

Compressed curriculum delivery model

Final evaluation report

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

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Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, April 2022, Sydney, NSW

Please cite this publication as:

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2022), **Compressed curriculum delivery model – Final evaluation report**, NSW Department of Education, education.nsw.gov.au/cese

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Acknowledgements

CESE would like to thank those who have contributed to this evaluation. This includes the members of the Compressed Curriculum Delivery Model Evaluation Reference Group, and NESA and department staff who provided data and information. We would also like to thank the people who took the time to participate in interviews or complete surveys informing this evaluation.

We acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal people and pay our respect to Country.

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| Executive summary

Background to the compressed curriculum delivery model evaluation

In NSW, most senior secondary courses (Stage 6: Years 11 and 12) are completed over a 24-month period, with students typically taking 6 courses across 24 months of senior study. This is known as the traditional delivery model. Alternatively, senior secondary courses can be completed in a single 12-month period. Here, students focus on completing half the number of their Stage 6 courses in the first 12-month period of senior study and the remaining courses in the second 12-month period. This is referred to as the compressed curriculum delivery model ('the compressed curriculum model').

Use of the compressed curriculum model developed gradually and organically in government and non-government schools in NSW, particularly in rural and remote schools, as they sought to deliver Stage 6 courses in a way that suited their particular context. As such, there was little central coordination or oversight of the model and its use.

The objective of our evaluation was to provide evidence for government and non-government school principals and school communities to make informed decisions about whether the compressed curriculum model is a suitable way to deliver Stage 6 courses in their schools.

Evaluation aims

We aimed to investigate:

- which schools are delivering a compressed curriculum
- reasons schools chose to deliver a compressed curriculum
- how schools are implementing a compressed curriculum model
- the effect of a compressed curriculum model on student outcomes
- staff perceptions of a compressed curriculum model.

The findings from each of these areas of investigation are detailed in this report.

Method

Data

To identify which schools are delivering a compressed curriculum and how they are doing so, and to estimate the impact of a compressed curriculum model on student outcomes, we analysed Stage 6 results records provided by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for NSW Government schools from 2010 to 2019.

To identify why schools chose to deliver a compressed curriculum, how they implemented the model and how staff perceived the model, we analysed data sourced from surveys and semi-structured interviews. Across the 3 school sectors surveys were completed by principals and teachers, and interviews were conducted with school staff in a variety of roles. The survey and interview data has been used throughout the report to represent the perspectives of school staff.

The technical report contains more detail on the data sources.

Summary of findings

We now have a better understanding of how students and schools have used the compressed curriculum model over the last decade.

Implementing a compressed curriculum model

- A small number of NSW Government schools have used the compressed curriculum model to deliver a fully compressed curriculum to their students. These schools tended to be smaller and were more likely to be located in outer regional areas. These schools were also more likely to be central schools and tended to have lower levels of socio-educational advantage. However, there is also a substantial proportion of students who have used the compressed curriculum model for one course only, and that course has most often been a vocational education and training (VET) course.
- Schools primarily chose to operate a compressed curriculum model to broaden the Stage 6 curriculum available to students, particularly small and regional schools. They also chose the model to provide a learning format that was tailored to their school's needs, and in an effort to provide a more suitable model for their highly capable students or students who required additional support.
- Factors that aided the effective implementation of the compressed curriculum model for schools included extensive preparation work. This included researching the model, discussion with other schools, community consultation and securing staff commitment to the model. The greatest source of support for schools adopting the compressed curriculum model was other schools already offering the model.

Impact on student HSC outcomes

- It is unlikely that offering a fully compressed model has a substantial impact on HSC completion rates, ATAR eligibility rates or HSC results. However, due to the limitations of our data, we cannot rule out that it may have weak to strong positive or negative effects.

Perceptions of the compressed curriculum model

- School staff provided a wide range of positive and negative views about the perceived impacts of the compressed curriculum model on schools, students and teachers. Some common views were:
 - The model enabled schools to implement a greater range of courses and resulted in greater student engagement throughout the year. However, it was difficult to enrol new students and to manage complex timetabling. There was also less downtime throughout the year.
 - Staff observed students developing positive relationships with teachers and peers, as well as improvements in learning behaviours. However, the high workload and fast pace of learning, commonly perceived by staff as being characteristic of the compressed curriculum model, was a challenge for some students. Another shared perception was that there was limited time available for co-curricular activities, which staff felt significantly impacted students.¹

¹ While school staff perceived there to be a higher workload and faster pace of learning under the compressed curriculum model, there should be no difference in the study time commitment between the traditional and compressed curriculum models.

-
- Some teachers felt that they were able to teach in greater depth and with more continuity, which also helped with teaching practice and student engagement.
 - The increased frequency of assessment tasks and associated time constraints with marking was particularly challenging for teachers.

Key considerations

Schools may or may not have a positive experience when using the compressed curriculum model. However, the model provides the flexibility for schools to choose a learning structure that is most suitable for their students' needs. Results from the analysis of government school students suggest it is unlikely that using a fully compressed curriculum has a substantial impact on HSC outcomes. The compressed curriculum format may be an appropriate way to offer courses that schools would not otherwise be able to offer. Findings from our qualitative analysis suggest that the model may also improve levels of engagement with particular student groups. Schools reported that other schools that were already offering the model were their greatest source of support in implementing the model.

Introduction

NSW secondary schools that have implemented the compressed curriculum model have typically done so to provide a learning structure they perceive as being more beneficial to their school and student body and to expand the range of Stage 6 courses on offer for students. Schools felt that expanding the range of courses on offer helped them to maintain enrolments and staff positions. Schools have not necessarily adopted the model with the intention of improving student outcomes.

In NSW, students typically take Stage 6 courses across 24 months of senior study. Using the traditional delivery model means that the same courses that are offered in the first 12-month period must be offered again in the following 12-month period. However, under a compressed curriculum model, all courses that are begun in the first 12-month period are completed in that period. This allows for new courses to be offered in the following 12-month period. In schools with smaller student numbers, the ability to combine the Year 11 and Year 12 cohorts into 1 larger group also means that a greater number of courses can be offered to this combined group.

Currently, a small number of schools across the 3 school sectors (government, Catholic and independent) have adopted the compressed curriculum model.

The compressed curriculum model can be used in a variety of formats, including:

- for individual students, whole classes or whole-year cohorts
- for one, some or all of the Stage 6 courses on offer at the school.

In a typical compressed curriculum model, students engage in approximately 8 hours of classes per course per week.

Because use of the compressed curriculum model developed gradually and organically, with little central coordination or oversight outside of monitoring regulatory requirements, there has been a lack of information about exactly how and when schools started to use the model; if they stopped using the model; their reasons for starting and/or stopping; whether use of the model achieved the school's aims; and the effects of the model on other school and student outcomes.

Through this evaluation we sought to answer the following 5 questions:

1. How have schools implemented a compressed curriculum model?
2. Why do schools choose to implement a compressed curriculum model?
3. Why do some schools choose to discontinue a compressed curriculum model?
4. What is the impact of offering a fully compressed curriculum on HSC outcomes?
5. How have school staff perceived the compressed curriculum model?

| Limitations

Owing to cross-sector data-sharing restrictions, our analysis of the impact of the compressed curriculum model on student outcomes was limited to NSW Government schools. While our results suggest that it is unlikely that offering a fully compressed curriculum has a substantial effect on HSC outcomes in NSW Government schools, the limited statistical power of our analysis means that we cannot rule out the possibility of weak to strong positive or negative effects. It is also important to recognise that our results may not generalise to NSW Government students and schools that substantially differ from those included in our analysis.

How have schools implemented a compressed curriculum model?

To look at how NSW Government schools implemented the model, we used Stage 6 enrolment records provided by NESA to first identify course enrolments that used the compressed curriculum model. We then linked the coded course enrolment records to school data where we identified schools that compressed a large proportion of their course enrolments in a given year. Due to the flexibility with which students can complete the HSC, the results from the above process may have a small amount of error and should be considered as indicative rather than strictly definitive. We present detailed information about the above process in a supplementary technical report.

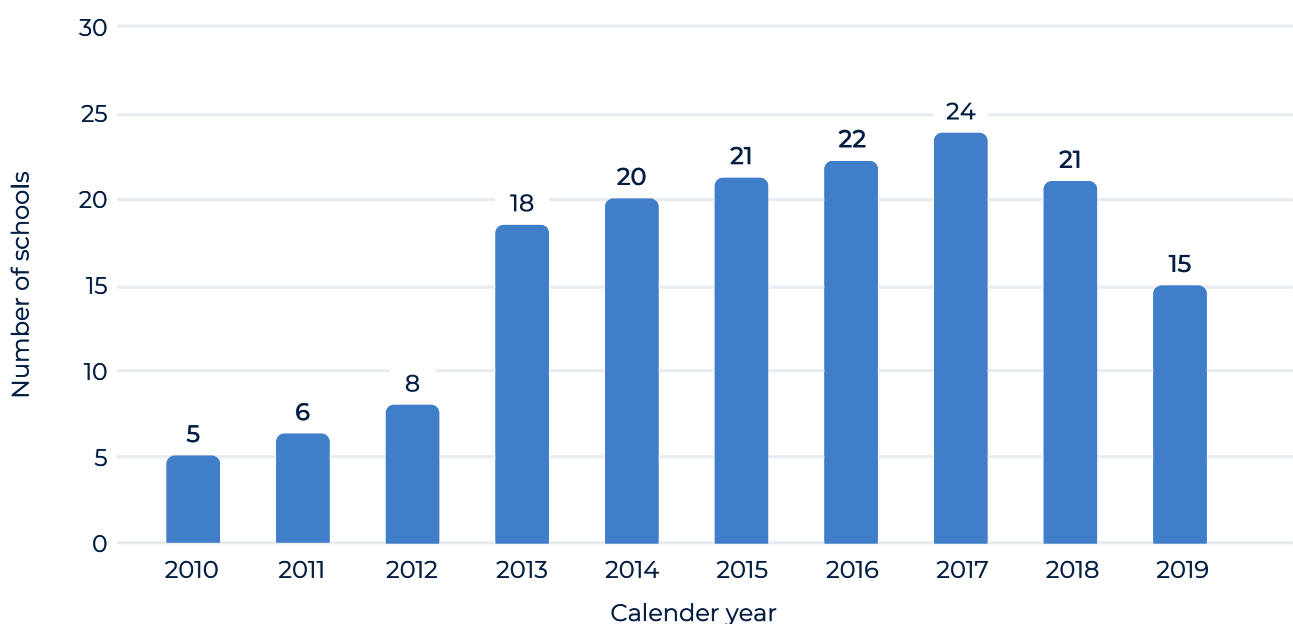
School staff from across the 3 school sectors also told us through surveys and interviews about their experiences in implementing a compressed curriculum model in their schools.

A very small proportion of NSW Government schools have offered a fully compressed curriculum over the last decade

Between 2010 and 2019, 37 NSW Government schools offering HSC courses had a fully compressed curriculum, compared to 443 offering only a traditional curriculum.² We present the number of schools using a fully compressed model in a given year between 2010 and 2019 in Figure 1. Use of the model appears to have increased up until 2017 and then declined. This may be due to the fact that some schools that adopted the compressed curriculum model later transitioned back to the traditional model.

Figure 1

Number of schools using a fully compressed model between 2010 and 2019



² Between 2010 and 2019, 22 schools offered a partially compressed curriculum at some point in time. We defined schools as 'partially compressing' if in any year they compressed over 10% but less than 80% of their courses.

Schools that offered a fully compressed curriculum had somewhat different characteristics to schools that only offered a traditional curriculum

Compared to NSW Government schools that only ever delivered a traditional model, fully compressing NSW Government schools were more likely to be central schools (Figure 2) and were more likely to be in outer regional NSW (Figure 3). Fully compressing schools also tended to be smaller than traditional only schools, having 327 fewer students on average (Figure 4). Fully compressing schools also tended to have lower levels of socio-educational advantage (Figure 5).

Figure 2

School type by delivery model

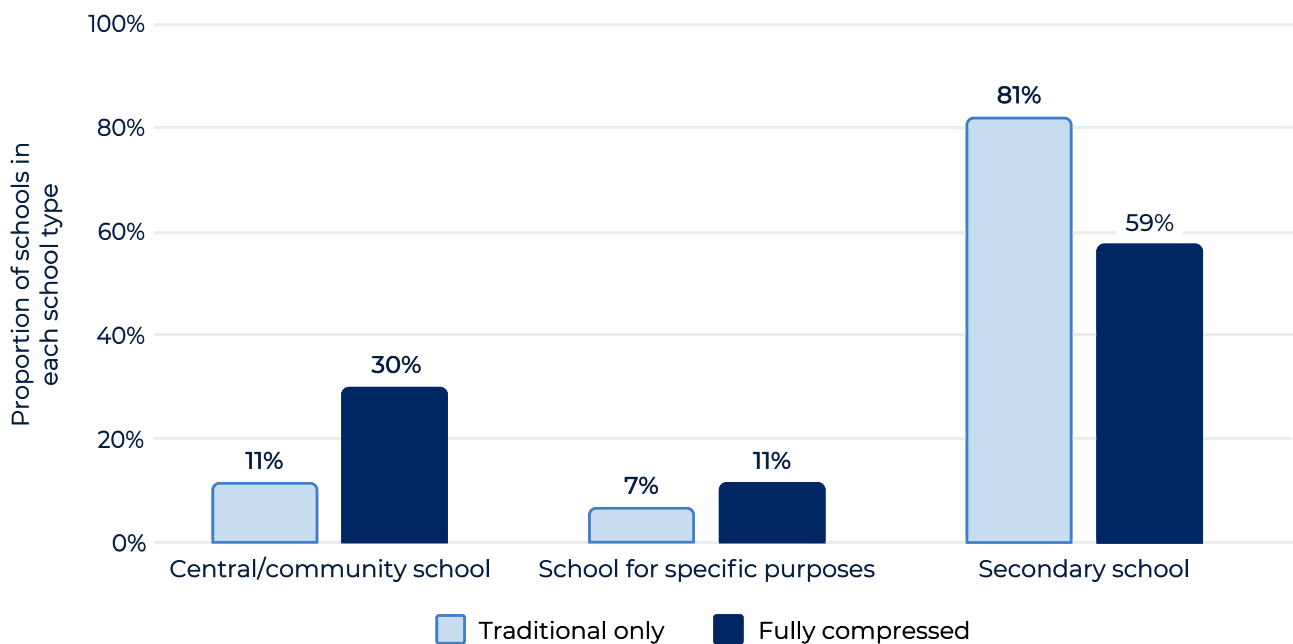


Figure 3

Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) remoteness categories by delivery model

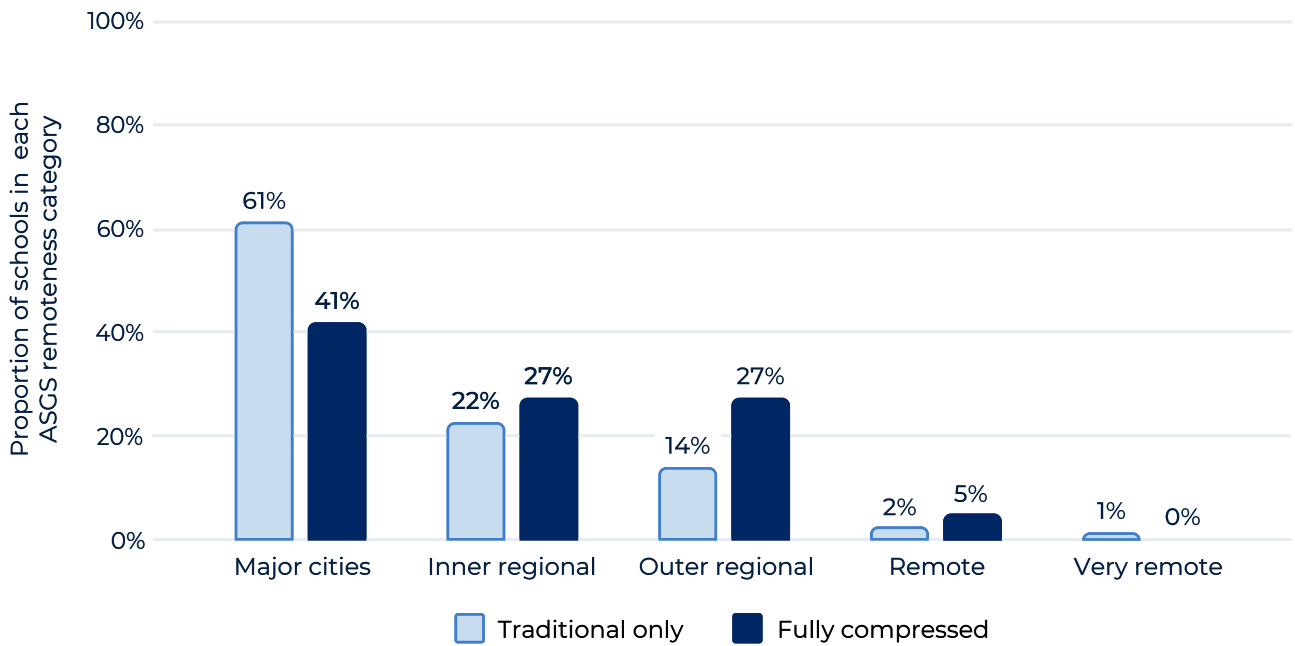


Figure 4

Full time equivalent (FTE) enrolments by delivery model

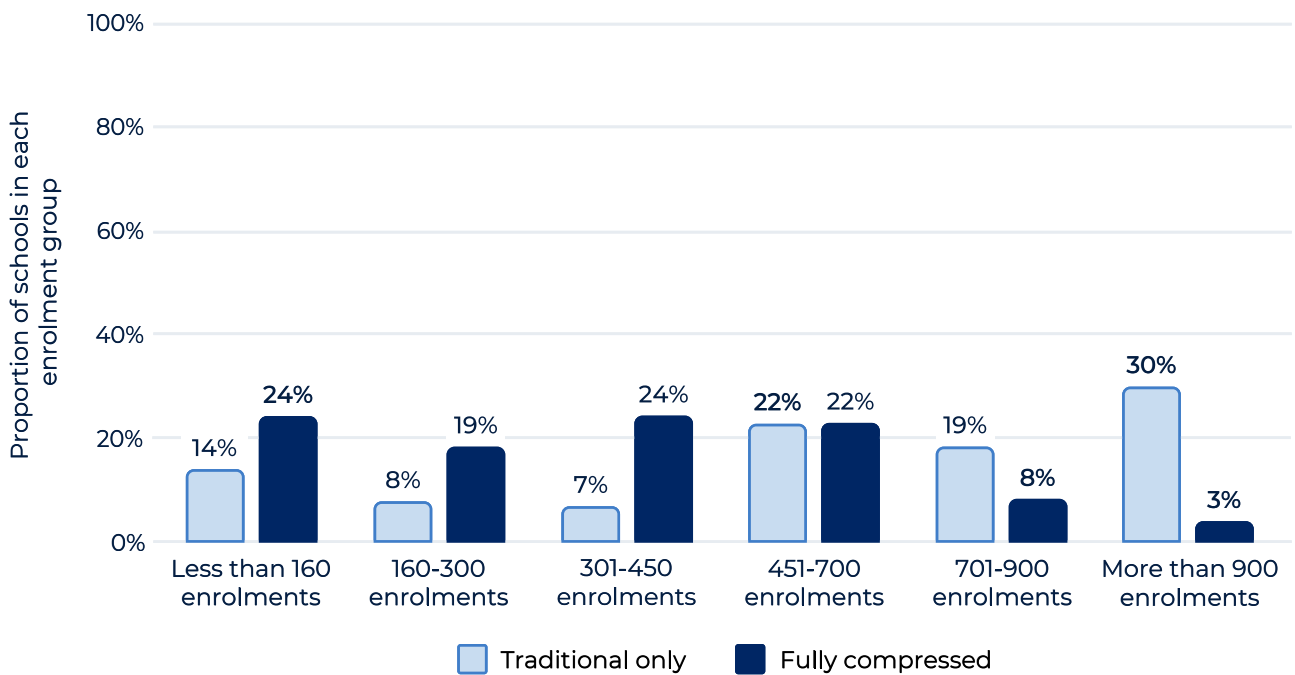
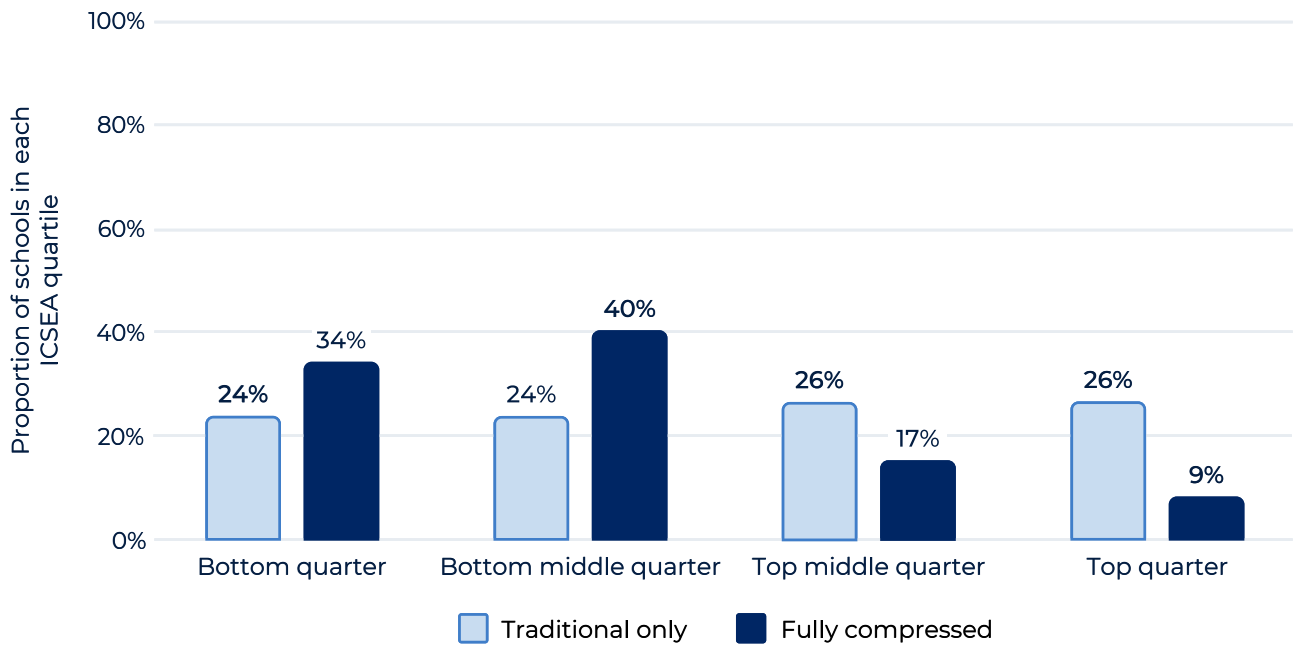


Figure 5

Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) quartiles by delivery model

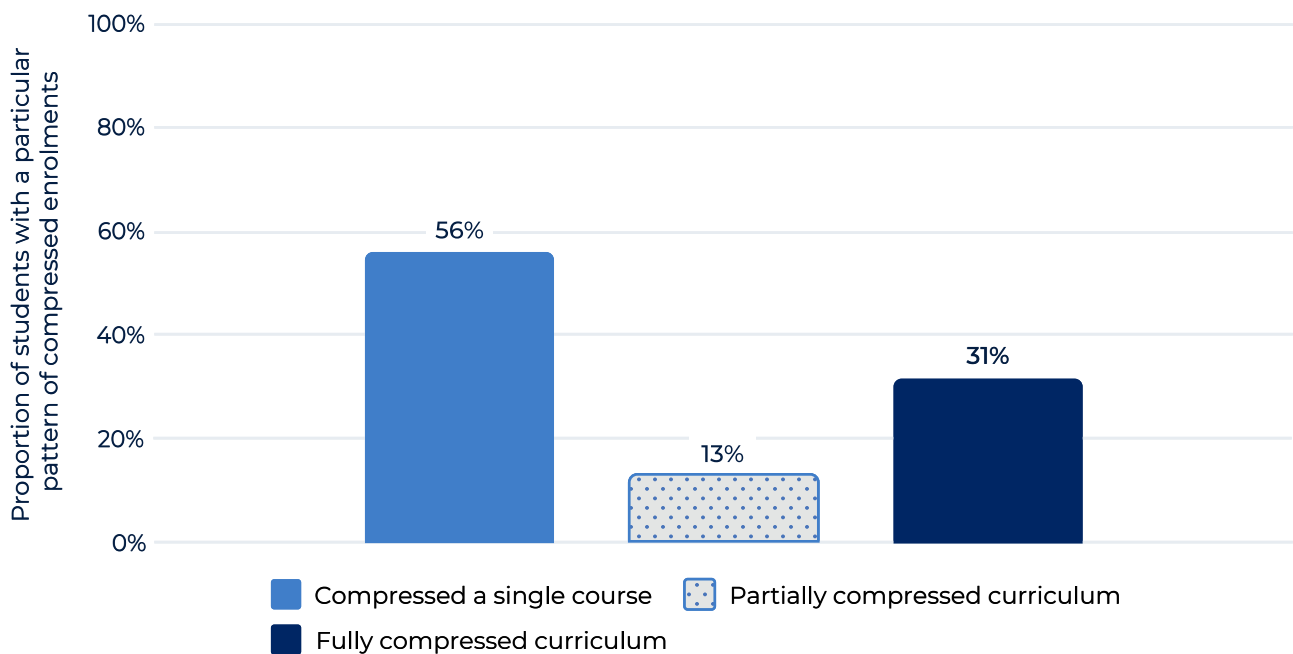


Between 2010 and 2019, 6% of NSW Government students started at least 1 course that used a compressed curriculum model

Of the 437,245 NSW Government school students who enrolled in a Stage 6 course between 2010 and 2019 (inclusive), 25,563 (5.8%) started at least 1 course using the compressed curriculum model. For each of these students, we used the number of compressed and traditional enrolments to classify their delivery model. Most students compressed only 1 course, while about one-third compressed all their courses (Figure 6). For those students who compressed only 1 course, the majority (74.5%) of the compressed courses were VET courses.

Figure 6

Proportion of students with a particular pattern of compressed enrolments

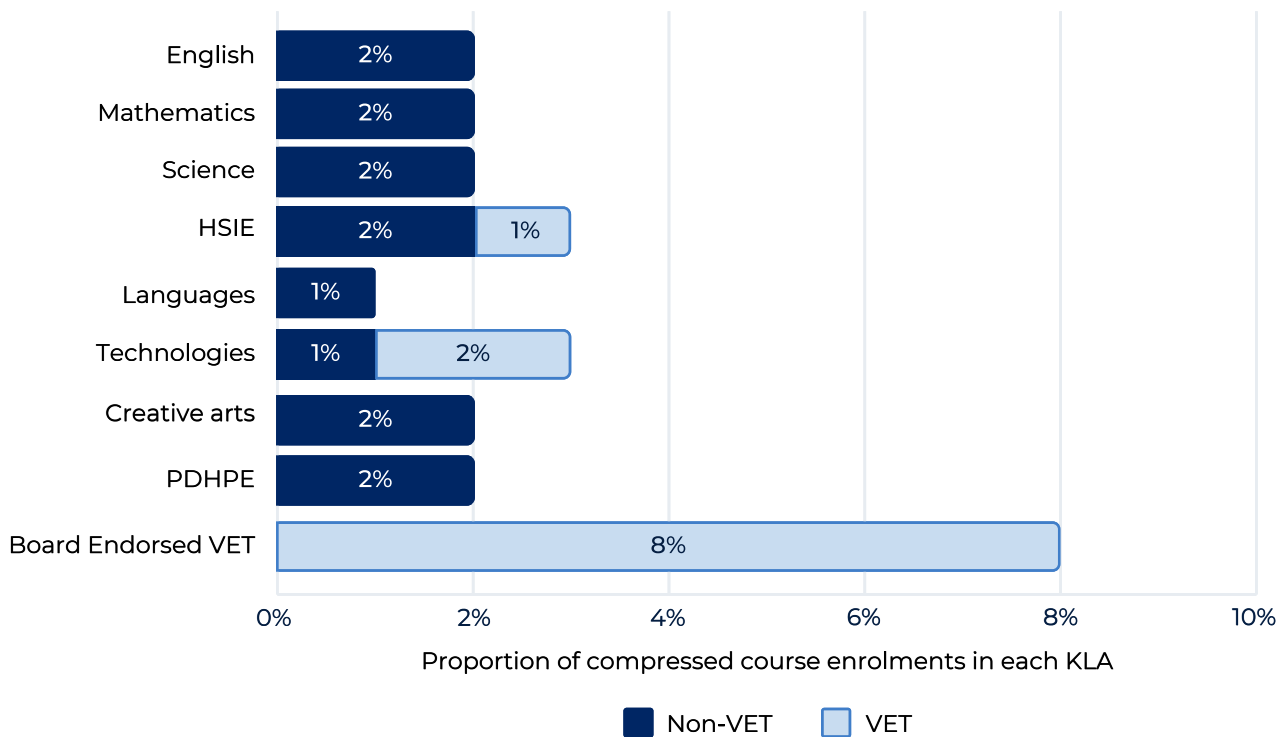


Board Endorsed VET courses were more likely to be compressed than other courses

We used key learning areas (KLAs) set by NESAs to explore whether certain types of courses were more likely to be compressed. We present the proportion of course enrolments in each KLA that were compressed in Figure 7, separated by their VET status.³ Except for Board Endorsed VET courses there do not appear to be large differences across KLAs in terms of their rates of compression.

Figure 7

Proportion of compressed course enrolments in each KLA by VET status



Board Endorsed VET courses were almost 4 times more likely to be compressed than other courses. It is possible that Board Endorsed VET courses are considered more suited to a compressed mode of study (focused study within a 12-month period), or that these courses may be more flexibly structured in the first place and so lend themselves to being compressed more frequently compared to other types of courses.⁴

³ Board Developed VET courses are assigned KLAs for national reporting purposes, and have external examinations available, while Board Endorsed VET courses do not.

⁴ We have not investigated this further as part of this evaluation.

Schools mostly received support from other schools to implement the compressed curriculum model

Early adopters of the compressed curriculum model found that, due to the organic development of the model within schools themselves, central offices and other schools were only able to offer limited support for implementation. As such, schools generally developed and administered processes and structures on their own. Later adopters had a greater degree of support as many were able to source information from other schools that had already introduced the compressed curriculum model. Table 1 shows the sources, types and examples of support schools received when implementing the model, as gathered from survey and interview data.

Table 1
Sources, types and examples of support schools received when implementing the model

Source of support	Types received	Examples
Other schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions and advice Networking Sharing resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researching other schools and asking questions Meeting with key school staff such as principals, directors of studies Networking events Panel discussions Sharing programs, scope and sequence, timetables, letters to parents, surveys
NESA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional learning General discussions Point of contact Administrative support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revising assessment policy Discussions regarding assessment and completion of courses Dedicated NESA staff member Changes to administrative requirements and facilitating online processes
Within the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional support Programming time Additional staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing emotional support to staff and offering to assist during difficult times Time to prepare programs, scope and sequence, lesson plans Additional deputy principal, full-time library tutor for senior students
Parents and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorsement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community support Parental support Student support
Sector support – Department of Education director, educational leadership (DEL) – Catholic Schools Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorsement Additional staff 	<p>“We explained to [the director] what we were doing and why we were doing it, and she agreed to go forward with it and signed off on it.”</p> <p>“The Catholic Schools Office had to, and continue to, provide significant above-establishment support ... because there was no way you could operate the traditional program and a compressed program just on the staffing per capita of students.”</p>

Schools desired more support for implementation

Schools identified the types and sources of support that would be helpful when introducing a compressed curriculum model:

- resources, such as scope and sequence samples
- guidelines for schools on how to implement the model, including regulations and requirements, and, as schools voiced, clear expectations from NESA about operating the model
- standardised guidelines for potential students that cover the range of issues and questions that schools are asked about a compressed curriculum model
- greater flexibility around timelines and reporting requirements that are adapted to the realities of operating a compressed curriculum model
- greater awareness of the compressed curriculum model as an option for other schools to consider.

Planning and research were critical prior to introducing a compressed curriculum model

Schools identified the following factors that assisted with the implementation of a compressed curriculum model:

- Most schools found preparatory work was one of the most important factors that enabled them to implement the compressed curriculum model effectively. This included researching the model, discussing the model with schools already delivering a compressed curriculum and school community consultation and communication. Community consultation included staff meetings, parent information sessions, letters to parents and presentations to students.
- Schools highlighted the importance of staff being committed to the compressed curriculum model. Some schools suggested that having additional release time and professional learning for their staff had enabled them to make the transition, although extra school funding had been needed to cover this resourcing.

Schools experienced some implementation challenges but were able to overcome these

Schools indicated that implementation challenges included:

- overcoming initial resistance to the model from staff and the community
- difficulties with timetabling and staffing arrangements
- having to fulfil administrative requirements that did not fit with the realities of the model.

School staff told us that they were generally able to overcome most of these initial establishment challenges.

Why did schools choose to implement a compressed curriculum model?

School staff told us through surveys and interviews about their reasons for introducing a compressed curriculum model in their schools. Some schools also reverted to the traditional model after trying a compressed curriculum model.

Most schools introduced a compressed curriculum model to broaden course availability

For schools that introduced a compressed curriculum model:

- Most school staff believed that a greater course selection would allow students to choose courses based on interest and post-school intentions, rather than limiting them to what was available at the time due to staffing or timetabling constraints. Some hoped this would incentivise students to remain at the school and possibly attract new students. Some small schools viewed a broader Stage 6 curriculum as a means to curb falling enrolments.

“As a small school in a semi-rural regional area, compressed delivery is a workable option for a low fee independent school to enable a broader variety of subject choices for students. This is possible because Year 11 and 12 students are joined together to make class sizes more viable and cost effective. A school like ours would not be able to offer a reasonable range of HSC studies unless this compressed delivery was possible.”

[Principal, independent school]

- Studying fewer courses was thought to reduce students' stress and motivate them to complete their studies, as students were only **focused on managing the work for 3, rather than 6, courses** at any given time.
- Many felt a compressed curriculum model **supported the needs of 2 key groups: highly capable students and students who required additional attention**. Compressing courses for highly capable and motivated students allowed them to 'accelerate'⁵ through their preliminary and HSC courses and take on more courses or extension courses in Year 12. Students requiring additional support were often described as disengaged, academically challenged and/or at risk of not completing Stage 6 due to various personal circumstances. A compressed curriculum model was thought to improve their level of engagement and attention, and offer an opportunity to gain qualifications, such as a VET credential, while still at school.

⁵ This is different to an 'acceleration model', where students undertake courses in advance of their cohort.

“Our students often have major difficulties in focusing on their work and the 8 hours per week of only 3 subjects means that they find the HSC much more accessible. Students with learning challenges only have to handle 3 sets of concepts, vocabulary, teacher expectations etcetera at the one time. Students only have to keep track of 3 sets of assessment schedules, which is still quite hard for young people living in challenging circumstances like homelessness, domestic violence, refugees, traumatic environments etcetera.”

[Principal, independent school]

- Teachers said that they **benefited from teaching a wider range of courses**, which contributed to professional development and career progression, particularly where a teacher was looking to become a head teacher. A compressed curriculum model was also thought to **improve collaboration between teachers**, particularly in instances where team teaching took place, and would reduce the stress and “issues” when a teacher wanted to take leave.

Why did some schools choose to discontinue a compressed curriculum model?

Some schools reverted to a traditional model as the experience differed from expectations

A small number of schools that had operated a compressed curriculum model had subsequently reverted to a traditional model of Stage 6 delivery. Key reasons included:

- **Schools did not experience the expected benefits and outcomes of introducing a compressed curriculum model.** The anticipated improvement in course offerings did not eventuate due to the complexities with timetabling and securing sufficient enrolment numbers for courses to be offered. Student retention or improvements in HSC results also did not eventuate.
- **Students did not have enough time to process and reflect on their learning before undertaking the HSC.** Schools that reverted to a traditional model felt that Year 11 students were not ready to undertake the HSC as they had not had enough time to build up the study skills and maturity to succeed. One principal commented that a compressed curriculum model:

“... defeated the true concept of a preliminary year, which prepares students for the HSC course.”

- Teachers perceived that a compressed curriculum model was **not suitable for certain courses**, particularly those that include a major work component, such as art or music. Students had less time to develop their submissions.

“Students have the identical number of in-class periods for teacher assistance but miss the December/January vacation, Easter vacation and the number of weekends to work on projects are halved. This loss of time to think about design, gain feedback and act on it impacts on the complexity and quality of work students are able to produce.”

[Staff survey]⁶

⁶ Note: This term covers both the survey of principals and survey of teachers.

- Teachers provided **negative feedback to us regarding workload, stress and difficulties with keeping students engaged** when delivering a compressed curriculum.
- The impact of **staff or student absences** was compounded due to the increased course content that was missed.
- The model made it difficult for students to access other learning systems such as Aurora College, distance education and Connected Classrooms, as well as engage with peers from other schools at networking events and HSC study days.

Further discussion on the perceived positive and negative impacts of the compressed curriculum model is included later in this report.

Most schools that chose to revert to a traditional curriculum delivery model experienced some challenges when doing so, primarily in terms of financial implications and the lack of guidance available. The main financial implication was the need for additional teachers during the transition. This could represent a significant cost for small schools. Schools also found the transition phase was complicated and that extensive community consultation was required. Schools that reverted to a traditional model did so with considerable research, consultation and forethought.

What is the impact of offering a fully compressed curriculum on HSC outcomes?

It is unlikely that offering a fully compressed curriculum had substantial impacts on HSC outcomes

We investigated the impact of offering a fully compressed curriculum on 4 HSC outcomes in NSW Government schools:

- HSC completion rates
- ATAR eligibility
- high performance rates⁷
- low performance rates.⁷

To estimate the impact of offering a fully compressed curriculum on these outcomes, we attempted to approximate what the outcomes for the students who were offered a fully compressed curriculum would have been had they instead been offered a traditional model.

To do this, we used the outcomes for students from schools that would go on to offer a fully compressed curriculum in later years as our starting point. We then made adjustments based on changes in outcomes for students from similar schools (over the same time periods) that only ever offered a traditional curriculum. Finally, we compared the expected outcomes to those that were actually achieved, with any differences thought to represent the effect of offering a fully compressed curriculum. We present the results of our analysis in Table 2 and more detailed information about our analysis in the technical report.

Table 2

Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals of the effect of a fully compressed curriculum on HSC outcomes

	Estimate of effect	Lower bound	Upper bound
HSC completion (%)	-2%	-6%	5%
ATAR (%)	1%	-3%	8%
High performance (%)	-1%	-9%	7%
Low performance (%)	0%	-7%	3%

⁷ Students are defined as high performing if they had 2 or more results in the top 2 HSC bands, while students are defined as low performing if they had 2 or more results in the bottom 2 HSC bands. It is plausible but unlikely that the same student could be defined as both high and low performing.

The results from our analysis suggest that offering a fully compressed curriculum may decrease the HSC completion rate by 2 percentage points, increase the ATAR eligibility rate by 1 percentage point, decrease the high performance rate by 1 percentage point and have no effect on the low performance rate. While these effects are all small, the associated 95% confidence intervals show that there is a moderate degree of uncertainty associated with our results. This means that while we cannot rule out the possibility that offering a fully compressed curriculum has small to large positive or negative effects on HSC outcomes, we can safely conclude that offering a fully compressed curriculum does not have substantial impacts on HSC outcomes.

How have school staff perceived the compressed curriculum model?

Staff had mixed perceptions of the compressed curriculum model

We spoke to school staff through surveys and interviews about the perceived impacts of a compressed curriculum model on students, teachers and schools. Staff expressed a wide range of positive and negative views about the model. Some felt that the model worked well and had positive impacts for all involved, some recognised it was only successful in certain circumstances, and others did not view any aspect of the model positively.

In some cases, respondents spoke about the same circumstances with opposing views. For example, some teachers found a compressed curriculum model to be beneficial for creative courses due to longer classroom periods allowing students to spend more time on major works. Other teachers found the model to be challenging for creative courses due to the reduced time outside of school hours for students to work on projects or skills. These findings demonstrate that it is hard to characterise different schools' experiences with the model as wholly positive or negative.

Table 3
Perceptions of the benefits of the model for schools

Benefits for schools	
<p>Greater course availability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • secures viability of small schools • offers greater course choice for students • allows students to stay with family and travel less. 	<p>This was the most commonly cited benefit of using a compressed curriculum model for schools.</p> <p>Viability of small schools</p> <p>Small schools indicated that providing a greater range of courses ensured that their school remained viable in terms of enrolments. The compressed curriculum model allows schools to combine Year 11 and 12 students into a single class, ensuring that there is a sufficient number of students for a teacher to be appointed to the course.</p> <p><i>“If we do traditional, we can't offer that many subjects for the kids. We've got a cut-off. We can't have a class less than 5 or 7 to run because it's financially unwise. We'll go bankrupt if we do that.”</i></p> <p>[Deputy principal]</p> <p>Greater course choice for students</p> <p>Schools indicated the benefits of a greater range of courses included greater flexibility for students to design their own pattern of study, being able to modify their choices after their first year, providing greater equity and opportunity for students in regional and remote areas and catering for students with different aspirations.</p> <p>Students can stay with family and travel less</p> <p>Rural and remote schools highlighted that a greater course choice allows students to stay at their current small school, without needing to travel to other schools farther away or go to boarding school.</p>

Benefits for schools	
Point-of-difference from other schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some schools felt that offering either a partially or fully compressed curriculum represented a point of difference for their school, allowing parents and students an alternative choice to the traditional model. • Providing a variety of courses that may not be offered in other schools or offering a different model of curriculum delivery was perceived as a positive feature that some students may find more appealing.
Improved school culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers perceived an improved school culture, particularly among Year 11 and 12 students, largely as a result of the senior students sharing classes and developing a “more collegial atmosphere”. • Teachers stated that Year 11 and 12 students can share their experiences which “helps Year 11 mature faster as they are (hopefully) exposed to the more mature learning approaches of the Year 12 students”. Some teachers felt that this positive atmosphere also flowed down to students in lower grades. • Another teacher drew a link between the reduced amount of movement around the school as a result of the longer classes and improved student behaviour across all grades.
Improved school image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While a direct link between the introduction of a compressed curriculum model and improved school image cannot be made, some schools believed the change in curriculum delivery played an important role in improved student behaviour. This in turn was considered a factor in improving the school's reputation. • One school stated that the school community's perception of a compressed curriculum model was “overwhelmingly positive once [the school community] understand why we're doing it, what we're doing, and the potential benefits for reducing stress and enabling greater focus”.
Students more engaged throughout the whole school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many teachers believed that the rollover of the school year halfway through Term 4 helped to keep students engaged in learning, as well as contributing to increased attendance rates. • The school community remains focused on learning rather than “winding down” at the end of the year. • Schools also felt that there was less non-attendance from students at the end of the year due to the change in courses, renewing their interest in learning something different.

| Table 4

Perceptions of the limitations of the model for schools

Limitations for schools	
Difficult to enrol new students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools indicated it was difficult to enrol new students at the beginning or partway through the year, particularly for students moving from a school with a traditional curriculum delivery model. • Students may have already covered course content in their previous school, or will have missed substantial course content in their new school. • It was also difficult for students to leave a compressed curriculum school to go to a traditional curriculum delivery school. • Moving between 2 compressed curriculum schools also had challenges as both schools may not offer the same courses at the same time.
Declining enrolments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some schools believed students moved to another high school not offering a compressed curriculum model because “their parents are of the opinion that a [traditional] curriculum is better suited” to their children. • However, analysis of enrolment data did not find a decline in enrolments in schools that offered a compressed curriculum model.
Complex timetabling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some teachers were limited to teaching only Stage 6, particularly if this was the only stage being delivered in the compressed format. Longer classroom periods and more frequent classes did not allow for enough timetabling flexibility to teach other stages. • Some schools also found it difficult to timetable part-time and job-sharing staff. • One school referred to the timetable disruptions their school experienced when the change of school year took place halfway through Term 4 for Year 10 students moving into Year 11. This primarily affected schools as timetables are not altered for Years 7, 8 and 9 so as to trigger the change to the Year 10 timetable as part of a roll-on process. • Another school highlighted that it is difficult to timetable events and other activities with schools that offer a traditional curriculum model.
Less opportunity for co-curricular activities and excursions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools found that timetabling challenges resulted in fewer opportunities to arrange excursions and other school activities. As one school said of their experience, excursions were “practically non-existent as teachers cannot afford to lose that much time with their seniors”. • Some schools also said there were fewer assemblies and other whole-of-school activities, which created little sense of community.
Course uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some small schools were still unable to provide course certainty due to minimum student enrolments. One school explained that courses with fewer than 10 students are not run, and students are told to wait until the following year. However, in the following year there may still be insufficient student numbers for the course to run, in which case the student does not get to do their chosen course at all.
Impact on teaching load and job security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers, particularly those in small schools, mentioned that the lack of course certainty impacted their job security and teaching loads from year to year. • Some teachers miss out on teaching a senior course, or even teaching altogether, if their course is not being offered in one year.

Limitations for schools	
No downtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some teachers perceived there to be a lack of downtime for themselves and students and felt this had a negative impact on the school. Teachers said it was difficult to find enthusiasm for starting a new school year in the middle of Term 4, when they perceived students as being “weary” or “thinking about Christmas”. Another teacher relayed their experience that there is no real winding down period at the end of the year which would normally allow time for reflection and evaluation. Instead, after a few weeks of preparation, they were required to “go full throttle into the new year”.

Table 5
Perceived impacts of the model on students

Summary of perceived impacts on students	
Developing positive relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many schools felt that students developed positive relationships with their peers, older or younger students, or teachers as a result of a compressed curriculum model. Teachers witnessed Year 12 students mentoring Year 11 students. This provided an opportunity for the senior students to be positive role models, and for Year 11 students to benefit from the experiences of their older classmates and learn “hopefully good habits”. Many teachers commented on the positive relationships that developed between themselves and their students due to the longer periods of time spent in the classroom together. On the other hand, some teachers spoke of the challenges faced when spending longer classroom periods together. In cases where students did not get along with each other, or there was a poor relationship between a student and a teacher, the longer, more frequent classes created a challenging dynamic.
Learning from previous years' experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools said that a compressed curriculum model provides Year 11 students with a better understanding of study and exam preparation techniques, allowing them to apply this learning in their second year. Students can also gauge their performance and identify areas for development, potentially improving their results. Teachers indicated that for some students, the model also allowed the opportunity to reassess their performance after the first year, and modify their course choices if they were no longer enjoying or interested in particular courses. However, other schools felt that Year 11 students did not have the maturity to study at the pace required, or at the level of complexity. This was particularly noticeable in combined Year 11 and 12 classes.

Summary of perceived impacts on students	
Improved learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many schools believed that a focus on 3 courses helped to improve students' overall learning. This included retaining concepts on a daily basis and not having to revisit them at the start of a new lesson, providing a greater level of immersion in the course content and a shorter period between learning concepts and sitting for an exam. However, this perception was not borne out in the quantitative outcome data analysis. Teachers of creative or practical courses often found the longer and more frequent class periods to be beneficial for student learning. <p>“There is continuity as the students are in class every day, twice some days. They make lots of progress on their major projects as they can remember what they were trying to achieve the previous day.”</p> <p>[Staff survey]</p>
Increased interest in and motivation to study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some teachers found that their students had greater interest in course content, and were more motivated to study. In particular, many teachers found that the usual disengagement that occurs towards the end of the school year was not evident when the curriculum was compressed. Another teacher said their “less able students did better in double time because the able students were really engaged and working hard”. They found that any students that were struggling made more effort to keep up with their high achieving peers.
Improved homework and study habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many schools attributed improvements in students' homework and study habits to having more focused time to study. They saw positive effects on students' time management skills as a result of planning and preparing for multiple assessment tasks. Teachers mentioned that the fast pace and frequent classes encouraged students to regularly complete homework and stay on top of their work.
Increased attendance and retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools commented on the noticeable increase in both daily attendance⁸ at school and overall retention, with more students either attending school more often or staying at school beyond the minimum leaving age than was the case previously. They felt this was due to fewer exams and less pressure, resulting in fewer absences. In some cases, students who had intended to leave school upon reaching the minimum leaving age ended up continuing on to complete the full 6 HSC courses.
Mixed impact on student wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many schools observed lower stress levels in students as a result of studying fewer courses and having fewer exams at the end of the year. They also felt that students were less stressed throughout the year as they only had to manage their time and focus across 3 courses rather than 6. However, other schools commented on what they perceived to be increased levels of pressure and stress, as the challenges of completing the HSC were spread out over 2 years, rather than just 1 year. Another school that had reverted to a traditional model indicated that the main reason was the increased stress and anxiety students had been experiencing. They had hoped that compressing the curriculum would alleviate some stress, but that did not occur.

⁸ Due to limitations with historical attendance data, we are unable to validate whether school attendance increased as a result of offering a compressed curriculum model.

Summary of perceived impacts on students	
Missed courses due to other activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the main disadvantages of the compressed curriculum model, as expressed by schools, was the decreased amount of time available for students to be involved in other activities such as part-time work, school excursions, TAFE, sport and work experience. Longer classroom periods and more frequently timetabled courses meant that any time away from regular classes significantly impacted how much content students missed. This was also relevant when students were ill – for either short or long periods of time. Schools mentioned how hard it was for some students to catch up on missed work, and in more extreme cases, students may need to repeat a course. Some teachers even indicated that they are reluctant to plan any activities that take their students away from the classroom due to the impact it has on both their course and other courses.
Hard to transfer to other schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some schools pointed out that the structure of a compressed curriculum model made it more difficult for students to transfer either into or out of the school, particularly if they were moving from or to another school that did not compress its curriculum. Transferring to another school was considered difficult at the start of a new year; however, a mid-year transfer was considered even more difficult, and in some cases, “near-impossible”.
Implications for time management, as perceived by school staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> high workload and fast pace lack of time to deeply understand and reflect on course content hard for creative and practical courses. 	<p>High workload and fast pace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many schools felt that the compressed curriculum model increased the workload for students and had to be delivered at an unreasonable pace. One teacher stated that they found the pace to be frantic and that they “start at a gallop and never slow down, just to complete the syllabus-mandated course content”. Another teacher believed that some of their students who missed out on course content ended up dropping out of the course altogether, as the workload required to catch up was too significant. <p>Lack of time to deeply understand and reflect on course content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many teachers felt students had insufficient time to deeply engage with what they had learned, both in class and outside of school. The lack of time between lessons impacted on the opportunity for students to use feedback from assessments to incorporate into the next piece of work. The quick turnaround times placed pressure on teachers to ensure that students were given sufficient time to understand and utilise the feedback. <p>Implications for creative and practical courses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some teachers of creative or practical courses felt students had less time to work on major projects or to develop skills, particularly outside of school hours. One teacher believed that the model adversely affects students that have limited prior knowledge or skills before commencing the compressed course: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">“Music students now need to have skills and a strong performance base before entering the compressed course, whereas the 2-year program allows for incremental development and a chance for a beginner to achieve good results by the end of their HSC.”</p> <p>[Staff survey]</p>

Summary of perceived impacts on students

Boredom with 3 courses

- Some teachers found that students became bored more quickly or were less engaged because of the lack of course variety.
- With the focus on only 3 courses, students found their overall course content to be less diverse and returning to the same course daily sometimes became boring. This was particularly the case for students who were not performing well in the course or had lost interest.
- Teachers also mentioned that students become bored in longer classes and that their attention decreased over time.

Perceived impacts on teachers

We asked teachers through a survey and interviews what they perceived to be the benefits of a compressed curriculum model for them. Responses were limited and Table 6 represents the few positive and negative impacts that were mentioned.

Table 6
Perceived impacts of the model on teachers

Summary of perceived impacts on teachers	
Teaching in greater depth and with more continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some teachers felt that longer lessons allowed them to teach the course content in greater depth as it allowed them to cover more complex issues without interruption. “It is a more immersive teaching experience. While it can be challenging to maintain the engagement of students for an extended period of time, it is also beneficial in that we don't have to finish a lesson, just when we were getting to the heart of an issue.” [Staff survey] Other teachers referred to greater continuity, which was due to the frequent classes. Students could recall lesson content more easily and less time was spent covering previous material at the start of each new class.
Improved teaching practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some teachers found that delivering a compressed curriculum helped to improve their overall teaching practice as it placed different demands on their skills. Some felt this was a result of the faster pace, while others attributed it to the greater amount of time available to focus on fewer classes. Comments included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I have found that my teaching has become more structured and I have improved the clarity of my instruction due to the fast-paced nature of compressed curriculum.” [Staff survey] “Places Stage 6 at the forefront of your teaching which means you can invest more time in reflecting upon your practice and developing effective teaching and learning activities for the students.” [Staff survey] Some teachers felt that teaching a reduced number of classes gave them the opportunity to improve the quality of their planning and programming, and to focus more closely on the quality of lessons. Other teachers believed that delivering a compressed curriculum could benefit beginning teachers as it allows them to focus on teaching one course and one group of students, allowing the teacher to get to know the strengths and weaknesses of students quickly.
Closer monitoring of and engagement with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers felt they had a better understanding of their students' learning needs and were able to tailor their teaching practice accordingly. One teacher indicated that the model allows for closer engagement with high needs students and enables teachers to address any learning difficulties in ways that are more suitable.
Opportunity for team teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several respondents also commented on the opportunity to perform team teaching, which allows them to share the workload and knowledge, develop team teaching skills and have someone to rely on during periods of absence.

Summary of perceived impacts on teachers	
<p>Implications resulting from a perceived lack of time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • frequency of assessments and time constraints on marking • less time to develop students and differentiate • high workload • increased stress and exhaustion • low staff morale. 	<p>Frequency of assessments and time constraints on marking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the most common negative impacts experienced by teachers was the increased frequency of assessment tasks and the time constraints associated with marking. Teachers felt there was insufficient time to provide feedback to students for them to incorporate into their next assessment. One teacher felt they were continually assessing the students and that there was limited time for teaching unimpeded by assessments. <p>Less time to develop students and differentiate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some teachers felt that there was less time to work closely with the students and to respond to their individual needs. They referred to the impact on developing appropriate teaching materials and differentiating for all student abilities within the class. <p>“Because so much of our work is in response to the needs of the students, the need to prepare specific work for the group, and individual, from day to day is burdensome. There is essentially no 'downtime' for teachers as there is a necessity to mould and shape programmed material, handouts, experiences etcetera from day to day in response to student needs.”</p> <p>[Staff survey]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One teacher felt that they did not have any time to provide additional lessons for students to practise skills or to explore alternative learning experiences. <p>High workload</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many teachers felt their workload had increased compared to the traditional model of curriculum delivery. Although some acknowledged that the need to be extremely organised was beneficial, many felt that the workload was unreasonable and unsustainable. Some teachers also referenced the extra work involved in helping students to catch up on missed work due to illness, holidays or other activities. <p>Increased stress and exhaustion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers referred to the increase in stress and exhaustion that they experienced. Reasons for the reduced emotional wellbeing included the fast pace of delivery, lack of downtime and high workload. <p>Low staff morale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many teachers felt that the model also negatively impacted staff morale, particularly their sense of satisfaction from teaching, and overall enjoyment. Some teachers commented that it took “the fun out of teaching and learning” due to constant time pressures.
<p>Greater impact of absences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers felt the impact of time away from class, as the amount of work required to catch up on content missed from even one lesson was substantial. • Some teachers specifically mentioned that they were less likely to take up professional learning opportunities or get involved in other school activities. • Other teachers indicated they still came into work when they were sick to ensure that students were not disadvantaged.

Summary of perceived impacts on teachers	
Challenging student-teacher relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some teachers felt it could be difficult to spend so much time with a challenging class or students, particularly if there were personality clashes. One teacher admitted that: "Seeing classes daily can be tiring. Sometimes teachers and students need a break from each other."
Difficulties with team teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some teachers working in a team teaching arrangement experienced additional challenges, particularly in relation to preparation and teaching styles. One teacher commented: <p>"It is very time consuming – since we are sharing classes, most of the time you can't prepare lessons in advance. You have to wait for the other teacher to finish the lesson and [then have a look at] what they covered. [There are] two teachers and two different teaching styles for the same class. Most of the time I may be covering information students did not understand when taught by the other teacher."</p> <p>[Staff survey]</p>
Teaching out of area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although not frequently mentioned, some teachers said that they are required to teach outside of their course area in order to maintain a full teaching load. This was particularly the case in smaller schools where both Year 11 and 12 students were in a combined class.

| Key considerations

Staff expressed a wide range of positive and negative views about the compressed curriculum model, with no clear consensus either way. Some staff talked about strongly positive or negative experiences, while others recognised that a compressed curriculum model of delivery was only suitable in certain circumstances.

While there is no strong evidence that student results in government schools have improved through a compressed curriculum model, few schools across the 3 sectors mentioned that this was a primary aim for them. Rather, schools were more focused on providing an appropriate learning structure for their students. Given that the model provides schools with the option to partially or fully compress their curriculum, there is inherent flexibility, allowing schools to achieve this aim.

The compressed curriculum format may be an appropriate way to offer courses that schools would not otherwise be able to offer. This may be particularly useful in small and outer regional schools as a way to curb falling enrolments.

Our qualitative findings also suggest that the compressed curriculum model may improve levels of engagement with particular student groups due to schools offering a greater range of courses, and because teachers may have been able to teach in greater depth and with more continuity.

Schools also reported that, due to the organic nature of the compressed curriculum model, other schools offering the model were their greatest source of support in implementing the model. Central offices should consider whether they are comfortable with this approach or would rather develop and offer their own support to schools considering using the model.

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