

Focus

A study of qualifications available to Senior Secondary School students in a sample of OECD countries

Sabbatical Report

**An investigation undertaken by
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as part of sabbatical leave taken in Term III 2005.**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements		1
Purpose		3
Executive Summary		4
Background		5
Activities		5
Findings		6
AUSTRALIA		6
ACT		8
Northern territory		9
New South Wales		9
Queensland		10
South Australia		11
Tasmania		12
Victoria		12
West Australia		13
BELGIUM		14
NORWAY		17
UNITED KINGDOM		20
England & Wales		20
Northern Ireland		20
SCOTLAND		23
ASSESSMENT AUTHORITIES	England Wales Northern Ireland Scotland	25
CONCLUSIONS	REFERENCES	26

PURPOSE

The purpose of my sabbatical leave was two fold.

- To broaden my knowledge and understanding of **secondary school assessment** by examining leaver qualifications available to students in a range of countries, namely Australia, Belgium, Norway the United Kingdom and Scotland. The countries chosen performed at a similar level to New Zealand (7th) on the PISA combined reading literacy scale in 2000.
- “Refreshment” was an important aspect of my leave and I accomplished this by doing something well removed from my usual work. I worked alongside plumbers, plasterers, electricians and my friendly “retired” builder while renovating and restoring my home. This was immensely satisfying and at the end of every day I could see where I had been!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Qualification system in New Zealand is unique in a number of respects.

- We have National assessment at three levels.
- We have National assessment in consecutive years
- We use standards based assessment for all subjects.

None of these points of difference appear to be of benefit in terms of the quality of education achieved by New Zealand students.

In Australia, five States have just one level of National assessment while two assess at Years 10 and 12. Norway and Belgium have a single qualification while the UK has two. None of the countries studied externally assess students in consecutive years. Countries with two qualification levels have one at the equivalent of Year 11 and then a two year program leading to a final year qualification.

The high financial cost to schools and the Qualifications Authority of our qualification system is self evident. There is also a high cost to students and their families. It was interesting to note that most countries consider that students should be entitled to sit National Qualifications free of charge while New Zealand operates a “user pays” or cost recovery system.

Internationally the trend is towards criteria or standards based internal assessment but in many cases this is combined with external norm referenced examinations. Most systems recognise that one approach does not fit all subjects and the externally assessed component may vary from 20 to 80%.

A range of methods are used to moderate assessment.

- Standard validation moderation – expert moderators undertake comparability of summative assessments undertaken by teachers.
- Statistical moderation - the teachers' school assessment marks are statistically moderated using the externally assessed component as the benchmark.
- Peer Moderation - panels of experienced teachers examine samples of student work.

The New Zealand education system is rated in the top 20% of OECD countries. If we are to stay there we must find a better balance between the time we spend on assessment and the time we spend teaching. It is interesting to note that the top country in the OECD for educational achievement, Finland, has no standardized testing or assessment until matriculation at the end of compulsory schooling.

There need to be changes to the National Qualifications System in New Zealand. The high cost of effective moderation and the impact of constant assessment on teacher work loads is simply not sustainable. Constant assessment does not increase learning. There is evidence to suggest that over assessment may in fact inhibit learning. NZQA have been working to improve their processes and systems so that students can be confident that their result fairly reflects their performance. I believe we now need to reduce external assessment for NCEA by examining in Years 11 and 13 only. This would increase the time available to our teachers and enable a greater focus on teaching and learning.

BACKGROUND

I was appointed to the position of Principal in 1996. Waiopahu College is a low decile school and I would have to admit to some degree of envy towards colleagues in wealthier areas who were able to take regular sabbaticals. The new sabbatical leave scheme has enabled me to take “guilt free” leave for much needed refreshment.

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

While the greater part of my investigation was internet based I was fortunate to be able to visit schools in Antwerp, Belgium and Elverum, Norway where I had discussions with the Principals, Board Chairman and staff members regarding leaving qualifications, as well as wider school related issues. These visits were valuable in that they provided an opportunity to observe the schools in action and, at Videregaende Skole in Elverum, to speak to a number of classes. Unfortunately, a school visit in Exeter had to be cancelled due to my ill health. In Hamburg I met with International Student agents.

This was the first time my wife Pam and I have travelled to Europe. Every day was an adventure and we were able to catch up with friends as well as explore new cities. To say that we enjoyed the trip would be a gross understatement.

FINDINGS

Australian Education System

Overview

Preschool and school education has a similar structure across Australia, with only slight variations amongst the States and Territories. School education is thirteen years, with some variations in Queensland and Western Australia, and is divided into a preparatory year, primary schooling and secondary schooling. Children usually start in the preparatory year at around five years of age, although in some States the starting age is closer to four years. Primary schooling is six or seven years (Years 1-6 or 1-7), and secondary schooling is five or six years (Years 7-12 or 8-12). School education is compulsory until the age of 15, except in Tasmania where it is compulsory until age 16.

During the 1980s and 1990s, there has been a steady increase in the number of students completing the full thirteen years of education, with the national rate at 72.3 per cent in 1999. Retention rates vary between States and Territories, ranging from 53 per cent in the Northern Territory to over 91 per cent in the Australian Capital Territory.

Tertiary education programmes can be divided into two main types: those offered by institutions and industry within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, and higher education programmes, which are mainly offered by universities and other higher education institutions. While the VET and higher education sectors in Australia are quite distinct, an increasing number of connections are being forged between the two.

Australian Secondary Qualifications

The AQF (Australian Qualifications Framework) comprises national qualifications in the secondary schools sector, the vocational education and training sector, and the higher education sector.

The qualification for secondary students is the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. Local titles are used at State/Territory level to certify the completion of secondary education. These are:

- NSW [Higher Education Certificate](#) (HSC)
- VIC [Victorian Certificate of Education](#) (VCE)
[Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning](#) (VCAL)
- QLD [Senior Certificate](#)
- SA [South Australian Certificate of Education](#) (SACE)
- WA [WA Certificate of Education](#)
- TAS [Tasmanian Certificate of Education](#) (TCE)
- NT [Northern Territory Certificate of Education](#) (NTCE)
- ACT [ACT Year 12 Certificate](#)

At a State/Territory level, requirements for the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education are set by statutory authorities who are responsible for the development and accreditation of courses of study, assessment, issuance of the qualification and associated quality assurance and consultative processes.

In each State/Territory, statutory authorities are responsible for determining assessment requirements and ensuring that assessment standards are maintained through appropriate quality assurance processes. The work of the statutory authorities is underpinned by nationally agreed principles of integrity and quality in assessment and certification.

Pathways through the qualification may include:

Full-Time School Study

A two-year post Year 10 Senior Secondary School Certificate of Education program.

Schools/TAFE Programs

A Senior Secondary School Certificate of Education program incorporating units of competency from a National Training Package, or recognising other community based learning.

A combination of an accredited course of study and credit for prior learning which may include a formally recognised program or other learning achieved by an individual, meeting the quality assurance requirements of the senior secondary certificate.

The Senior Secondary Certificate of Education is issued in each State/Territory by a statutory authority. Each State/Territory has legislative responsibility for authorising the issue of the Certificate. These qualifications may be referred to using a number of local titles at State/Territory level. Individuals who complete some of the requirements for the Certificate will receive a record of their achievements with State/Territory statutory authorities taking responsible for providing and maintaining records.

Schools also provide vocational education and training recognised under the range of AQF Certificates I-IV and are required to have the same compliance, including with the relevant legislation, as in the vocational education and training sector, either directly with the State or Territory training authority or through some delegated arrangement.

There are three levels of quality control exercised in the interaction between the statutory authorities and the schools:

1. curriculum development - to achieve the best possible range of skills and knowledge and to identify explicit standards as a basis for reliable assessment
2. registration and accreditation - to control consistency of standards and the currency of the qualification
3. moderation - to achieve comparability of student results.

Quality assurance processes underpinning the SSCE include external examinations and tests, external moderation, marker monitoring and a wide range of checks and cross-checks on the reliability and validity of student's results.

In all States and Territories, various combinations of these quality assurance processes are used by the statutory boards which, meeting as a national agency, ACACA (Australasian Curriculum Assessment Certification Authorities) have developed national guidelines for assessment quality and equity, and a set of national principles for certification. The national principles support the AQF guidelines for the SSCE to achieve national consistency of outcomes (including certification of vocational education and training completed in senior secondary school), national portability, flexible pathways to the qualification and across sectors, and protocols for issuing the qualification.

Australian Capital Territory

Two formal documents are issued to ACT senior secondary system students by the ACT BSSS at the completion of Year 12:

- Year 12 Certificate which lists courses and grades in all units completed during Years 11 and 12
- Tertiary Entrance Statement (for eligible students) on which the Universities Admission Index (UAI) is reported.

The ACT operates a system of school based curriculum and assessment within the policy and procedures of the Board. Colleges determine the courses (and units) that they offer to the students. There are no compulsory courses or units. Assessment in the ACT is continuous school based assessment. There are no examinations set by a central authority for any subject.

ACT Year 12 Certificate

To be awarded an ACT Year 12 Certificate a student must complete a coherent pattern of study which includes a minimum of 17 standard units forming at least 3 A, T or M minors in a period not exceeding 5 years. There may be one break in study of up to one year. This applies to all students commencing Year 11 in 2005

Tertiary Entrance Statement

The Tertiary Entrance Statement reports a student's UAI (University Admissions Index) and information on the T courses the student studied. To be awarded a Tertiary Entrance Statement (TES) a student must complete a minimum of 20 standard units of which 18 standard units must be classified as A or T. These units must be arranged to form at least 3 majors and 3 minors or 4 majors and 1 minor courses and of these at least 3 majors and 1 minor courses must be classified as T. The student must also sit the [ACT scaling test \(AST\)](#) in their final year of study. These studies must be completed in no less than 3.5 semesters and no more than 5 years. With the approval of the college principal there may be one break in study of up to one year. Students intending to take longer than 2 years need to obtain the permission of the college principal.

Northern Territory

Northern Territory Certificate of Education

Senior secondary students generally work towards the Northern Territory Certificate of Education. The Northern Territory Board of Studies issues the certificate to students who meet the requirements and levels of achievement during their senior secondary studies.

There are two levels: Stage 1, generally Year 11, and Stage 2, generally Year 12. Although most students complete the certificate in two years, it can be done part-time for as many years as required. At least 22 approved units must be studied.

Senior secondary students in the Territory undertake subjects developed and accredited by the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA).

There is an extensive list of subjects available to senior secondary students through Territory schools. Each school can provide a list of senior subjects it offers. Careers advisers can help with subject selection.

Tertiary Entrance Rank

The Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) is one of the factors universities use to determine whether a student is eligible for a course. The Northern Territory Certificate of Education and TER issued to NT students are recognised nationally.

New South Wales

School Certificate Year 10

The School Certificate is awarded by the Board of Studies NSW to eligible students at the end of Year 10. To receive the School Certificate, students are required to study courses in each year in Years 7-10 in English, Mathematics, Science, Human Society and its Environment and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education.

At some time during Years 7-10, students are also required to study courses in Creative Arts, Technology and Applied Studies and Languages Other Than English. Each year all students in Year 10 sit for state wide tests in November in English-literacy, Mathematics, Science (and Australian History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship from 2002). The tests assess individual achievement in the foundation knowledge and skills needed to successfully undertake subjects in Years 11 and 12 and to participate effectively in the wider community. Students receive their own test results for these tests. Students also are awarded a grade for each of the courses they have studied in Years 9 and 10. The grades are based on a set of [Course Performance Descriptors](#) developed by the Board of Studies. They indicate a student's full range of achievements in each course, providing a detailed report of the student's overall performance.

Higher School Certificate

The Higher School Certificate is a locally, nationally and internationally recognised qualification for students who successfully complete secondary education in NSW.

For all Board of Studies developed courses, with the exception of dual accredited vocational education courses, school based assessment contributes 50% of the course mark, with the Higher School Certificate (HSC) external examination mark contributing the other 50%. For each course, the student's examination mark and assessment mark are averaged to create the HSC mark which is shown on the performance scale, and that mark determines the performance band to which the student's result is allocated. The Higher School Certificate Record of Achievement shows the course name, an examination mark, assessment mark and performance band. The school assessment

marks for each course are moderated by the Board of Studies according to the performance of the students in each school in the HSC examination for that course.

The UAI applies to tertiary entrance in New South Wales and the ACT only.

But the UAI can be directly used for entry into universities across Australia.

Other states and territories have their own arrangements and requirements. This information can be accessed at

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/acaca/s5_tertiaryentrance.html

Queensland

Queensland Core Skills Test

The Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test is a state-wide test based on the Queensland senior curriculum and is available to all Year 12 students regardless of subjects taken. However, students seeking a Tertiary Entrance Statement must sit for this test as part of their eligibility for an Overall Position and Field Positions.

An Overall Position (OP) states a student's rank-order position based on overall achievement in Queensland Studies Authority subjects. To qualify for an OP, students must have studied at least 20 semesters of QSA subjects including three subjects for all four senior semesters and have taken the QCS Test.

Field Positions (FPs) indicate a student's rank-order position based on overall achievements in QSA subjects in up to five fields: extended written expression, short written communication, basic numeracy, solving complex problems and practical performance. FPs are calculated only when students are eligible for an OP.

Queensland Secondary certification

As well as regular end-of-semester reporting, students in state secondary schools receive certificates marking significant milestones.

On completing Year 12, students receive a Student Education Profile containing a Senior Certificate and, if eligible, a Tertiary Entrance Statement.

The Senior Certificate records individual subject results, including relevant vocational education and training results and the Queensland Core Skills Test results.

The Tertiary Entrance Statement is the key to university entrance and contains an Overall Position and Field Positions.

Some students will receive a Certificate of Post-Compulsory School Education. A student is eligible to receive the Certificate of Post-Compulsory School Education if the student has at least 12 years of schooling and is identified by the school as having an impairment or difficulties in learning that are not primarily due to socioeconomic, cultural and/or linguistic factors.

Exit statements, based on school records, may be issued to students who leave school prior to completing the requirements for a certificate.

South Australia

South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE)

To meet the requirements of the certificate, students need to take a balanced range of studies, generally over two years, although no particular time limit is specified. Stage 1 of the SACE is usually studied in Year 11 and Stage 2 of the SACE is usually studied in Year 12. Students may negotiate alterations to this schedule. The studies include English or English as Second Language, Australian Studies, and Mathematics at Stage 1 (Year 11), as well as a selection from other subject groups.

To be awarded the SACE students must:

- study 22 semester (half-year) units, some of which may be combined to form full-year programs
- reach a level of satisfactory achievement in at least 16 of the 22 units
- meet the subject pattern requirements
- satisfy a writing-based literacy requirement ([WBLA](#)).

The SACE is the basic requirement for entry to higher education. The higher education institutions use a tertiary entrance rank (TER), derived from SACE studies, to rank students for selection to particular courses. To be eligible for a TER, students must complete five Stage 2 (Year 12) subjects.

Not all subjects are assessed by external examinations, but for those which are then the external assessment usually counts for 50%. There are a range of subjects where the breakdown is 30% external assessment and 70% school based assessment. In these cases the externally marked component is an investigation that is undertaken and marked at the school and then externally marked a second time.

There are a number of subjects which are fully school assessed and then moderated.

Moderation usually follows two forms:

1. Standard validation moderation - moderators undertake comparability of assessment of summative assessments undertaken by teachers.
2. Statistical moderation where the teachers' school assessment marks are statistically moderated using the externally assessed component as the benchmark.

Tasmania

Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE)

Student assessment is criterion based and measures student performance against specified standards within criteria. The criteria separate the knowledge, skills and competencies that students must acquire to succeed in a given syllabus and the standards describe the graded outcomes attainable within each criterion.

TCE subjects are designed for students in Year 11 & 12

They are available in a range of 'sizes' and 'levels'

The sizes are 50, 100 & 150 hour duration

The levels are numbered 2, 3, 4, and 5

Students would often progress from 2 to 4 or 3 to 5 during the two years

Level 5 syllabuses are externally examined. The exam contributes approximately 1/3 of the final result. However, there are minimum performance requirements in the examination.

The internal components are moderated by meetings of teachers state wide on a subject by subject basis (possible in Tasmania) to share works samples etc.

Victoria

Victoria Certificate of Education

The percentage of external assessment varies between subjects (studies). There are two components to the assessment of the VCE:

Firstly, there is satisfactory completion of the VCE, which is determined by completion of units (16 in all). Decisions about unit completion are made by the school based on whether the student has met the outcomes for the subject as specified in the study design. Schools would normally be using coursework to make the decisions about satisfactory completion of units and therefore the VCE as a whole.

The second component of VCE assessment is graded assessment. Graded assessment is used to generate a study score out of 50. The study score indicates how well the student has performed in that study compared to all the others in Victoria who took that subject. The study scores are then used by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) to calculate the ENTER – the tertiary entrance ranking that compares all students in Victoria.

There are three graded assessments per study. Graded assessments include written examinations, performance/oral examinations, school-assessed Tasks (projects) and school-assessed coursework. All of these except for school-assessed coursework are externally assessed; school-assessed tasks are assessed both internally and externally. The three graded assessments are different for each study and contribute towards the study score in different ways, but with the exception of Studio Arts, each subject has at least one coursework (internal) GA and at least one examination (external) GA.

External assessment is used in varying degrees, depending on the subject. Decisions about completing the VCE are made solely on internal assessment by the schools; decision about the 'ranking'/performance of students are made using both internal and external assessment, with the

examination component being from anything between 34% (Studio Arts) and 66% (maths, sciences and accounting).

All subjects except for Studio Arts have school-assessed coursework as one of their graded assessments. With school-assessed coursework schools choose from a prescribed list of tasks and they then run the tasks. Schools enter initial coursework results and a moderation process is applied to produce final coursework results.

Western Australia

Western Australian Certificate of Education.

Students who meet the requirements will be issued with a Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). To qualify for a WACE, a student must:

- complete at least ten full year (or equivalent) Curriculum Council subjects,*1
- obtain an average grade of C or better in at least eight full year (or equivalent) Curriculum Council subjects, with at least four of the full year (or equivalent) subjects at Year 12 level,*2
- achieve English language competence. (A student may also demonstrate English language competence by passing the Curriculum Council English Language Competence Test).

Common Assessment Framework

CAF subjects are based on a broad competency-based model. In the CAF approach different levels of outcomes are defined rather than a can do/can't do dichotomy. The following principles are central to assessment in this model:

- teachers and students must make a commitment to the common goal of developing and demonstrating the subject outcomes
- the student must know what is expected of him/her
- the assessment process must be fair, valid and reliable, and the performance criteria transparent
- competency may be achieved at the student's own pace (within the subject).

Each CAF subject has a series of Common Assessment Tasks (CATs) which provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate performance of the subject Outcomes.

Criterion-referenced assessment allows the student to demonstrate what she/he is capable of rather than how well he/she performs in comparison to others.

Individual performance is compared to a set of performance criteria to determine the level of student performance. Three levels of performance are described for each outcome: Very High (V), High (H), Satisfactory (S).

Students must know in advance what is expected of them and the standards which will be applied. The teaching/learning program should provide opportunities for students to improve performance to obtain mastery. They will have at least two opportunities within the formal assessment program to demonstrate achievement of each outcome.

BELGIUM (Flanders)

Overview

Access to education is free of charge up to the end of compulsory education (6- 16). Freedom of education is a constitutional right in Belgium. The concept of the governing body (or school board) is a key concept in the organisation of education in Flanders. The governing bodies have wide-ranging autonomy. However, schools that want government recognition or financial support from the government must meet the attainment targets, be adequately equipped and have sufficient teaching materials. They must be established in buildings, which are habitable, safe and sufficiently tidy, etc.

The constitution also guarantees the parents' freedom of choice. Parents and children must have access to a school of their choice within a reasonable distance from their home.

Educational networks

In many cases the educational networks, as the representative association of governing bodies, take over some of the responsibilities of the governing bodies. They draw up their own curriculum and timetables. Traditionally, a distinction is made between three educational networks:

- community education is education organised by a public body called 'Flemish Community Education' acting under the authority of the Flemish Community. The constitution provides that community education must be neutral. This means that the religious, philosophical or ideological convictions of parents and pupils must be respected
- subsidised publicly run schools are municipal education institutions organised by the municipalities as well as provincial education institutions organised by the provincial administrations. The governing bodies of this education network are united in two umbrella organisations, the Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (OVSG), and the Flemish Provincial Education (POV)
- subsidised privately run schools deliver education organised by a private person or private organisation. The governing body is often a non-profit-making organisation (VZW). Privately run education mainly consists of Catholic schools. They are associated in the umbrella body called Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education (VSKO). Furthermore, protestant, Jewish, orthodox, Islamic, etc. schools also exist. In addition to these denominational schools, there are also schools, which are not affiliated to a particular religion. Examples of these are the Freinet schools, Montessori schools or Steiner schools, which adopt particular educational methods and are also known as 'method schools'.

A small number of schools in Flanders are not recognised by the government. These are the so-called private schools, which are not financed or subsidised by the government.

68% of Flemish pupils attend subsidised (privately run) education.

Secondary education is aimed at young people aged 12 to 18. All schools in secondary education are open to boys and girls.

The definitive choice of subjects is postponed until the second stage so that pupils are first introduced to as many subjects as possible.

The majority of teaching periods in the first stage are devoted to the core curriculum.

From the second stage, four different education forms are distinguished. Within one of these education forms, the pupil opts for a particular course of study.

- general secondary education (ASO), places an emphasis on broad general education, which provides a very firm foundation for passing on to tertiary education
- technical secondary education (TSO), places a special emphasis on general and technical/theoretical subjects. After TSO, young people can exercise a profession or pass on to tertiary education
- secondary education in the arts (KSO), combines a broad general education with active art education. After KSO, young people can choose to go on to tertiary education
- vocational secondary education (BSO) provides practice-oriented education in which young people learn a specific occupation in addition to receiving general education.

In the second and third stage there is a common and an optional part. In the optional part, the core curriculum is supplemented with a broad range of possible subjects. In the third stage, the specific education can be further narrowed down with a view to the ultimate choice of profession or possible educational pathways in tertiary education.

In the fourth stage, consisting mainly of nursing education, no core curriculum is imposed because of the specificity of the training.

A pupil gains the certificate of secondary education after successfully completing six years of ASO, TSO, or KSO or seven years of BSO¹⁰. With a certificate of secondary education from any school, type of education or course of study, a young person has unrestricted access to tertiary education.

From the age of 15 or 16, pupils can transfer to part-time education. Young people can follow training in part-time vocational secondary education (DBSO). They can also opt for an entrepreneurship training course provided by the VIZO-Syntra-network or for a recognised part-time training course.

Assessment

Pupil evaluation is based on tests and examinations organised by the individual teacher under the ultimate responsibility of the organising body of the school (Decision of the Flemish Government of 13 March 1991). Permanent evaluation is possible as well.

In secondary education, the essential instrument of assessment is the class council. The assisting and deliberating class council consists of the school head or his/her representative and all members of the teaching staff, who teach the pupil in a specific school year (these persons are entitled to vote). They can be assisted by the deputy school head, the technical advisor (coordinator), supporting personnel and/or personnel involved in the psycho-social or pedagogic guidance of the pupils (these persons only give advice).

The class council is responsible for the instruction of a specific group of pupils, the assessment of their school progress, the decision regarding each pupil's promotion to a higher class, and the issuing of certificates when appropriate.

Progression

A regular pupil's promotion to the next class follows the issuing of an orientation certificate by the class council at the end of the school year.

The class council can base its decisions on factors such as the following:

- the past school career of each pupil
- the intermediary results from assessments, tests and examinations
- information from the Centre for Educational Guidance (CLB)
- interviews with the pupil and parents, if necessary

At the end of the year, the class council decides for each pupil whether promotion to the next class is permitted with (B certificate) or without (A certificate) restrictions, adjourned (promotion being dependent on the successful completion of re-examinations), or refused (C certificate) (VSKO, 1997).

Certification

In addition to advisory reports (orientation certification) established at the end of each year of secondary education, the class council may grant the [Diploma](#) of Secondary Education (Diploma Secundair Onderwijs) at the end of the 6th year of secondary education (after completion of general, technical, or arts education) or at the end of the 7th (specialisation) year or at the end of the 1st or 2nd year of the fourth stage (after completion of vocational education).

In vocational secondary education pupils can obtain certificates after the 4th or the 6th year and after the 5th specialisation year for the same courses. The [Diploma](#) of Secondary Education and the certificates may be granted after passing one integrated test.

In part-time vocational secondary education qualification certificates are granted after successful completion of the training. In modular vocational education each module results in a partial certificate and all modules of a learning path together result in a certificate. One or more certificates combined with attainment targets and a complete course duration result in a diploma.

NORWAY

Overview

The basic principles and priorities of Norwegian education policies today are:

- a high general level of education in the entire population
- equal opportunity for all in access to education
- decentralisation of educational administration
- meeting long-term and short-term qualification requirements of the labour market
- emphasis on a broad and general initial education, leaving specialisation to later stages and further training at work
- lifelong learning (based on a "cradle to grave" definition)
- a comprehensive education system with easy transition between levels and courses

The Norwegian education budget equals 6.9 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the year 1998. The average for countries with membership in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is 5.7 per cent (1998). The educational level of the population has risen considerably in recent years. 85 per cent of people aged 25 to 64 have upper secondary education or higher. 94 per cent of people between 25 and 34 years of age have upper secondary education or more.

Primary and lower secondary education

Compulsory schooling in Norway is of ten years' duration, and children start school at the age of six. Compulsory education is free and net enrolment is close to 100 per cent. The responsible administrative unit is the local municipality.

Since 1997 the three main stages in compulsory education are:

- Lower primary stage (grades 1 to 4)
- Upper primary stage (grades 5 to 7)
- Lower secondary stage (grades 8 to 10)

As a result of Norway's scattered population, close to 40 per cent of primary and lower secondary schools are so small that children of different ages are taught in the same classroom (multi-grade teaching). Also, 59 per cent of lower secondary schools are combined with primary schools.

Compared with other countries, Norway has few private schools and no specific private school tradition. In 1999 only about 1.6 per cent of the pupils at compulsory school level attended private schools. The percentage is increasing slightly at the turn of the century.

Private schools are primarily considered as supplementary and not supposed to compete with public instruction. According to the Act schools can be approved on condition that they are:

- established on religious or ethical grounds
- based on alternative pedagogical ideas
- established for Norwegian children abroad
- considered to fulfil a quantitative need
- providing vocationally orientated education which is not offered in the public system.

Private schools recognised by the State are given state support of 85 per cent of the running costs of equivalent public schools.

Upper secondary education and training

Upper secondary education normally covers the 16-19 age group (11th to 13th grade) and includes general, academic studies as well as vocational and apprenticeship training. Since 1994, everyone between the ages of 16 and 19 has had a statutory right to three years of upper secondary education. Upper secondary education is offered at county (regional) level and may lead either to higher education, to vocational qualifications, or to partial qualifications. General theoretical education and vocational training are offered side by side, often in the same school building. Pupils take one of 15 foundation courses during the first year. Specialised courses are offered in the second and third years (advanced courses I and II) and in apprenticeships after completing course.

Apprenticeship schemes are part of the upper secondary school system. The first two years of training are provided at school, whereas the final specialized part (up to two years) is given at a workplace in the form of on-the-job training. If not enough apprenticeships are available, the county authority must offer training at school in the form of a third year course (advanced course II). The final examination (trade or journeyman's examination) is the same regardless of whether training has taken place at school or at a workplace.

Assessment

Both continuous and final assessment is used. The final assessment is the end-of-year marks combined with results from examinations. Knowledge of the objectives is essential when evaluating a pupil's total achievement.

Two types of marks are awarded in the upper secondary school and recorded on pupils' certificates. The first are marks for overall achievement, based on the pupils' work during the school year, including practical work, work in class, homework, tests, project work and group work. These marks are awarded each term, but only the end-of-year marks are recorded on the certificate. The marks are given on a seven-point scale from 0 (lowest) to 6 (highest). In the case of trade certificates, centrally set theoretical and practical examinations are held; the mark is "passed" or "not passed".

The same grading system is used for marks awarded in end-of-year examinations. Most examinations in written subjects are organised by public examination boards. Answer papers are evaluated centrally by groups of experienced teachers. As a safeguard against possible error a separate commission of examiners deals with appeals. Their decision is final.

Examinations are either written, oral, a combination of the two, or practical. In the General area of study, written examinations in Norwegian composition are compulsory. In addition, pupils normally take at least two written examinations in at least two other subjects. In the area of study for Business, the pupils normally take four written examinations, two in the third year and one in each of the first 2 years. In the areas of study for Music, dance and drama, and Sports and physical education, a written examination covering the central subject matter in the area of study is compulsory. Pupils may also be examined in general subjects. In all these areas of study, a certain percentage of the pupils, drawn by lot, also take oral examinations during which the class teacher acts as examiner and an external assessor, appointed for the occasion, awards the marks.

Promotion, educational guidance

All upper secondary schools provide guidance to pupils on matters related both to choice of study programme and to future career. A general matriculation standard is introduced, giving entry to higher education.

Pupils can be admitted to advanced level I if they have completed the foundation course in accordance with the requirements of the curriculum. If a pupil has failed one or more subjects in the

foundation course, he/she can be admitted to advanced course I if the school can document the possession of sufficient skills and knowledge to follow a course at the higher level.

To be admitted to advanced level II, pupils have to document completion of advanced level I, or the school accepts that their skills and knowledge meet the level required. Pupils who need special assistance and do not have marks from the foundation course are accepted on the basis of individual assessment. Pupils are normally accepted on courses building on the foundation course they have followed, so that they receive a complete programme of upper secondary education.

If the number of applications exceeds the number of available places in the county, pupils are given points according to their marks in all subjects.

Problems have occurred when there were not enough places at advanced course I and advanced course II level. With a shortage of places, marks determined which pupils were given the opportunity of proceeding to the next grade, and pupils with poorer marks were sometimes forced to move horizontally instead of vertically in the system. The result was that pupils ended up after 2-4 years of education without formal qualifications in an occupation. Transfer from one branch to another is possible, but the expansion of capacity since the introduction of Reform 94 has made it much less common. The intention is that all pupils should receive a full cycle of education (3-4 years) and obtain a certificate qualifying for further studies or an occupation or both.

Certification

Students are awarded grades according to their achievement. A distinction is made between occupational qualifications and qualifications for higher education. Minimum requirements for higher education entrance qualifications include two components:

1. Successful completion of 3 years of upper secondary education including foundation course, advanced course I and II (regardless of area of study) or possession of a recognised vocational qualification/trade or journeyman's certificate.
2. Studies corresponding to a specific level of attainment, determined in periods per week, within the following general subject areas: Norwegian; English; social studies; mathematics; science/environmental studies.

There are basically two different kinds of certificates:

1. The craft/journeyman's certificate in crafts and trades.
2. Certificate awarded on completion of 3 years of upper secondary education leading to either general entrance qualifications for higher education or vocational qualifications in vocational subjects not governed by the Act Concerning Vocational Education. In order to gain the certificate, the candidate must have passed all subjects and exams pursuant to the curriculum. The certificate lists the general compulsory subjects, subjects related to the chosen area of study and electives. Marks recorded on certificates are those awarded by the subject teacher indicating the pupil's level of achievement in the subject, with the addition, of examination marks. The higher education entry qualification consists of two components. The basis is three years of study with a minimum level of achievement in the subjects mentioned under b above. The following areas of study are included: General and business studies; Music, dance and drama; Sports and physical education; Management and natural resources (advanced course II); Drawing, design and colour (advanced course II); Media and communication (advanced course II). An alternative route is, in addition to 2 years of vocational training, to add an advanced course II general subject combination consisting of Norwegian, mathematics, natural sciences, English and recent history.

Upper secondary school certificates are issued on the authority of the school and signed by the principal. The county examination board on the basis of recognised tests issues craft and journeyman certificates.

UNITED KINGDOM

England and Wales

Education in England and Wales is divided into: primary, secondary, further and higher education. Compulsory education lasts for 11 years; statutory schooling ages are between 5 to 16 years. Children are legally required to start attending school at the start of the term after their fifth birthday either on 31 August, 31 December or 31 March, however children often start earlier than this. Most pupils transfer from primary to secondary school at age 11 years. However, a system of middle schools also exists: here pupils are transferred from primary school at either age 8 or 9 years, then onto secondary education at age 12 or 13 years. Most secondary schools in England and Wales are comprehensive; these do not operate a selective entrance system. However, in some parts of England, a grammar school system also operates whereby pupils are usually required to pass an entrance examination based on their ability.

Under the National Curriculum, as a result of the Education Reform Act 1988, four Key Stages to education were established. These are as follows:

Key Stage 1: 5 to 7 years old

Key Stage 2: 7 to 11 years old

Key Stage 3: 11 to 14 years old

Key Stage 4: 14 to 16 years old

Pupils are assessed by National Curriculum tests at the end of each Key Stage. Key Stage 1 assessments are taken at age 7, Key Stage 2 assessments are taken at age 11 and Key Stage 3 assessments are taken at age 14. Key Stage 4 is assessed by levels of achievement acquired at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. Having completed GCSEs, pupils have a choice of whether to continue with further education at school or college or to undertake employment.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, every child receives 12 years of full-time education between the ages of 4 and 16 years of age. If a child reaches 4 years of age on or before 1 July they will start attending school on 1 September, however, if a child reaches the age of 4 years after this date, they will attend school in the next academic year. As in England and Wales, alternative provision for education can be made subject to the approval of the appropriate Education and Library Board.

In Northern Ireland, the majority of pupils transfer from primary to post-primary (grammar or secondary) school at 11 years of age. It is possible for pupils to apply to a grammar school at this age if they succeed in the entry test (known as a Transfer Procedure test). Grammar schools cater for the educational needs of pupils up to the age of 19 years whilst secondary schools cater for the educational needs of pupils up to the age of 16 years.

Compulsory education in Northern Ireland is also divided into four Key Stages. These are as follows:

Key Stage 1: 4 to 8 years old

Key Stage 2: 8 to 11 years old

Key Stage 3: 11 to 14 years old

Key Stage 4: 14 to 16 years old

Examinations are taken at the end of each Key Stage.

England, Wales and Northern Ireland each have their own qualifications, curriculum and assessment authority, although these bodies work together particularly with regard to regulating external qualifications.

Assessment

GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education)

Exams for this qualification are normally sat by 15- to 18-year olds in schools and colleges across the country but they are available to anyone who would like to gain a qualification in a subject in which they're interested. GCSEs can be taken in over 45 subjects from English and maths to economics and psychology. There are also eight GCSEs in vocational subjects that relate to work in particular vocation areas. Some subjects can be taken in different ways.

For example, there are four ways to take GCSE science qualifications:

- Three separate GCSEs: one in biology, one in chemistry and one in physics
- A double award in science, which covers all three subjects and is worth two GCSEs
- A single award in science, which covers all three subjects and is worth one GCSE
- A double award in applied science, which is worth two GCSEs.

GCSEs normally take two years to complete. In this time students will do 'coursework', which will count towards their final grade. Coursework may include projects, fieldwork, artwork, experiments or investigations. They also sit exams. Some subjects, like art and design, design and technology and GCSEs in vocational subjects have more coursework and fewer exams.

Some subjects, such as science and maths, have 'modular' options. A modular course is split into different units, with an exam at the end of each unit. This means that students will sit exams throughout the course instead of doing all the exams at the end of the two years. Some subjects, like geography and history, don't have modules, this means that students sit all the exams at the end of the course.

Students are able to resit an exam to try to improve their grade. The better mark out of the two attempts will count towards the final GCSE grade.

A levels

The A level is normally taken as a two-year course that is a progression from either GCSE or equivalent. It is not always necessary, however, to have taken the subject at GCSE or equivalent to be able to take the A level course. The A level is regarded as the main route to higher employment and/or higher education.

All A levels were unitised in September 2000, and candidates are now able to take units as they proceed through the course rather than being examined in a single session at the end of the course. There are two categories: GCE AS/A level and VCE A level.

VCEs involve the study of a sector of industry. They are currently being updated to match the GCE structure and will be first taught in centres in September 2005.

The Advanced Subsidiary (AS) is a stand-alone qualification and is valued as half a full A level qualification. It has three units (assessed at the standard expected for a student half way through an

A level course) that contribute 50 per cent of the full A level. The A2 is the second half of a full A level qualification. It has three units (assessed at the standard expected for a student at the end of a full A level course) that are worth 50 per cent of the full A level qualification.

Most units are assessed by examination. Some are assessed by coursework. In most A levels, coursework accounts for 20 to 30 per cent of the marks. The AS covers the less demanding material in an A level course. The A2 covers the more demanding material. For example, in the A2, students might:

- specialise in an area they studied at AS
- extend their knowledge and understanding of the subject by studying new topics
- improve their skills.

Also in the A2, students will combine knowledge, understanding and skills from across the A level course.

Scotland

In Scotland, pupils between the ages of 5 to 16 years receive full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude. After 7 years of primary education pupils are transferred to secondary education, usually around the age of 12 years. Many pupils continue their education past compulsory schooling to further and higher education level, however some pupils leave school at 16 years and undertake employment.

The 5 to 14 curriculum takes pupils through primary education and 2 years of secondary. As there is no statutory curriculum in Scotland, LEAs and head teachers have responsibility for the delivery and management of the curriculum, however guidelines are provided.

SEED regulate the curriculum in primary schools under the 5 to 14 curriculum. There are no entry restrictions to secondary education in Scotland. Lower secondary education is divided into three stages. The first two years (S1 and S2) provide general education; third and fourth years (S3 and S4) are based on specialist and vocational education for all.

Pupils aged 14 to 16 years take Standard Grade courses. Standard Grade courses are part of a national program where assessments are regulated and marked by the [SQA](#). These courses are offered at three levels and take two years to complete. The levels offered are credit; general and foundation, different levels are taken according to pupil ability. Options for Standard Grade courses are chosen at the end of the second year of secondary education. Standard grades are attained from continuous assessment within the school and by external examination.

Further education in Scotland is available through Higher and Advanced Higher education courses taken in fifth (S5) and sixth (S6) years. This is not compulsory. There are five levels to Higher and Advanced Higher education; these are access, intermediate 1, intermediate 2, higher and advanced higher. These are assessed internally and by external assessment from the SQA.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA is the national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees.

Assessment

At the end of the four years of lower secondary education pupils are eligible to receive the [Scottish Qualifications Certificate](#) (Standard Grade) of the [Scottish Qualifications Authority SQA](#). This profile-type certificate, intended to be attainable by all pupils, is gained by external examination together with an element of assessment carried out by the school itself and moderated by the [SQA](#). In Standard Grade courses, pupils are assessed against performance standards related to three levels of award: Foundation, General and Credit.

Criteria for achievement for each level have been set out which give a description of what candidates achieving the award should know and be able to do. A Grade 1 award at Credit Level indicates a high degree of mastery at that level, while Grade 2 indicates a satisfactory degree of mastery. Grades 3 and 4 operate similarly at General Level as do Grades 5 and 6 at Foundation Level. The award is based on the achievements of the individual measured against stated standards, rather than on how his or her achievements compare with those of other candidates.

Within a Level, e.g. Credit, on all courses pupils (or any adult candidates) have to provide evidence of achievement in all the basic aspects or 'elements' of the subject. For example in English, there are separate assessments for Reading, Writing and Talking, as well as an overall grade. A 'profile' of performance stating the grade obtained in each element appears on the certificate beside the overall award for the course. Elements are assessed in a variety of ways. In the majority of courses pupils have to demonstrate attainment in oral or practical skills and these skills are usually assessed internally by the class teacher on the basis of work done during the course.

Some elements, such as Writing in English, are assessed on the basis of a folio submitted to the [Scottish Qualifications Authority SQA](#) and a written examination. Others are assessed only through a written examination. In all cases, even where an element is assessed externally, teachers submit estimates to the [SQA](#) which may be used to improve the pupils' grades in cases of disagreement. If an assessment is not available for any element, for whatever reason, no overall grade can be given for the course. The only exception to this is when a candidate with a particular disability follows an amended course excluding that element.

The official certificate issued by the [SQA](#) setting out a pupil's achievement in Standard Grade courses also records any of the [National Qualifications](#) units which have been successfully completed. The school is responsible for carrying out the assessments of the work of pupils on these Short Courses, but the [SQA](#) moderates school assessments to make sure that national standards are maintained.

Upper Secondary Education

The [National Qualifications](#) are available at five levels: Access, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Higher, and Advanced Higher. The Intermediate 1 and 2 levels are equivalent to Standard Grade General and Credit levels respectively.

Most [National Certificate NC](#) modules bring together vocational and academic subjects to ensure that these are given equal status. A key aim of the system is to allow students of all levels of ability to progress to the highest qualification of which they are capable by working through the tiers, although there is no requirement to study at every level.

Each new National Qualification course is at one of five levels and consists of 160 hours of study, made up of three 40-hour units plus an additional 40 hours for consolidation and revision. School pupils (or students in further education) can achieve certification from [SQA](#) simply for passing separate units at a level. Assessment of this achievement is the responsibility of school (or [FE](#) college) staff, moderated by [SQA](#). In addition, pupils/students can be certificated for whole course achievement at a level, if they pass all the component units of a course (internal assessment) and also receive a grade, A, B or C, in the external examination for the course, which is set and marked by [SQA](#). The vast majority of school pupils are entered for [National Certificate](#) courses, and so undergo both internal and external summative assessment. However, in the case of the Access level of the system, pupils who achieve three associated units receive an ungraded "Cluster Award" on the basis of their teachers' assessments and do not take an external examination.

Employers and [higher education](#) now give more weight to core skills (key competencies). These are important in the workplace, in study and throughout all aspects of life. Every person receiving a Scottish Qualification Certificate is able to obtain credit for Core Skills achievement through a Core Skills profile. Pupils receive their first Core Skills profile when they are 16, after sitting Standard Grades at school, and are to add to and build on this as they continue through education and training.

Scottish Group Awards, which were proposed as part of the new national Qualifications framework, are currently under review. These awards, at the same five levels as other [National Qualifications](#) consist of combinations of courses and units which make up a coherent programme of study. It was envisaged that schools would offer more broadly based group awards (e.g. Science and Mathematics; Arts and Humanities; Technological Studies). The more specialised group awards (e.g. Care; Communication and Media; Engineering) were considered more likely to be offered in [further education](#) colleges and training centres.

Qualifications, curriculum and assessment authorities

England, Wales and Northern Ireland each have their own qualifications, curriculum and assessment authority, although these bodies work together particularly with regard to regulating external qualifications.

England - QCA

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is a [non-departmental public body NDPB](#) formed in October 1997 by the merger of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). It is sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and governed by a board whose members are appointed by the [Secretary of State](#) for Education and Skills. On a day-to-day basis, it is managed by an executive team. QCA's remit is to promote quality and coherence in education and training, from pre-school to higher vocational levels, and its prime duty is to advise the [Secretary of State](#) for Education and Skills on all matters affecting the school curriculum, pupil assessment and publicly funded qualifications offered in schools, colleges and workplaces. Its remit does not extend to higher education.

Wales - ACCAC

The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) was created by the amalgamation of the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACAC), which was established in April 1994, with the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) (Wales) Office in October 1997. The acronym ACCAC is derived from the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales' name in Welsh: Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Aseu Cymru.

ACCAC is an [Assembly-Sponsored Public Body ASPB](#) accountable to the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW). It also works closely with the qualifications, curriculum and assessment authorities in England and Northern Ireland, and performs, in relation to Wales, functions similar to those exercised by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in relation to England.

Northern Ireland - CCEA

The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) was established on 1 April 1994. It is a [non-departmental public body NDPB](#) reporting to the Department of Education (DE) in Northern Ireland .

Scotland - SQA

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is an executive non-departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by the Scottish Executive Education Department. It is the national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees.

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

See Executive Summary

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