Criterion 3: Equity of pathways**

*Focus questions:*

- Does the syllabus or SAS contribute to the provision of high-quality learning options that open up a range of post-school pathways and take full advantage of the flexibilities enabled by the QCE?
- In what way does this syllabus align with post-school destinations of work, training or higher education?
- When considering syllabuses and SASs in the same area of learning:
  - Is there sufficient difference between the syllabus and the SAS to warrant two syllabuses?
  - What group of learners will this syllabus serve?
  - What is the potential impact on schools?
- When considering the suite as a whole:
  - Is another version or specialisation of the area of learning needed?
  - Could the needs of specific cohorts of students be better served by contextualising the current syllabus?
  - What is the potential impact on schools?
- Is the area of learning covered in this syllabus or SAS available as a training package or course in VET? If so, is the VET qualification broadly available to schools?
- Does the syllabus include opportunities for schools to offer programs that “extend” talented students?

### **Criterion 4: Currency and relevance**

The issue of relevance and contemporary appeal is important in terms of maintaining a suite of syllabuses that provides a meaningful education for young people in the 21st century.

Criterion 4 guides decision-making processes to consider:

- new knowledge and new configurations of knowledge
- adding and removing syllabuses.

### **New knowledge and new configurations of knowledge**

Development and review processes must consider how knowledge is being reshaped in the 21st century. Conventional binaries separating academic from vocational and theory from practice have outlived their usefulness. Dave Turner in his presentation at the *Schooling for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* conference<sup>17</sup> said it was time to “vocalise the academic and intellectualise the vocational”. The separation of knowledge from its application has been described by Young as “divisive specialisation”.<sup>18</sup> The challenge of

<sup>17</sup> Australian and New Zealand School of Government, *Schooling for the 21st Century: Unlocking human potential*, Conference, Sydney September 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Young, M 1998, *The Curriculum of the Future: From the new sociology of education to a critical theory of learning*, Farmer Press, London.

reducing the divide between conceptual and applied learning was raised as a key issue in recent education reviews in South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the United Kingdom.<sup>19</sup>

This view is supported by employer perspectives about knowledge and skills for working in the 21st century.<sup>20</sup> They claim that applied skills integrated with core academic subjects is the “design spec” for creating an education system that will prepare young people to succeed in the modern workplace and community life.

This presents a challenge for Queensland’s approach to developing syllabuses and SASs and how the notion of vocational learning is included across subjects. Greater clarity about the role of vocational education and training and the meaning of “vocational education” needs to be addressed in the development, maintenance and revision processes.

### **Adding and removing syllabuses**

Over the last 30 years there has been little change in the subjects schools select to offer and which are then chosen by students despite the addition of many new syllabuses.

Different configurations or more contemporary approaches in some areas of learning have been added to the suite. Where a decision has been taken to phase out an earlier version of the syllabus, the viability of the newer subject has been assured, e.g. Secretarial Studies replaced by Business Communication and Technology, Speech and Drama and Theatre replaced by Drama.

While the range of subjects offered in Queensland is similar in many ways to the subjects offered in the other states and territories, there are some notable differences in how the subjects are named. For example Queensland offers the subject Home Economics whereas other states have Food Technology, Textile Design and Family and Community Studies.

#### **Criterion 4: Currency and relevance**

*Focus questions:*

- Does the syllabus:
  - reflect changes in the discipline?
  - include applied and conceptual learning?
  - include how this area of learning relates to the work environment, career options and pathways?
- Is this syllabus a contemporary approach to an area of learning in another syllabus? If yes, what is the strategy to phase out the older version?
- How is this area of learning treated in other jurisdictions?
- Does this syllabus provide opportunities for learning in areas that complement or supplement existing syllabuses?

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<sup>19</sup>Department of Education and Skills 2005, *14–19 Education and Skills*, The Stationery Office, London.

Department of Education and Training 2007, *Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools*, Canberra. State of South Australia 2006, *Success for All: SACE review*, report to the Minister for Education and Children’s Services on the review of the South Australian Certificate of Education, Adelaide.

<sup>20</sup>Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, Partnership for 21st Century Skills & Society for Human Resource Management 2006, *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers’ perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century US workforce*, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Tucson AZ.

## **Criterion 5: Sustainability**

The QSA's legislated role is to develop syllabuses for statewide implementation; it is also responsible for assessment and moderation, certification and tertiary entrance procedures. Each of these must align and maintain public confidence. This is particularly pertinent to the senior phase of learning where there are "high stakes" outcomes for all students regardless of the pathways they pursue.

Queensland's system of externally moderated school-based assessment relies on the ongoing and active engagement of schools in the quality assurance processes. There were 26 syllabuses when the system began. Having a large number of syllabuses and SASs not only makes the maintenance of consistency and quality across the range of syllabuses and SASs increasingly difficult, but also impacts on schools' capacity to release staff for involvement in the quality assurance processes. This particularly impacts on smaller schools.

Criterion 5 guides decision-making processes to consider:

- demographics and potential demographics of subjects including a longitudinal analysis of achievement and enrolment data routinely collected by the QSA
- economic viability of maintaining low candidature subjects, not just in terms of the work of the Authority, but also in terms of the costs to schools, professional development and pre-service training institutions.

### **Demographics**

Some syllabuses in the current suite are defined as incompatible, that is they are sufficiently similar that achievements may not be reported as two whole separate subjects on the Senior Statement. In reviewing the suite and making decisions about new syllabuses, the educational value and economic viability of maintaining or developing subjects that are incompatible needs to be considered.

New subjects have been added to the suite that are different contexts or different specialisations within the same broad learning area and have varying degrees of content overlap and in some cases embed the same VET certificates. From an educational perspective and given the research about choice, the degree of specialisation represented in these syllabuses could be challenged. It should be asked whether these syllabuses are sufficiently different to warrant different courses or whether it would be more educationally sound for schools to concentrate on some core understandings for these particular areas of learning and that specialisations are undertaken through vocational education and training qualifications, higher education or other learning organisations.

Having several options in the same area of learning may put schools under an obligation to offer a range of courses of study. This splits the potential cohort and hence schools' ability to offer courses in terms of their human and physical resources — teachers, rooms, learning resources, release of staff for professional development or engagement in quality assurance processes and so on.

Having variations of the same area of learning also puts pressure on pre-service teacher training provision and ongoing professional development to accommodate the need for ever finer specialisations within the same learning area.

Developing specific syllabuses for specialised learning could be addressed by utilising the inherent flexibilities in some current syllabuses. For example, the project to contextualise mathematics for apprentices using the Mathematics A syllabus instead of developing another syllabus demonstrated that through targeted support, work programs could be

developed to meet quite specialised needs. This project also highlighted that the current division between Mathematics A and Mathematics B acts as a barrier for developing programs for specialised groups, notably students undertaking electrical apprenticeships.

### **Educational and economic viability**

Over the last 30 years, few syllabuses have been removed from the suite. The addition of more syllabuses has not been reflected in the way schools offer and students choose subjects. Schools tend to offer about 10 to 25 different courses. Enrolment data suggests the range of courses that make up the main part of the offering has changed little.

The subjects that were most popular 10 years ago continue to be popular now. In 1997 the top 20 subjects were all Authority subjects. By 2007, the top 20 included six SASs. However, when considering just the Authority subjects, the top 20 subjects consistently chosen by students or offered by schools have essentially not changed. The top six Authority subjects by enrolments are exactly the same as in 1997.

However, while these subjects remain “popular” they now represent a smaller proportion of the cohort, a likely consequence of the addition of new subjects and the inclusion of Authority-registered subjects. Even the popular syllabuses and SASs attract less than 10% of the cohort enrolments, that is, less than 4000 students in Year 12.

This apparent stability in the subjects chosen could be a reflection of schools’ capacity to offer subjects in terms of their human and physical resources and/or it could reflect community views of what is “worthwhile” learning.

This data does not show how different groups of students choose subjects or the combinations of subjects chosen. Data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth provide some evidence that subject selection clusters by socioeconomic status and gender and that those students who are most advantaged tend to select from a fairly narrow group of subjects.<sup>21</sup>

The participation rate in external examinations has declined dramatically over the last 10 years. In addition, achievement data shows very poor results except for the subject Chinese, which, according to anecdotal evidence, is undertaken mainly by native speakers.

Given this data, it is timely to determine the degree to which syllabuses for the Senior External Examination are serving the needs of students and to look at alternative pathways for adults returning to study. There are now a range of options for mature age people seeking tertiary entrance or Year 12 equivalent courses that lead to tertiary entrance and other higher education options; these include the Certificate IV in Adult Tertiary Preparation and university run entry-level courses. External study through New South Wales and matriculation using the Higher School Certificate is also an option.

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<sup>21</sup> Thomson, S 2005, *Pathways from School to Further Education or Work: Examining the consequences of Year 12 course choices*, report 42 in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell, Vic. This report looked at the comparative data from students in Year 12 in 1993, 1998 and 2001.

**Criterion 5: Sustainability***Focus questions:*

- Is this syllabus incompatible with any other syllabus or SAS? Does this subject overlap significantly with another syllabus or a VET course of study?
- If there is a syllabus and SAS, is there sufficient difference to warrant two syllabuses? If there is overlap, do the two subjects treat the common material in distinctive manners that would warrant two syllabuses?
- After analysing enrolment and achievement data over time:
  - Is there a viable cohort for maintaining the subject in the suite?
  - Does achievement data suggest that this subject is opening up pathways for students?
- Is a new subject that is a different context or specialisation in the broad learning area necessary or can the learning be accommodated using the flexibilities in a current syllabus?
- Is the level of specialisation required to deliver the learning in this syllabus reasonable for schools to offer?
- What is the potential impact on pre-service and in-service teacher preparation?

## **Conclusions**

The need for robust criteria to be applied in an ongoing manner to proposals for new syllabuses and the current suite of senior syllabuses is necessary to ensure that the suite offers the best possible range of options to schools and young people.

This report concludes that many of the issues raised can be addressed within the current development, review and maintenance processes. Consistently applying the criteria would mean the need for “landscape” reviews would be unnecessary, as the criteria would be assessing the health of the suite and individual subjects as part of the ongoing cycles of review and development.

The adoption of the criteria allows the QSA to maintain a suite of syllabuses that represent the community’s expectation of a broad and general senior education, in conjunction with other learning options available to young people in the senior phase of learning.