

Compressed curriculum delivery model

A short guide

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



What is a compressed curriculum delivery model?

In NSW, most Stage 6 courses 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, some Stage 6 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').

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.



What did we find out about the compressed curriculum model?

The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) conducted an evaluation of the compressed curriculum model to help schools make informed decisions about whether the model is suitable for them.

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 final report can be found here: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/cese/publications/cese-evaluations/compressed-curriculum>.

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

- 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 and research, discussion with other schools, community consultation and securing staff commitment to the model. Schools' greatest source of support was other schools that had experience with offering the compressed curriculum 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 extra-curricular activities, which staff felt significantly impacted students.
 - A limited number of responses suggested that teachers 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.

Considerations for implementing a compressed curriculum model in your school

Schools considering introducing a compressed curriculum model should incorporate the following findings into their decision-making:

- The model is likely to increase the range of courses available to students, particularly in small and outer regional schools.
- Offering compressed VET courses may be appropriate for students who have lower levels of school engagement or who would otherwise leave school early.
- Although the availability of central office support has increased over time, it is likely that schools will receive the most benefit from consulting with other compressed curriculum schools during the research and preparation phase.
- Schools are mostly able to overcome initial set-up challenges, although there will always be complications associated with the model. Primarily, these are the difficulty with enrolling new students and complex timetabling arrangements.
- It is unlikely that offering a fully compressed curriculum has substantial impacts on HSC outcomes.
- There may be fewer opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular activities, excursions and interactions with non-compressed neighbouring schools.
- Students may develop more positive relationships with their teachers and peers, particularly those in a different year group, as they learn from their experiences. They may also develop improved learning behaviours, increase attendance and remain in school for longer.
- Some students may find the fast work pace and perceived higher workload to be a challenge.
- Many schools observed lower stress levels in students as a result of studying fewer courses and having fewer end-of-year exams. Other schools perceived increased levels of pressure and stress in students, as the challenges of completing the HSC were spread out over 2 years, rather than just 1 year.
- Assessment tasks are set more frequently, requiring teachers to meet quick turn-around times on marking. This may increase the pressure on those teachers.
- Schools that revert to a traditional curriculum delivery model may experience challenges when doing so, primarily in terms of financial implications (mainly, the need for additional teachers during the transition) and the lack of available guidance.

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