Department of
Education
GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Shaping the future

Pathways to Post-School Success
Review of Western Australian senior secondary pathways

Targeted consultation summary

30 October to 28 November 2023

Introduction

On 21 June 2023, the Minister for Education launched a review of senior secondary pathways in a bid to ensure all Western Australian students can reach their full potential through their post-school study, training, or employment pursuits.

A panel of education specialists was established to drive the review with support from a larger advisory committee, representing key stakeholder groups.

Since the panel's inception, it has focused its attention on examining senior secondary schooling within Western Australia, nationally, and beyond. To support this work, the panel commissioned a series of research papers, including an environmental scan conducted by the Pathways to Post-School Success Secretariat, which garnered contributions from over 1,600 education stakeholders across the state.

This body of research informed development of the panel's discussion paper, which was publicly released on the review website on 24 October 2023. Submissions to the discussion paper closed on 8 December 2023.

Concurrently, the panel convened a series of one-hour meetings with identified key stakeholders from 30 October to 28 November 2023. The focus of these meetings was to ensure all invited stakeholders had an opportunity to speak directly with the panel and draw its attention to issues, data, and information the panel may need to consider as part of the review.

This report provides a summary of the feedback received during the targeted consultation period.

Who we spoke to

From 30 October to 28 November 2023, the panel met with 25 stakeholder groups and over 80 individual stakeholders, representing public and non-government secondary principals, parents, students, Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples, rural and remote education, education support settings, industry, and the community services, higher education, and Vocational Education and Training (VET) sectors.

What we heard

Stakeholder feedback was consistent with the feedback from the environmental scan and largely consistent with the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) refreshment opportunities identified by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority.

Feedback highlighted that while individual schools have the autonomy to innovate and provide contextualised solutions for their students, over time, these school-level innovations have led to pathways and opportunities becoming patchworked, disconnected, and limited in certain schools and regions.

Most stakeholders appreciated the diversity and flexibility of choices and pathways within the current system. It was, however, recognised there are opportunities for the system to better address the different and changing needs of the state, young people, families, and community.

Stakeholders highlighted a range of improvement opportunities, whilst also emphasising the need to maintain high standards for all students. The key consultation themes are discussed on the following page.

Key consultation themes

1. **Increased flexibilities to meet the diverse needs of all students**
   Most stakeholders appreciated the flexibility and rigour of the current system; however, requested even greater flexibilities to meet the diverse needs of all students. This included greater flexibility at the school-level around provision of educational adjustments for equity groups.

   There was a particular emphasis on the need for greater flexibilities in the WACE requirements to ensure more equitable access for all students. Specifically, stakeholders considered the achievement standard and literacy and numeracy standard requirements to be significant barriers to WACE achievement, particularly for students with disability. It was noted that the literacy and numeracy assessment standard can also be a barrier to entry into post-school education and training. There was support for the exploration of alternative ways to measure or demonstrate these requirements, on the condition that high standards are maintained for all students.

2. **Capturing and recognising more of a student's journey**
   Stakeholders acknowledged that the WACE and Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement (WASSA) are comprehensive documents; however, thought they could capture and celebrate more of what a student has achieved during their whole educational journey, not just in Years 11 and 12. There was also a request for further exploration of how cultural and diverse experiences, such as on-country learning, can be meaningfully measured and recognised. Stakeholders agreed that some activities recorded on the WASSA could be validated at the school level.

3. **Better preparing students for the world of work**
   Feedback highlighted the need for senior secondary education and pathways to be more informed by industry and responsive to state and local skill needs. Stakeholders agreed on literacy and numeracy remaining an essential capability but emphasised the need for a greater focus on contemporary and emerging work capabilities, including critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration, enterprise and entrepreneurial skills, digital literacy skills, and research skills. There were differing views regarding the place of Certificate IV courses in schools, with some considering them age-inappropriate and others viewing them as necessary to prepare students for the current economy.

4. **Enhanced career education delivery and support**
   Stakeholders noted that many students lack knowledge of the current job market and career opportunities and emphasised the importance of comprehensive career education. While the 2021 state government career education initiatives, including the career practitioner initiative and Year 9 Career Taster Program, are valued and appreciated by many, there was a request for greater and more centralised career pathway information, resourcing, and support. In particular, many asked for career information that is differentiated for regions, parents, students, teachers, and equity groups and more informed by industry. Some also expressed support for students to access career education earlier in their schooling.

5. **Greater partnering, collaboration, and information sharing**
   Stakeholders identified a need to strengthen partnerships and information sharing between organisations, higher education providers, agencies, schools, the VET sector, and industry to make transitions more purposeful, sustainable, seamless, successful, and meaningful.

The growing influence and impact of universities and the VET sector on schools and students was noted, with stakeholders emphasising the need to strengthen partnerships with these particular groups. These sub-themes are explored below.

5.1. Universities

Stakeholders noted the proliferation of university early offers and in-school enabling programs in recent years. While many value these initiatives, there were concerns regarding the lack of a unified approach across universities, and the unintended consequences on student aspirations and subject choice. Stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the relaxing of university prerequisites and the impact on ATAR participation and student university preparedness. It was agreed that increased data transparency and sharing between schools and universities is necessary to help address these concerns. This would also enable further exploration of the learnings from the design and structure of in-school enabling programs, including the UniReady English course.

5.2. VET sector

Stakeholders emphasised the significant practical and resourcing issues associated with VET delivery in schools, noting these issues are intensified in the regions. Separate concerns were reported about the literacy and numeracy standard of some students intending to transition to post-school VET programs, and some in-school VET courses being insufficiently linked to industry and state needs. It was agreed there is a need for greater partnering between schools, the VET sector, and industry to enable better delivery of VET programs across all regions.

6. Improving student engagement and retention

Many stakeholders emphasised the importance of students remaining in schooling until Year 12, noting the interplay between retention and engagement.

Feedback highlighted that the reasons for student disengagement are complex and varied. Some stakeholders considered student disengagement to be largely caused by the pressure and focus on students to achieve a rank over deeper learning, understanding, and personal interest, as well as the lack of relevance and real-world learning opportunities in the curriculum. Many also commented on the impact of compulsory ATAR examinations on student mental health and wellbeing, engagement, and participation. There was broad support for the exploration of better matching of assessments to subject needs.

Stakeholders noted the learnings and potential for alternative (complementary) research-based learning programs, such as Big Picture Education, to enhance student engagement and retention; however, recognised that further exploration would be required to ensure these programs meet the appropriate standards.

7. More support for the regions

Many stakeholders emphasised the staffing challenges experienced by regional and remote schools and impact this has on schools' ability to deliver various pathway options and courses, particularly career education and VET. While the support provided through the School of Isolated Distance Education (SIDE) is highly valued, feedback indicated that many schools lack the appropriate support to enable effective in-class delivery of SIDE courses. It was suggested that having more resources, either on-site or through the relevant regional education office, would better support course delivery, career pathways education, and post-school transition at the state and local level.

8. **Enhancing the status and perception of VET and ATAR**

   There was agreement on the significant value of vocational (VET) and academic (ATAR) courses in schools and important role they play in preparing students for their future careers. However, many commented on the perceived lower status of VET course pathways compared to ATAR course pathways, noting that some only view VET as an engagement option and/or enabling pathway to achieve WACE or entry to university. It was acknowledged that the current bifurcation of ATAR and non-ATAR, and ATAR and VET pathways may be contributing to this perception and a more integrated approach could be worth exploring.

9. **Recognition of student success**

   Stakeholders acknowledged the importance of data to measure student progress and achievement. They also highlighted the importance of measuring the progress and achievements of students from different and diverse backgrounds and need for greater flexibility and recognition of students with disability, early school leavers, Aboriginal students, and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Next steps

This summary report will be used to inform development of the review final report and its recommendations.

The final report is to be delivered to the Minister for Education by the end of February 2024.