



2010 HSC Student Survey report

1. Introduction and Methodology

An exit survey of Higher School Certificate students was identified as a targeted outcome in the Board's 2005–2010 strategic plan, under Key Result Area 4.2: *Collecting, analysing and evaluating relevant information, particularly student participation and performance data, to inform Board activities and policy directions*. Following a pilot survey in 2006, the survey was conducted for the first time in 2007.

The exit survey is administered using eBOS Students Online, the Board's secure internet-based service which gives students access to their own records and other useful information, such as a personalised examination timetable. By using eBOS Students Online, the survey is customised for each individual, with responses matched with student details already held on the examination system.

The survey opened on 13 November 2010 (immediately after the final HSC examination) and was available up until 11 December, just prior to the release of results.

2. Survey Respondents

The survey was completed by 2195 students, somewhat fewer than for the previous two years (about 3300). This decrease was consistent with reduced student online activity in other Board services and may have been related to decreased electronic word of mouth arising from the closure of a major third-party HSC student chatroom. Tables 1 and 2 show a comparison of the respondents with the total HSC candidature by geographic location, school sector and sex, as well as by the distribution of Bands.

Table 1: Survey respondents by location, sector and sex

		Survey		State	2009 Survey
		n	%	%	%
Location	Country	802	37	36	35
	Metropolitan	1385	63	63	65
	Overseas	8	<1	<1	<1
Sector	Government	1300	59	60	59
	Non-government	895	41	40	41
Sex	Female	1481	67	51	66
	Male	714	33	49	34

Table 1 **Error! Reference source not found.** shows that while the students who completed the survey closely resembled the overall HSC candidature in terms of location and school sector, females were somewhat overrepresented (67% of sample compared to 51% of cohort).

Table 2: Survey respondents by Band results

% of course results in	Survey	State	2009 Survey
	%	%	%
Top Band	23	11	22
Top 2 Bands	62	39	62
Top 3 Bands	89	69	88
Above minimum standard expected	99	96	99

Table 2 shows that 23% of all the HSC course results achieved by the survey respondents were in the top Band, compared with only 11% of all course results achieved by students across the state. In addition, 62% of all the HSC course results achieved by the survey respondents were in the top two Bands, compared with only 39% of all course results achieved by students across the state. This repeated the pattern shown in the 2009 survey.

3. Survey Responses

The survey items were structured into two sections, with students responding on a 5-point scale. The first section asked students to rate eight resources developed by the Board of Studies (from *Very Useful* to *Did not know it existed*), and then to respond to four further items regarding information provided about assessment and ethical scholarship (from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*). The second section was course-specific, and consisted of eight items relating to the student's satisfaction with each of the HSC courses studied that year (from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*).

3.1. General Questions

3.1.1. Resources

Students were asked to rate eight resources developed by the Board of Studies using a 5-point scale. The scale was chosen to allow students to indicate whether they were aware of the resource, whether they then chose to use it and, if they used the resource, how useful they found it. The results are summarised in Table 3, which also shows comparative figures from the 2009 survey.

Table 3: Responses to general questions about Board-developed resources

How useful did you find the following HSC resources developed by the Board of Studies?						
	Survey	Very Useful	Useful	Not Useful	Chose not to use	Did not know about it
		%	%	%	%	%
Past HSC exam papers	2010	56	39	2	2	<1
	2009	53	40	3	3	<1
Notes from the Marking Centre	2010	20	52	14	11	3
	2009	20	49	15	11	5
Standards packages	2010	11	25	10	13	42
	2009	12	27	10	14	36
Assessment Resource Centre (ARC)	2010	6	16	6	12	59
	2009	6	18	7	12	55
Test yourself – online multiple choice	2010	37	36	6	14	8
	2009	39	35	5	14	7
Advice Line	2010	4	7	3	49	37
	2009	5	7	5	50	33
Syllabuses	2010	53	37	5	3	1
	2009	53	36	6	4	1
Students Online website	2010	16	43	15	17	10
	2009	17	40	15	20	10

Table 3 shows that two items were rated as useful by about 90% to 95% of respondents and very useful by about 55%: past HSC exam papers and syllabuses. Two other resources were rated as useful by about 70% to 75% of respondents: online multiple choice (37% 'Very Useful') and Notes from the Marking Centre (20% 'Very Useful'), while the Students Online website was rated as useful by about 60% (16% 'Very Useful'). While most respondents were aware of these five resources, there was less knowledge of standards packages (42% unaware) and the Assessment Resource Centre (59% unaware). The standards packages were seen as useful by about 35% of respondents (11% 'Very Useful') and the ARC by about 20% (6% 'Very Useful'). While about 65% of respondents knew about the Advice Line, most chose not to use it, although 4% rated it as 'Very Useful' and 7% as 'Useful'.

This pattern of responses in 2010 was similar to that for 2009.

3.1.2. Assessment and ethical scholarship

Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement regarding four statements relating to the school-based assessment program and ethical scholarship, using a 5-point Likert scale from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. The results are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Responses to general questions about information provided

During the HSC year I was provided with information about:						
	Survey	SA	A	NAD	D	SD
		%	%	%	%	%
The dates that assessment tasks were due	2010	64	30	4	2	1
	2009	63	29	5	2	1
The weighting of each assessment task	2010	55	34	6	4	1
	2009	54	35	7	3	1
The importance of ethical scholarship	2010	28	25	25	13	8
	2009	30	30	23	11	6
How to avoid plagiarism	2010	46	39	10	4	1
	2009	48	40	9	3	1

The column headings relate to the 5-point Likert scale with SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, NAD = Neither Agree nor Disagree, D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree.

Table 4 shows that most students were informed about the dates and weighting of assessment tasks, with overall agreement of about 90%. About 85% of the students agreed that they had been given information about avoiding plagiarism and 55% that they were provided with information about ethical scholarship in general. These results were generally similar to the 2009 survey, although awareness of ethical scholarship and avoiding plagiarism each dropped by about five percentage points.

3.2. Course-specific Questions

Students were asked for their agreement to eight statements in relation to each HSC course that they studied, ranging from whether the course was interesting, challenging and useful, to the assessment program and the fairness of the HSC exam. For non-Board Developed courses, the statements referring to the assessment and examination were omitted. There were about 12,000 responses for each item (representing almost six courses for each student). The responses have been aggregated across all courses to describe an overall pattern, with selected courses analysed in more detail.

3.2.1. Overall responses – Board Developed courses

Students were asked four questions about their satisfaction with each course, three questions about the assessment program, and one about the examination. Table 5 shows the overall response pattern, with comparative 2009 data.

Table 5: Response pattern – course-specific questions

Think about the course shown above. Choose the response that best reflects your view.						
	Survey	SA	A	NAD	D	SD
		%	%	%	%	%
The course was interesting	2010	42	35	10	9	5
	2009	42	36	10	8	4
The course was challenging	2010	38	38	13	8	3
	2009	38	38	13	8	3
The course will be useful for my further education or work	2010	31	31	19	12	8
	2009	32	31	19	12	7
I would choose this course again	2010	41	29	12	10	9
	2009	40	29	13	10	8
The assessment tasks helped me with my learning	2010	33	40	14	8	5
	2009	33	40	15	8	4
The assessment tasks allowed me to show my knowledge in a variety of ways	2010	31	37	17	10	5
	2009	31	37	17	10	5
There were too many assessment tasks	2010	7	11	32	38	13
	2009	7	11	33	38	11
The HSC examination was a fair test	2010	27	42	15	10	7
	2009	28	41	16	9	7

The column headings relate to the 5-point Likert scale with SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, NAD = Neither Agree nor Disagree, D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree.

Table 5 shows that in about three-quarters of responses courses were described as challenging and interesting while in about 60% the courses were seen as useful for future study or work. In 70% of responses, students said they would choose the course again.

In terms of the assessment program, about 70% agreed that assessments helped learning and allowed them to show their knowledge, and less than 20% felt that there were too many tasks. About 70% of respondents said the HSC examination was a fair test.

The results in 2010 were very similar to those for 2009, with most results being within one percentage point of the corresponding results the previous year.

3.2.2. Individual course results

The students answered questions about 118 different Board Developed courses.

Table 6 shows the 14 courses that were studied by more than 300 respondents.

Table 6: Courses with more than 300 responses

Course	Number of responses	% of survey	% of state
English (Advanced)	1393	63	38
Mathematics	826	38	24
General Mathematics	781	36	44
Biology	697	32	22
English (Standard)	664	30	49
Chemistry	528	24	15
Mathematics Extension 1	471	21	13
Business Studies	446	20	22
Ancient History	439	20	17
Modern History	399	18	14
Physics	395	18	13
Legal Studies	387	18	12
English Extension 1	347	16	8
PDHPE	335	15	19
Visual Arts	329	15	14
Studies of Religion I	329	15	14

Table 6 shows that the most popular subjects done by the survey students are essentially the same as the most popular subjects across the state, but the survey students were studying the higher level courses where available. In English, 16% took Extension 1 (compared with 8% statewide), 63% studied the Advanced course (compared with 38%) and 30% studied the Standard course (compared with 49%). In Mathematics, 21% took Extension 1 (compared with 13% statewide), 38% studied the 2-unit course (compared with 24%) and 36% studied General Mathematics (compared with 44%). There were also proportionally more students studying Biology (32%), Chemistry (24%) and Physics (18%) compared to the statewide percentages (22%, 15% and 13% respectively). These differences are similar to those observed with the 2009 survey.

The nine most popular courses account for about 45% of course responses and were each studied by more than 20% of the survey students: English (Advanced), Mathematics, General Mathematics, English (Standard), Biology, Mathematics Extension 1, Chemistry, Business Studies and Ancient History.

Table 7 summarises the combined *Strongly Agree* and *Agree* percentages for each course. Shaded cells indicate percentages which differ by more than 10 percentage points above (blue) or below (red) the average across all courses (from Table 5).

Table 7: Agreement (%) with course-specific items for selected courses

Think about the course shown above. Choose the response that best reflects your view.	<i>Avg Agree</i>	Eng (Std)	Eng (Adv)	Gen Maths	Maths	Maths Ext 1	Bio	Chem	Bus Stud	Anc Hist
The course was interesting	77	55	59	53	71	86	88	83	74	86
The course was challenging	76	67	87	68	89	93	75	82	67	78
The course will be useful for my further education or work	62	38	41	68	70	73	71	75	80	39
I would choose this course again	70	38	49	59	74	79	77	70	72	67
The assessment tasks helped me with my learning	73	61	63	60	62	77	75	75	81	79
The assessment tasks allowed me to show my knowledge in a variety of ways	68	64	58	52	58	68	68	72	76	76
There were too many assessment tasks	18	30	27	13	12	7	17	13	20	18
The HSC examination was a fair test	69	73	72	45	44	63	64	63	65	75

Table 7 shows that the two English courses (Advanced and Standard) had similar patterns on most items, being seen as significantly less useful than other courses and as having significantly more assessment tasks (although only a minority saw these as ‘too many’). They were also seen as less helpful in student learning than was the case for other courses, while the proportion of students seeing the courses as interesting was markedly less than average. English (Advanced) was seen as more challenging than most courses and English (Standard) as less challenging. The proportions who would choose either of these courses again was well below average (although in practice, most students have to choose one or the other).

Mathematics Extension 1 and Mathematics rated above average in challenge and usefulness, with most respondents indicating that they would choose the courses again. By contrast, General Mathematics rated well below average for interest and for the usefulness of assessment tasks. For both Mathematics and General Mathematics, there were substantially fewer respondents than average who saw the HSC examination as a fair test.

The two Science courses were seen as interesting and useful, while responses to Business Studies and Ancient History resembled the average for all courses, except in terms of usefulness for further education or work (Business Studies significantly higher, Ancient History significantly lower).

3.2.3. Overall responses – Board Endorsed courses

There were 231 students who responded to items about Board Endorsed courses, with 81 responses for VET courses, and 176 responses for general education content endorsed or Board endorsed courses of which 67 were for a course in Religion. Table 8 shows the overall response pattern for VET, other BEC and Religion courses.

Table 8: Response pattern – BEC items by course type

ITEM	Type	SA	A	NAD	D	SD
		%	%	%	%	%
The course was interesting	VET	60	33	1	1	4
	Religion	18	27	16	13	25
	Other BEC	63	28	6	0	4
The course was challenging	VET	30	26	16	17	11
	Religion	4	3	18	28	46
	Other BEC	28	23	17	16	16
The course will be useful for my further education or work	VET	54	30	7	5	4
	Religion	10	12	21	25	31
	Other BEC	41	29	16	10	4
I would choose this course again	VET	60	22	10	2	5
	Religion	21	22	13	12	31
	Other BEC	61	20	12	2	6

The column headings relate to the 5-point Likert scale with SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, NAD = Neither Agree nor Disagree, D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree.

Table 8 shows that there was a similar very positive pattern for VET and general BEC courses, with the exception of courses in Religion. About 85% to 90% of students found the courses interesting (60% strongly agreeing) and over 80% would choose the course again (60% strongly agreeing). The courses were seen as useful for further education or work by about 85% of respondents for VET courses and 70% for general courses, while about 50% to 55% saw the courses as challenging. About 45% of Religion students found the course interesting and would choose the course again while less than 10% saw the course as challenging and less than 25% saw it as useful for future work or study.

3.3. Overall Challenge and Relevance

A result indicator in the Office’s Results and Services Plan refers to the percentage of students judging courses relevant and challenging, as reflected in the items *The course was challenging* and *The course will be useful for my further education and work*. An index was derived for each course by calculating an average score using the responses across the 5-point Likert scale. The maximum possible score is 5 – if all students chose *Strongly Agree*, and the minimum possible is 1 – if all students chose *Strongly Disagree*.

The average index calculated across all responses was 4.0 for Challenging and 3.7 for Relevant. This reflects strong overall agreement that courses were challenging and relevant, as described in Section 3.2.1. These average ratings were identical to the figures obtained in the 2009 student exit survey.

The results for the 30 courses with more than 100 respondents are shown in Table 9, in decreasing order of the challenging and relevant indexes.

Table 9: Challenging and relevant courses

CHALLENGING		RELEVANT	
Course	Index	Course	Index
Mathematics Extension 2	4.9	English Extension 2	4.4
English Extension 2	4.7	Personal Development, Health and	4.2
History Extension	4.6	Physical Education	
Mathematics Extension 1	4.5	Community and Family Studies	4.1
Chemistry	4.5	Business Studies	4.1
English Extension 1	4.4	Mathematics Extension 2	4.1
Physics	4.4	Economics	4.0
Modern History	4.3	History Extension	4.0
Mathematics	4.3	Chemistry	4.0
Economics	4.2	Society and Culture	4.0
English (Advanced)	4.2	Legal Studies	4.0
Ancient History	4.1	Physics	4.0
Legal Studies	4.0	Mathematics Extension 1	3.9
Personal Development, Health and	4.0	Biology	3.9
Physical Education		Information Processes and Technology	3.8
All Courses	4.0	Mathematics	3.8
Biology	3.9	Drama	3.8
Drama	3.9	Visual Arts	3.8
Studies of Religion II	3.8	Hospitality	3.8
Visual Arts	3.8	Music 1	3.8
Business Studies	3.8	Food Technology	3.7
General Mathematics	3.7	General Mathematics	3.7
Music 1	3.7	All Courses	3.7
English (Standard)	3.7	English Extension 1	3.6
Information Processes and Technology	3.7	Modern History	3.6
Food Technology	3.6	Geography	3.6
Geography	3.6	Senior Science	3.3
Society and Culture	3.5	Ancient History	3.2
Senior Science	3.5	Studies of Religion II	3.1
Community and Family Studies	3.3	English (Advanced)	3.0
Hospitality	3.3	English (Standard)	2.9
Studies of Religion I	3.0	Studies of Religion I	2.4

Table 9 shows that the Extension courses (in Mathematics, English and History) and the courses in Chemistry and Physics were identified by the students as the most challenging. This is consistent with the intention of extension courses to be more intensive and complex than the associated 2-unit course. Studies of Religion I, Hospitality and Community and Family Studies were seen as the least challenging.

In terms of relevance, English Extension 2, PDHPE, Community and Family Studies, Business Studies and Mathematics Extension 2 were identified as the most useful for further study or work, with the 2-unit English and Studies of Religion courses identified as the least relevant.

The relationship between challenging and relevant was further explored by comparing the ranking of each course in each category, particularly in cases where the relative rank between the categories was large. Courses where the relevance rank was much greater than the challenging rank included Community and Family Studies and Business Studies while courses where the opposite occurred included English Extension 1, Modern History, Ancient History and English (Advanced).