Principles and procedures for the inclusion of Higher Education Studies within the VCE

1. Overview

The Higher Education Studies within the VCE Program, henceforth referred to as the Higher Education Studies (HES) Program, is designed to provide a broader range of studies in the Victorian Certificate of Education to challenge high achieving, interested and able students through the opportunity to include a first year higher education study in their VCE program. Higher Education Program studies do not duplicate the studies offered in the VCE; rather they extend the range and breadth of studies for these students. The Higher Education Studies Program is jointly run by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), participating higher education institutions and schools whose students participate in the program. The VCAA coordinates, monitors, and reviews implementation of the Higher Education Studies Program.

Higher Education studies are defined as those that are drawn from higher education institute undergraduate degrees that are accredited by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA). A Higher Education study must be comprised of two full semesters (or the equivalent), thereby providing equivalence in duration with a VCE Unit 3–4 sequence.

Involvement in the Higher Education Studies Program offers students access to a range of potential benefits, including:

* academic challenge and intellectual stimulation in a broader range of studies
* credit towards an undergraduate qualification at the higher education institute where the student completed the higher education study
* Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) increment
* experience of higher education institution life and access to those facilities.

The Higher Education Studies Program is structured so that participating higher education institutions submit for VCAA endorsement accredited higher education studies that provide the opportunity for students to receive advanced standing in an undergraduate degree. Schools coordinate the participation of their students directly with the relevant higher education institutions that are responsible for the conduct of the academic program and related assessment.

The higher education institutions, VCAA and the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC, [www.vtac.edu.au/](http://www.vtac.edu.au/)) coordinate enrolment and assessment data.

Students can undertake only *one* higher education study as part of their VCE program.

Higher Education Program studies are *not* accredited VCE studies but a higher education study may contribute towards satisfactory completion for the award of the VCE as a Unit 3–4 sequence without a study score.

Students who successfully complete a higher education study have the name of the study, the year of enrolment and the institution name reported on their VCE *Statement of Results*.

2. Principles and procedures of the Higher Education Studies Program

The underpinning principles for the Higher Education Studies Program are that it:

* provides a broader range of academic studies designed to challenge high-achieving, interested and able students at levels beyond accredited VCE studies
* is broadly accessible to students from across the state of Victoria
* operates as a genuine partnership between schools, the higher education institutions and the VCAA with concomitant responsibilities and obligations.

The following requirements encompass the intentions of these principles. A Higher Education Program study:

* is to be commensurate in workload to a VCE Unit 3 and 4 study
* is to constitute 20%–25% of a full time first year higher education institute undergraduate course of study that is drawn from a bachelor degree program
* enables students who are awarded a pass result to gain credit for that study at the first year and proceed to second year of the study at that higher education institute.

Student entry will be upon the recommendation of the student’s school principal with respect to the preparedness of the student to undertake a higher education study. Where there is a prerequisite VCE study, it is recommended that a student has obtained a study score of 40 or greater in that study.

Where a higher education study requires a pre or corequisite study, the student will comply with these requirements

3. Proposal of a study for inclusion in the Higher Education Studies Program

A higher education institution is able to propose a first year study for consideration by the VCAA for inclusion in the list of endorsed Higher Education Program studies. A proposed higher education study must meet the principles of the VCAA for the Higher Education Studies Program as outlined above. The VCAA provides a template for submission of higher education study proposals.

A higher education study will be considered for inclusion in the Higher Education Studies Program if it falls under one of the following categories.

Extension study:

The semester-length units of study drawn from the first year of a Higher Education undergraduate degree are a clear advance on, or an extension of, a linked or pre-requisite VCE study at Units 3–4 level.

Advanced standing:

The semester-length units of study drawn from the first year of a Higher Education undergraduate degree program provide students with greater breadth in their learning program and are not available in any current VCE studies. The study does not necessarily have a pre-requisite or corequisite structure in relation to current VCE studies.

On receipt of a proposal from a higher education institution, the VCAA will conduct a curriculum audit with respect to the linked VCE studies. This is to ensure that:

* There is no significant overlap or duplication
* Access and equity principles are met
* The higher education study provides a clear advance on, or an extension of, a VCE Unit 3   
  and 4 level of study.
* An Advanced Standing higher education study provides greater depth and breadth on an identified aligned learning area

The VCAA will consider any such proposal with respect to these principles and procedures and provide timely notice to the higher education institution as to whether the proposed study is endorsed for inclusion in the Higher Education Studies Program or not. Where a proposed study is not endorsed, the VCAA will provide timely feedback as to the reasons for non-endorsement.

The VCAA convenes a working party annually, chaired by an officer of the authority, for the purpose of considering proposed higher education studies and making recommendations to the Board of the VCAA with respect to their suitability for inclusion in the Higher Education Studies Program. The Board of the VCAA considers these proposals and recommendations for new higher education studies to be available commencing the following year.

4. Endorsement of a study for inclusion in the Higher Education Studies Program

A Higher Education Program study is endorsed for a three to five year period, consistent with VCE accreditation periods.

Where a previously endorsed higher education study undergoes change in terms of its purpose, nature, content, scope, pre or co-requisites, it is to be resubmitted to the VCAA for a curriculum audit.

The VCAA will publish annually in the *VCAA Bulletin* and on its website the list of endorsed studies for the Higher Education Studies Program and participating higher education institutions. ([www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/studies/studiesextension.html](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/studies/studiesextension.html))

5. ATAR increment

The Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) provides an ATAR increment for a higher education study as a fifth or sixth study, provided that the student has:

* satisfactorily completed four VCE Unit 3 and 4 sequences for which study scores have been calculated, including one from the English group
* satisfactorily completed at least one VCE Unit 3 and 4 sequence in the same year as the higher education study
* satisfactorily completed the full year of the higher education study
* been awarded a pass result by the higher education institution.

Where the higher education institution stipulates pre-requisites, the student must have obtained a score in the pre-requisite VCE study at the level prescribed by the higher education institution.

Where the student withdraws from or fails to satisfactorily complete a VCE prerequisite or corequisite study, which is a requirement of the higher education study, they will not be eligible for an extension study increment in their ATAR calculation regardless of their performance in the higher education study.

There is *no* penalty or disadvantage with respect to tertiary entrance selection for non-completion of a Higher Education Program study, or non-award of an increment for the Higher Education Program study.

6. Administration of the Higher Education Studies Program

The *VCE and VCAL Administrative* *Handbook* is published annually, and includes all aspects of the administration of the VCE, VCAL and VET. It sets out the rules, regulations and procedures governing the delivery of the VCE and includes a section with summary information about the Higher Education Program.

Details about the operation of the Higher Education Program at participating higher education institutions can be accessed from their websites. Participating schools provide information about the Higher Education Program and how their students can access the program, to their school community via their own processes and documentation.