

**PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE DEST HIGHER
EDUCATION STUDENT COLLECTION TO
IMPROVE DATA ON CREDIT TRANSFER AND
ARTICULATION**

CONSULTATION PAPER

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Prepared for the Joint Committee on Higher Education
by the Credit Transfer and Articulation Data Experts Working Group

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Summary

1. In May 2005 the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) – comprising State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers with portfolio responsibilities in these areas – endorsed a series of initiatives to strengthen credit transfer and articulation from vocational and technical education (VTE)¹ to higher education.

2. As part of this, MCEETYA agreed that a Working Group of experts be established to improve data collection on credit transfer and articulation. This decision recognised that existing data is limited in scope and depth and, without better data, it is very difficult to measure and assess accurately existing outcomes.

3. The Data Experts Working Group was chaired by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and included three representatives from the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) and others from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB) Secretariat and the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

4. The Working Group took account of issues related to the collection of additional data from the sector at this time and the administrative implications for universities. In summary it proposes that, commencing in January 2007:

- the **scope** of students on whom credit transfer data is collected through the DEST collection be expanded to include VTE rather than just TAFE and those with incomplete as well as complete VTE qualifications;
- the **data** collected be expanded through two additional items – the course code of the VTE qualification and the VTE provider code from which DEST would derive the field of education, the level of the complete or incomplete VTE qualification and the type of VTE provider; and
- the **timing** of collection continue to include both commencing and completing students, but data collected on the latter group will be expanded to measure exemption utilised rather than granted and to identify its source.

5. The proposed changes would benefit institutions by making possible a better understanding of the patterns of transfer and articulation between relevant disciplines. They would also improve the scope to track student progress within institutions from different providers or fields of VTE study and the impact of credit transfer policies in practice over the full course of a student's study. The changes also address major gaps and limits in existing DEST statistical collections and will improve public understanding as well as the reliability of data on credit transfer and articulation.

6. The purpose of this paper is to set the basis for consultations with stakeholders on the changes. The paper sets out the background to the issues, the available data and its limitations and details the proposed changes and their rationale. It also sets out the proposed timeframe for implementing the changes and provides instructions on how to comment on the proposals. Comments are due by **cob 10 March 2006**. Subject to the outcomes of consultation, the changes would be confirmed through a Ministerial Determination by the Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training by end March 2006, in order to allow institutions sufficient time to implement the changes for the beginning of 2007.

¹ Also known as 'vocational education and training' or VET.

Background

7. Credit transfer and articulation between higher education (HE) and VTE has been the subject of policy and research interest for over 20 years. A number of major studies have identified barriers as well as examples of good practice in this area and stakeholders and governments have taken steps to improve performance, notably through the AVCC's *Policy Guidelines on Cross-Sector Qualification Linkages* (2001) and the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board's (AQFAB) *National Guidelines on Cross-Sector Qualification Linkages* (2004).

8. Nevertheless, the Australian Government and State and Territory Ministers with responsibility for VTE and higher education have remained concerned that credit transfer and articulation, especially from VTE to higher education, is overly difficult for many students. At its May 2005 meeting the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) agreed to a series of initiatives to strengthen credit transfer and articulation. In particular the Council:

- adopted a set of Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation;
- noted Draft Principles for Good Practice Information Provision and agreed that these should be a basis for further consultation with stakeholders;
- agreed to fund a national study of current practices in credit transfer and articulation from VTE to HE; and
- asked the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the new VTE quality agency to take a more active role in auditing credit transfer and articulation practice.

9. In addition, MCEETYA asked the Joint Committee on Higher Education (JCHE) – comprising Commonwealth, State and Territory senior officials with responsibility for higher education – in collaboration with the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB), to establish a Working Group to improve data collection on credit transfer and articulation. The Working Group's terms of reference set out the issues to be addressed by it, namely to:

- identify and describe the data items, definitions and codes in existing DEST and National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) data collections which can be used to measure credit transfer and articulation from VTE to higher education;
- assess the extent to which these reliably and accurately measure credit transfer and articulation and identify any limitations and barriers which need to be addressed;
- propose options to overcome deficiencies; and
- suggest additional data measures which would be feasible without imposing additional cost/workload requirements on data collection agencies and providers.

10. The Working Group was chaired by DEST and comprised three representatives from the AVCC and others from the NCVER, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the AQFAB Secretariat and the Victorian Department of Education and Training. The full membership of the Working Group is at [Attachment A](#).

Available data and its limitations

11. Currently, data on credit transfer is collected through the DEST Higher Education student collection largely at the time students enrol and is reported to DEST by individual higher education institutions. From 2005 four data items have been collected:

- the student's highest educational attainment and year of attainment prior to the first enrolment in the course of study, including whether a TAFE award course (Element no. 493);
- the HE Provider or type of HE Provider where the studies for which the exemption or status was granted were undertaken including whether at TAFE in Australia (Element no. 368); and
- the percentage of the course's requirements for which exemption² was granted over all its stages in the first year of enrolment in the course (Element no. 367) or by the time the requirements of the course were completed (Element no. 385).

12. The Working Group identified a series of issues with the DEST student collection:

- the variables refer to 'TAFE' courses, rather than VTE courses and it is unclear to what extent the data captures VTE in the broader sense and whether this is interpreted consistently across institutions;
- the measure of educational attainment does not include incomplete prior VTE/TAFE studies so it is difficult to gauge the full population which may obtain some credit transfer;
- data is not collected on aspects such as whether VTE studies are related to the HE field of study or the level of the VTE qualification obtained;
- the amount of exemption awarded at course commencement may not be able to be utilised in full and it is not possible to compare progression and attrition rates for those granted exemption with other students. While data is collected on exemptions granted over the course of degrees at completion, this does not indicate the amount that was utilised or the source of the exemption;
- while some data is collected on the type of provider with whom prior studies were undertaken, this is limited to Higher Education Providers and does not include those who provide VTE only, either as private providers or as part of TAFE institutes;
- students enrolled in dual sector institutions articulating from nested courses may be recorded as "continuing" rather than commencing and therefore fall outside the data collection; and
- the processes by which universities collect this data are not clear or necessarily consistent and decentralised decision making on credit transfer within universities may not lead to all decisions being reflected in the data.

Proposed changes

13. In summary, the Working Group's proposal is as follows:

² An exemption is granted by a Higher Education Provider when a student is not required to undertake a part of a unit of study, a unit or units of study because of prior studies or work experience. Such exemption is referred to by various names, such as "credit", "status" or "advanced standing".

- the **scope** of students on whom credit transfer data is collected through the DEST collection would be expanded to include VTE rather than just TAFE and those with incomplete as well as complete VTE qualifications;
- the **data** collected would be expanded through two additional items – the course code of the VTE qualification and the VTE provider code from which DEST would derive the field of education, the level of the complete or incomplete VTE qualification and the type of VTE provider; and
- the **timing** of collection would continue to include both commencing and completing students, but data collected on the latter group will be expanded to measure exemption utilised rather than granted and to identify its source.

14. The changes are summarised in Figure 1 below. Technical specifications for revised and new data items are at Attachments B and C respectively with changes to existing items highlighted in yellow. Attachment D contains the technical specifications for relevant unchanged items.

Scope

15. The scope of the student population on which credit transfer data is collected would be expanded in two ways by changes to elements no. 493 (highest educational participation prior to commencement) and no. 368 (exemption/status Higher Education Provider code) in the Student Enrolment collection.

16. The first would be to change the terminology from TAFE to VTE to include students whose qualifications were obtained in the private non-TAFE VTE sector. Depending on a university's current practice, this may involve collection of data on additional individuals. Some universities have indicated that they already include all VTE and not just TAFE awards under this item, while others follow the existing definition and exclude them from reporting (but still consider and award credit through their institution's processes).

17. The second change would be to include students with incomplete VTE qualifications as well as those with completed ones in element no. 493. The interest here is in to what extent incomplete VTE qualifications also provide a pathway to university and students are successful in obtaining credit for relevant prior work. This would involve an additional code in Element no. 493 for incomplete VTE qualifications as well as a change in the name of the data item from attainment to participation to reflect this broadening.

New data items

18. As noted above, a major limitation of the existing DEST Higher Education student data is that nothing is collected on whether VTE studies are related to the HE field of study or on the level of the VTE qualification obtained. Studies have shown that both of these have a significant bearing on the chances that a student will receive credit and the amount of credit obtained.³

19. This gap will be addressed by a new data item "VTE course code". In the VTE system all AQF qualifications are listed on the National Training Information Service database at www.ntis.gov.au as either 'qualification' for qualifications in Training Packages or 'course' for state-accredited qualifications. As part of this listing they are assigned an alpha-numeric code that uniquely identifies the level and field of each AQF qualification, with a different code format for 'qualification' and 'course'.

³ R Harris, R Sumner & L Rainey, *Student traffic: Two-way movement between vocational education and training and higher education*, NCVET, 2005.

Figure 1: Summary of current data collected on credit transfer and proposed changes

CURRENT

Commencement

Highest educational attainment prior to commencement (Element 493)

Higher Education Provider or type of Higher Education Provider where the studies for which the exemption or status was granted were undertaken (Element 368)

Prior studies exemption granted by reference date of commencing year (Element 367)

Completion

Total exemption granted over all stages of the course as a percentage of the course's requirements (Element 385)

PROPOSED

Commencement

Highest educational participation prior to commencement (Element 493) – broaden to VTE rather than TAFE and incomplete VTE courses

Higher Education Provider or type of Higher Education Provider or Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) provider where the studies for which the exemption or status was granted were undertaken (Element 368)

Prior studies exemption granted by reference date of commencing year (Element 367)

VTE course code
VTE Provider code

Completion

Highest level of educational participation on the basis of which any exemption or status was granted from the course's total requirements over all its stages by its completion

Total exemption utilised over all stages of the course as a percentage of the course's requirements (Element 385)

VTE course code
VTE Provider code



Change to an existing data item



New data item

20. Under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) guidelines for issuing VTE qualifications, all official documentation of qualifications and part-qualifications issued to the students of a VTE provider must identify the course code. It is proposed that, where a student receives credit for VTE studies, the higher education provider will be required to record this course code from the qualification documentation supplied by the student. Some institutions may also be able to use systems such as the Automated Results Transfer System (ARTS©) or QualSearch or work with their Tertiary Admission Centre to obtain this information electronically.

21. This will then be provided to DEST as part of the Student Enrolment and Past Course Completion files. DEST will use the course code to derive both the Field of Education (at the detailed 4 digit level) and the level of the course under the Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED) using the National Training Information Service.

22. A second new data item is proposed to identify the type of VTE provider with whom the student was studying. In the VTE system all accredited providers (known as Registered Training Organisations or RTOs) have a unique provider code issued by State/Territory Training Authorities. This code is an up to six digit number that is unique to each of the almost 7,000 RTOs.

23. As with the course code, the provider code must be present on qualifications documentation issued by the provider and it is proposed that, where a student receives credit for VTE studies, the higher education provider will be required to record the VTE provider's code and provide it to DEST as part of the Student Enrolment and Past Course Completion files. Using this code DEST will determine the type of each provider using the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS).

Timing of collection

24. At present, data on the amount of exemption granted is collected at both commencement and completion. However, it is not possible to determine whether exemption granted has been able to be used, e.g. where it is in the form of unspecified credit. Also, the source of the exemption cannot be reliably attributed to VTE or HE studies as the only information collected on this is at commencement and this will not include those who have commenced or completed a VTE qualification after that point, e.g. as students who are concurrently enrolled in VTE and HE.

25. It is proposed that the amount of credit transfer granted will continue to be collected for commencing students as it is at the moment (see Element no. 367 in Attachment D). The amount of credit granted for completing students will be changed to measure credit utilised by the student toward their final award as distinct from that which is granted (see Element no. 385 in Attachment B).

26. It is also proposed to add a new item to the Past Course Completion file "Basis for exemption", through which institutions would be asked to report the highest level of study on the basis of which an exemption was granted throughout the student's course of study (see Attachment C). Where the highest level of study is a complete or incomplete VTE award course, institutions would also be asked to supply the VTE course code and the provider code.

Benefits of the changes

27. In developing these proposals the Data Experts Working Group has been very conscious of the impacts of higher education reforms on institutions, especially in relation to data collection. The Working Group believes that changes involving additional data need to be carefully justified to ensure that they offer substantial benefits to institutions as well the broader public policy interest in improving credit transfer and articulation across the higher education sector as a whole.

28. The proposed changes would benefit institutions seeking to improve the management of credit transfer and articulation in several ways:

- reliable data on the field of education and qualification level of students entering with complete or incomplete VTE awards would allow institutions to better understand patterns of transfer and articulation between relevant disciplines;
- the scope to track progress, retention and attrition by students coming from different providers or fields of education would enable institutions to improve arrangements with specific providers and to develop ways of intervening or better supporting students to facilitate completion. A number of institutions are already monitoring student progress in this way; and
- the collection of data on exemption utilised up to the point of a student completing their course would permit institutions to understand the impact of their credit transfer policies in practice in assisting students with relevant prior studies.

29. The proposed changes would also benefit public understanding of credit transfer and articulation more generally by addressing the major limitations noted above in relation to the existing student collection. Having the field of education and level of the VTE qualification would allow comparison of how credit transfer is occurring in areas where the subject matter of VTE and higher education courses is related across the higher education system as a whole. Expanding the collection of data on completing students would allow measurement of credit use rather than credit awarded and also facilitate analysis of completion and attrition rates for those granted credit transfer. Expanding the scope of the student population on which data is collected, especially through including those with incomplete VTE qualifications, will give a more realistic measure of potential and actual credit transfer across the whole sector.

Timeframe

30. Subject to views expressed through this consultation process, the Working Group proposes that these changes will be implemented from 1 January 2007. This consultation process would be followed by the Working Group considering the issues raised and recommending a final proposal which would be put to the Minister for Education, Science and Training for formal approval through a Ministerial determination by the end of March 2006. This would allow institutions and software vendors up to 9 months to make the necessary changes to administrative and information systems before the beginning of 2007.

How to comment on this paper

31. We invite comments on the proposals put forward in this paper and ask that you respond to the questions below:

- Do the proposed changes address the key limitations identified above in relation to data collected on credit transfer and articulation?
- Are the proposed changes practical and workable for institutions?
- Is the proposed timeframe appropriate?
- Are there ways in which the proposals could be improved while still addressing the limitations with the existing data?

32. Comments regarding the proposed changes or any of the issues raised in this paper should be submitted by **10 March 2006**. Comments should be addressed to:

Ms Lois Sparkes
Chair
JCHE Data Experts Working Group

and sent either by email to quality@dest.gov.au or by mail to:

Ms Lois Sparkes
Branch Manager
Quality Branch
Higher Education Group Loc 133
Department of Education, Science and Training
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Attachments

- A: Membership of the Data Experts Working Group
- B: Technical specifications – revised data items
- C: Technical specifications – new data items
- D: Technical specifications – relevant unchanged item

Attachment A

DATA EXPERTS WORKING GROUP – MEMBERSHIP

Department of Education, Science and Training:

Chair – Lois Sparkes (Higher Education Group)
Paul White (Higher Education Group)
Matthew Hardy (UniStats)
Sandra Fox (UniStats)
Ross Young (VTE Strategy and Performance Unit)
Anne Broadbent (Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group)

Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee:

Professor David Macey
Director of Prospective Students and Admissions Centre
Murdoch University

Ms Robyn O'Loughlin
Head of Planning Unit
Deakin University

Ms Lucy Schulz
Director, Student and Academic Services Unit
University of South Australia

Victorian Department of Education and Training:

Mr Wayne Hoare
Manager of Decision Support & Performance Measurement Branch

Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board:

Judy Forsyth
Executive Officer, AQFAB Secretariat

Australian Bureau of Statistics:

Karen Collins
Assistant Director, National Centre for Education and Training Statistics

National Centre for Vocational Education Research:

Toni Cavallaro (Provider Collections Co-ordinator)

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS – REVISED ITEMS

ELEMENT NO. 493

FIRST YEAR: 2007

LAST YEAR:

FIELD NAME: HIGHEST-PARTICIP

ELEMENT NAME: Highest educational participation prior to commencement

DESCRIPTION: A code which indicates the student's highest educational participation and year of attainment prior to the first enrolment in the course of study

CODE FORMAT: Data Type: Character
 Units: Code (numeric)
 Width: 6

CLASSIFICATION:	CODE	MEANING
	000000	Overseas student
	010000	Not a commencing student
		Commencing Domestic student for whom highest educational participation and year of attainment prior to commencement was:
	02YYYY	A complete higher education postgraduate level course
	03YYYY	A complete higher education bachelor level course
	04YYYY	A complete higher education sub-degree level course
	050000	An incomplete higher education course
	06YYYY	A complete VTE award course
	070000	An incomplete VTE award course
	08YYYY	A complete final year of secondary education course at school or VTE
	09YYYY	A completed other qualification or certificate of attainment or competence
	100000	No prior educational attainment

CODING NOTES: YYYY is the year of the completion

If no information is available for year, code as "9999"

Any decision on the relative position of differing educational experiences should be based on the following hierarchy:

any participation (completed or not) in any higher education course (at any level) should be coded as higher than any participation (complete or incomplete) in a VTE course, which should be coded as higher than any school or other educational participation.

INPUT FILES: Student Enrolment (EN)

PREPARED ON: [Date of Ministerial determination]

ELEMENT NO. 385

FIRST YEAR: 2007

LAST YEAR:

FIELD NAME: TOTAL-EXEMPTION

ELEMENT NAME: Total exemption **utilised**

DESCRIPTION: The percentage of the course's requirements over all its stages for which exemption was **utilised** by the time the requirements of the course were completed

CODE FORMAT:

Data Type:	Character
Units:	Code (numeric), right justified, with a leading zero if needed
Width:	2

CLASSIFICATION: **CODE** **MEANING**

00 to 99	Percentage of the course's requirements over all its stages, for which exemption was utilised by the time the requirements of the course were completed
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CODING NOTES:

For this purpose, "utilised" means that the student was granted exemption and was able to use it towards their final award.

INPUT FILES: Past Course Completions (PS)

PREPARED ON: [Date of Ministerial determination]

ELEMENT NO. 368

FIRST YEAR: 2007

LAST YEAR:

FIELD NAME: EXEMPT-INST

ELEMENT NAME: Exemption/status Higher Education Provider code

DESCRIPTION: A code indicating the Higher Education Provider or type of Higher Education Provider or Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) provider where the studies for which the exemption or status was granted were undertaken

CODE FORMAT:

Data Type:	Character
Units:	Code (numeric), right justified, with leading zeros if needed
Width:	4

CLASSIFICATION:	CODE	MEANING
	0001	Not a commencing student
	0001	Commencing student but no exemption granted
	1000 to 8000	Higher Education Provider code for a commencing student and exemption was granted on the basis of prior higher education studies undertaken at that Higher Education Provider in Australia
		A commencing student for whom exemption was granted on the basis of:
	8001	prior VTE studies undertaken at a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) in Australia
	8002	studies at an education Higher Education Provider outside Australia
	8003	work experience inside or outside Australia
	8004	other

CODING NOTES:

Refer to Appendix A - Codes and Names Used for Higher Education Providers. Where exemption was granted on a combination of codes, then the code to be assigned relates to that code contributing to the largest part of the exemption.

*If data other than "0001" are reported for non-commencing students, DESTPAC will ignore the data during edit validations.

INPUT FILES: Student Enrolment (EN)

PREPARED ON: [Date of Ministerial determination]

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS – NEW ITEMS

ELEMENT NO. ABC

FIRST YEAR:	2007
LAST YEAR:	
FIELD NAME:	VTE COURSE-CODE
ELEMENT NAME:	VTE course code
DESCRIPTION:	The code of the VTE course for which exemption was granted
CODE FORMAT:	Data Type: Data Units: Alphanumeric Width: 10
CLASSIFICATION:	CODE MEANING

No coding required.

CODING NOTES:

Institutions are required to enter the whole course code from the student's VTE qualification, transcript or statement of attainment. Each VTE course and qualification has been assigned a unique course/qualification code within the National Training Information Service (NTIS), which is a national database of VTE courses and qualifications. DEST will match the code entered by the institution with the NTIS to derive:

- the level of the student's VTE course or qualification; and
- the field of education of the VTE course or qualification.

INPUT FILES:	Student Enrolment (EN), Past Course Completions
PREPARED ON:	[Date of Ministerial determination]

ELEMENT NO. XYZ

FIRST YEAR: 2007

LAST YEAR:

FIELD NAME: VTE PROVIDER-CODE

ELEMENT NAME: VTE provider code

DESCRIPTION: A unique code which identifies each VTE provider within the national VTE system and from which the type of provider can be derived.

CODE FORMAT: Data Type: Data
Units: Numeric
Width: 6

CLASSIFICATION: **CODE MEANING**

No coding required.

CODING NOTES:

Institutions are required to enter the National Training Information System Registered Training Organisation code which is 10 digits in length from the student's VTE qualification, transcript or statement of attainment.

Each VTE provider has been assigned a unique code within the National Training Information Service (NTIS), which is a national database of VTE courses, qualifications and providers.

DEST will match the code entered by the institution with the NTIS to establish whether the VTE provider is a School, a Technical and Further Education institute, a university, an enterprise, a community-based adult education or an other training provider. [Note: this is the draft release 6.0 of the AVETMISS standard to take effect in 2007].

INPUT FILES: Student Enrolment (EN), Past Course Completions

PREPARED ON: [Date of Ministerial determination]

ELEMENT NO. DDD

FIRST YEAR: 2007

LAST YEAR:

FIELD NAME: EXEMPTION-BASIS

ELEMENT NAME: Basis of exemption granted

DESCRIPTION: Highest level of educational participation on the basis of which any exemption or status was granted from the course’s total requirements over all its stages by its completion

CODE FORMAT: Data Type: Character
 Units: Code (numeric)
 Width: 2

CLASSIFICATION:	CODE	MEANING
	00	Overseas student
	01	No exemption granted
		Domestic student for whom highest educational participation on the basis of which any exemption or status was granted was:
	02	A complete higher education postgraduate level course
	03	A complete higher education bachelor level course
	04	A complete higher education sub-degree level course
	05	An incomplete higher education course
	06	A complete VTE award course
	07	An incomplete VTE award course
	08	A complete final year of secondary education course at school or VTE
	09	A completed other qualification or certificate of attainment or competence
	10	No prior educational attainment

CODING NOTES:

INPUT FILES: Past Course Completions

PREPARED ON: [Date of Ministerial determination]

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS – RELEVANT UNCHANGED ITEM

ELEMENT NO. 367

FIRST YEAR: 1994

LAST YEAR:

FIELD NAME: PRIOR-EXEMPTION

ELEMENT NAME: Prior studies exemption/status

DESCRIPTION: A code which identifies the extent to which **exemption** or status from the course's total requirements over all its stages were granted by the reference date of the first year of enrolment in the **course**

CODE FORMAT: Data Type: Character
Units: Code (numeric), right justified, with leading zeros if needed
Width: 2

CLASSIFICATION:

CODE	MEANING
00	Not a commencing student
00	Commencing student for whom no exemption or status granted by the reference date in the first year of enrolment
01 to 99	Commencing student; percentage of the course's requirements over all its stages, for which exemption was granted by the reference date in the first year of enrolment

CODING NOTES:

*If data other than "00" are reported for non-commencing students, DESTPAC will ignore the data during edit validations.

INPUT FILES: Student Enrolment (EN)

PREPARED ON: 27 August 1997; *rev 8 October 2001