



WACSSO

Partnering with P&Cs to
advance public education

WACSSO SUBMISSION

Pathways to Post-School

Success Review

Response to Expert Panel

Report: Consultation Draft

August 2024

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgement of Country

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations pays respect to First Nations and Traditional Custodians throughout Australia, recognising their connection to land, waters and sky.

We acknowledge parents, families, Elders and communities as sharers of culture and knowledge; and recognise the value this learning holds for children and young people.

The Voice of Parents

WACSSO acknowledges parents* as the first educators in their child's life. We celebrate and honour the diversity of families and recognise the vital role they play in supporting children and young people throughout their learning journeys.

This submission is informed by the experiences and feedback we receive from Western Australian Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs) and the parents of children attending WA public schools.

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* WACSSO recognises the term "parent" to also include a child's primary carer.

Introduction

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations (WACSSO) is the peak body representing parents of public school students in Western Australia. We provide services and representation at the State and National level to more than 650 Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs) across WA. Together with the P&C community and all our stakeholders, WACSSO works tirelessly to advance public education in WA so that every student has the best chance to realise their potential and live the life they deserve.

Our vision is for Western Australian schools to provide world-leading education to every student. For over a century, we have worked passionately with school organisations across this State to improve the public education system, all the while never losing sight of a simple principle: that we are stronger together.

WACSSO was pleased to represent WA parents in the first consultation round undertaken by the Expert Panel for this Review. The consultation process encouraged robust discussion with a focus on outcomes that would benefit students.

We now provide to the Panel feedback on the consultation draft released mid-year. WACSSO's summary of parent perspectives focuses on the three main areas of change, and the recommendations within each of those areas. This submission is informed by WACSSO Policy and by interactions with our networks of parents located across WA, including a specific survey undertaken with public senior secondary school parents.

Reframing the purpose of senior secondary education

- Parent views, reflected to WACSSO, are that the purpose of senior secondary education is to build upon the skills gained at primary level, to prepare young people for the work environment and adult life more generally, and to instil a love of learning that can help them face the changes and challenges they will encounter throughout their lives. Parents frequently share their concern that, currently, senior secondary education is not delivering on this purpose in a manner that considers the needs of their child to prepare them for life after school.
- The development of a purpose statement which has student interests and aspirations at its core has the potential to be more inclusive and engaging for all students, particularly disengaged students or those that are most disadvantaged. WACSSO believes for a purpose statement to be effective and achieve the goals parents wish for in their children's education, its development should include genuine consultation opportunities with students and parents. The education system, including schools, leadership teams, teachers and staff working in all facets of the system, should be provided with the necessary resources and expertise to ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed and feel proud of their achievements.
- Parents express that they want their child to receive an education where they can reach their full potential, an education where there is choice, flexibility, inclusion, and exposure to a range of careers at an early age. The delivery of career taster programs has been well received by parents and they allow students exposure to industries they may not have considered. This is particularly important for students in regional and remote areas who often don't have a wide exposure to industries outside of the taster programs. These programs, although welcomed by parents, are often delivered too late in the student's education journey, and ineffectively communicate to parents and students the links between subject and pathway choices.

A system built for learning goals

- Parents report a trend towards higher enrolments in general courses and perceive this to be due to a number of reasons, including early offers into university, increased levels of stress and anxiety experienced by students completing ATAR pathways and accounts of students being counselled to choose general courses.
- In a recent regional visit, students provided insight into their pathway choice, noting the decreased pressure and workload associated with a general pathway allowed them to undertake paid work and save for the associated costs of higher education including relocating away from home. Expanding the programs and courses that contribute to ATAR and consolidating the pathways will provide our regional and remote students with optimal outcomes for success.
- Flexibility in course selection is appealing to parents, however maintaining requirements for essential skills of literacy and numeracy was highlighted in responses to our survey. Introducing more flexibility for students is seen as a positive, but parents express concern that assessments must be appropriate, including seeking demonstration of literacy and numeracy skills. Also reported was the hope that combining courses does not make the system more confusing and complex than is currently the case.
- Parents were widely in support of the idea of introducing a greater range of assessments, rather than reliance on exams. Closed book, independent exams do not reflect the workplace, nor the assessment environment at some universities. With greater access to information than previous generations, it is important schools are equipping students with the thinking and analytical skills to interpret this content, and to test these capabilities. While assessment measures need review, of continuing importance to parents is that, regardless of the assessment process or measure, there is a commitment to clear and early communication between parents and teachers about student progress and achievement.
- Students should be encouraged to achieve and not discouraged from participating in any learning activity or assessment, rather there should be a collaborative approach and guidance for parents and the student to make an informed choice.
- Parents would welcome the broadening of reasonable adjustments in the classroom and special consideration for assessments. There are a range of personal circumstances that can impact a student's ability to demonstrate knowledge independent of a formal diagnosis, whether that be anxiety and inability to focus during times of stress, or the inability to write legibly and quickly for extended periods when the majority of schoolwork is completed via screens and devices.

Fully recognising student diversity and achievement

- Parents report that the WASSA in its current form is of limited usage and relevance. Whilst Parents believe that literacy and numeracy standards are crucial in a statement of achievement, their opinion is micro credentials, and volunteering should be included to further demonstrate competencies.
- Parents acknowledge the benefit of VETDSS in providing students with a meaningful pathway whilst retaining engagement with school. Students accessing further study through apprenticeships or traineeships outside of the school context should not be precluded from receiving their WASSA for time spent at school.
- WACSSO believes that students with disability should not be disadvantaged in attaining a WACE and fully supports the inclusion of accommodations within WACE requirements. Parents have long called for such accommodations to be made; success will be underpinned by appropriate consultation with families with lived experience, and sufficient funding and resources to achieve outcomes for success.
- Diversity is a strength in society and in the workplace and schools should be responsive to students who require adjustments to the learning environment. There is great benefit to engaging with students and families those who think and see the world in different ways.
- At the 2023 WACSSO annual conference, Parents raised the issue of inequality of SCSA equitable access adjustment through the submission of an agenda item, which was passed unanimously by our parent members. This motion directed WACSSO to write to the WA Education Minister requesting a review of equitable access adjustments for ATAR course examinations, to address the following:
 1. they lack equality
 2. they do not take into account the challenges experienced by students from regional/remote areas and low socio-economic backgrounds in accessing the services and funds needed for review of existing diagnoses.
 3. onus is placed on schools to have provided adequate accommodations and documentation of these accommodations when currently there is inadequate resourcing for students with learning disabilities.

In closing

WACSSO broadly supports the recommendations in the draft consultation paper, provided they are appropriately funded and resourced with decisions made in consultation with all stakeholders inclusive of students of parents.

