

# OBE = COS?

## Open letter to the Western Australian Community

It is of concern to the Western Australian College of Teaching that there is confusion amongst parents and the community of the relationship between Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and the new Courses of Study (COS). In fact some individuals, groups and certain media outlets have tried to muddy the waters regarding the relationship between the two for their own purposes.

COS is a part of OBE in Western Australia.

OBE is simply about ensuring that students understand what they are expected to learn (the outcomes) and providing a variety of ways for students to achieve the objectives based on their prior knowledge, interests, ability and the way they learn best.

Outcomes based education is not new in Western Australia. Many teachers have used an outcomes focused approach (called behavioural objectives) for decades. The Australian Academy of Science, for example, introduced an outcomes focused Year 11 and 12 biology course in the early 1970s called The Web of Life. What is new is the repackaging of Year 11 and 12 courses to cater for all abilities and interests.

This involves new methods of teaching, assessment and reporting.

Some Year 11 and 12 teachers believe very strongly that Year 11 and 12 is about teaching a rigorous syllabus whereby students either make the grade or they do not. This approach is supported by a number of academics. Other teachers support the outcomes based education approach whereby courses are tailored to the needs of each student and not just for students seeking university entrance.

OBE was introduced into Western Australia in 1998 as the curriculum with the release of the *Curriculum Framework*. Given the complexity of the task of introducing such from kindergarten to Year 12 it was decided to introduce the curriculum changes in two steps. Firstly, introduction up to and including Year 10 and secondly at an appropriate time into Year 11 and 12. The new Courses of Study (COS) is this second phase. Seventeen courses out of a possible 50 have been developed.

The move to outcomes based education was central to the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* of 1999. All State, Territory and Commonwealth governments supported this declaration.

Most school teachers would now agree that OBE is working successfully in primary and Years 8-10. There are issues but 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater' is not the answer.

Currently four courses of study are operating in schools – three in Year 11 and one in Years 11 and 12. What the Government is seeking to do is introduce the seventeen developed COS into Year 11 for 2007 and then into Year 12 for 2008.

There are many lobby groups who have their own ideas on what should happen, usually this comes down to: abandon OBE (and accordingly COS), trial the COS in a certain number of schools, or delay for 1 or 2 years.

The Western Australian College of Teaching acknowledges that in the final analysis curriculum is the responsibility of government and employers. The College, however, is very much of the view that teachers should be listened to, actively involved in the early stages of development of programs, and supported with time and resources to achieve effective implementation.

The College has 38,000 members and has received considerable feedback from its membership. It is our role to represent the teaching profession and step into the debate where OBE and COS impacts on the status of the profession and the ability of our members to maintain educational standards.

It is clear that the Government intends to continue the implementation of OBE with the introduction of the new COS in all schools.

The College's information is that there are learning teams in schools and whole schools ready to embrace the changes. There are, however, learning teams and schools who are not ready for a variety of reasons. Many teachers state they need additional support (particularly time); are uneasy with the assessment methods and resulting workload; concerned about comparability between schools; and reporting to parents.

### THE COLLEGE POSITION

The College has recommended to the Minister for Education and Training that

- those schools and learning areas ready to implement the new COS in Year 11 do so in 2007 followed by Year 12 in 2008
- schools or learning areas not currently ready ensure that they are adequately prepared for introduction of the COS in 2008 or 2009.

This would provide the Curriculum Council and employers with time to ensure that the Courses of Study are working effectively and for teachers to be prepared to implement the final phase of Outcomes Based Education in WA.

The College Board believes that it is a workable solution and one that ensures ongoing effective secondary education in our State and one that will maintain parent and community confidence.



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