

Reporting HSC performance

From 2001 student performance in the Higher School Certificate has been reported against set standards. These standards are described in six performance bands for each Board Developed Course.

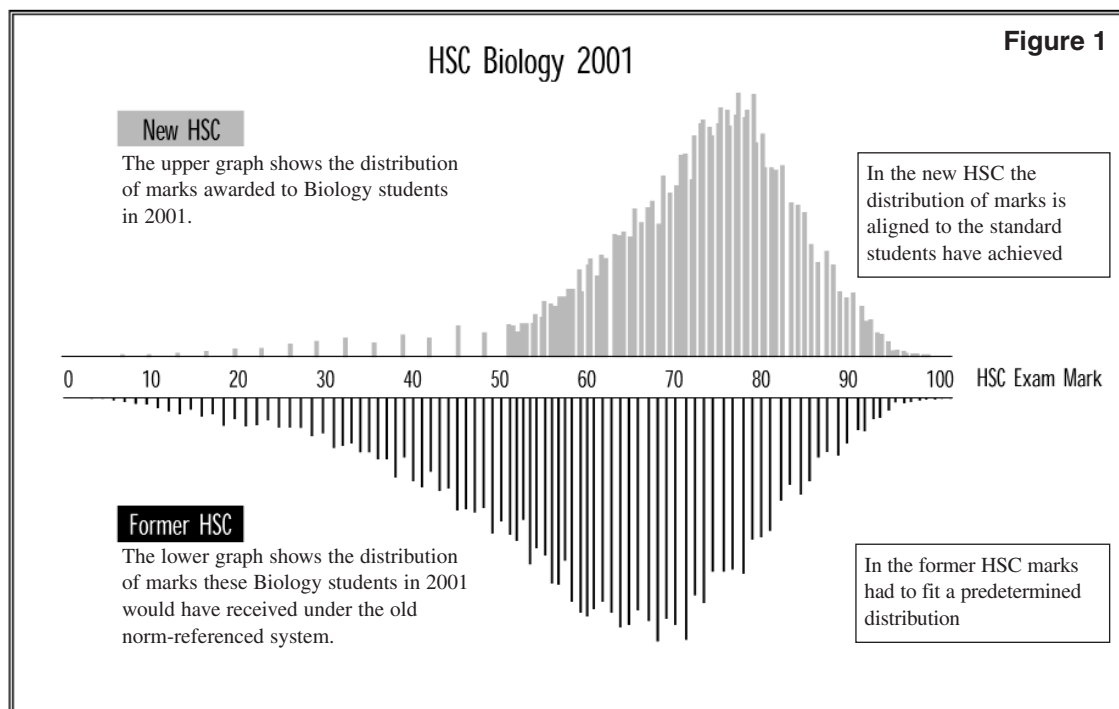
The performance bands describe what students typically know, understand and can do. They are linked to a mark scale from 0–100.

A mark of 50 represents the minimum standard expected in each course. Marks of 50, 60, 70, 80 and 90 on the scale correspond to the boundaries between the bands.

more and the middle-placed students received 60.

The system also allocated 25% of students a mark less than 50, regardless of the standards they achieved. Artificial ceilings restricted the number of students who could achieve the higher marks.

In the new HSC marks are no longer scaled to fit a predetermined distribution. The distribution of marks in new HSC courses is aligned to the standards students have achieved. There are no longer any artificial restrictions placed on the number of students who can achieve in each



... under the new standards-referenced system, most Biology students met the minimum standard expected and so received marks of 50 or above. Under the former system 25% of these students would have been automatically allocated marks below 50 even though many of them would have met or exceeded the current minimum standard.

A student whose mark falls on the boundary between two bands is regarded as having just achieved the standard associated with the higher band.

Prior to 2001, HSC marks allocated to students were norm-referenced. Marks were awarded on the basis of a student's position in the course.

In all courses a student's examination performance was reported against a predetermined scale of marks. The top 1–2% of students in a 2-unit course was allocated marks of 90 or more. The top 25% of students received 70 or

mark range. Students who achieve high standards are now guaranteed high marks.

Figure 1 above shows the distribution of marks for students who took Biology in 2001. The distribution of marks that would have been applied under the former norm-referenced system is also shown.

In future the distribution of marks within and across HSC courses will vary from one year to the next depending upon students' actual performance as measured against the standards.

The removal of mark restrictions has generally resulted in the achievement of higher average marks in New HSC courses. The middle-placed students in 2001 achieved HSC exam marks in the 70–80 range in contrast to the fixed median mark of 60 under the former norm-referenced system.

Some points to note about the new reporting scale

In figure 1 it can be seen that, under the new standards-referenced system, most Biology students met the minimum standard expected and so received marks of 50 or above.

Under the former system 25% of these students would have been automatically allocated marks below 50 even though many of them would have met or exceeded the current minimum standard.

It is important to note that in a standards-referenced approach the process of aligning students' raw marks to the performance scale does not change their positions in the group.

The position of each student is not affected by the alignment process but the marks now have meaning in terms of set standards of achievement.

Relation to the UAI

Professor Masters, in his review of the 2001 HSC examination, found no evidence to suggest that important distinctions between students' marks have been lost by assigning the majority of marks to a range between 50 and 100.

He further noted that the issue of maintaining fine distinctions between students' examination performance was more likely to arise in the context of the UAI than in the reporting of HSC marks.

UAIs are constructed by the Universities Admissions Centre directly from raw examination marks (and school assessment marks moderated against them) before they are aligned to the new HSC performance scale.

The assignment of the majority of HSC marks to a 50–100 mark range therefore has no influence on the calculation of the UAI.

The focus on 50 and the minimum standard

Given the general community interpretation of 50 as a 'pass' at all levels of education, it has been suggested that HSC students may now feel they can achieve a respectable result with minimal effort.

Masters took the view that this suggestion seems

unjustified for the vast majority of HSC students in 2001.

However he did note suggestions that the existence of 'minimum competency' standards can focus teaching and learning on satisfying minimum requirements only.

The middle-placed students in 2001 achieved HSC exam marks in the 70–80 range in contrast to the fixed median mark of 60 under the former norm-referenced system.

He recommended that the Board 'monitor the possibility that the number of students achieving low standards in a course will be increased by the decision to assign a mark of 50 to students achieving the minimum standard expected.'

In response, as part of the Board's Consultative Committee process, the proportions of students achieving the minimum standard expected will be monitored during 2002–03.

Advice as to whether the minimum standard needs to be re-established for any course will then be provided to the Board early in 2004.

School assessment marks

Schools were advised to continue to use the full range of marks from 0–100 for 2001 and 2002 when providing school-based assessment marks to the Board.

It remains the case in 2002 that schools should not adjust students' final assessment marks to conform to a 50–100 scale in reporting them to the Board.

The Board of Studies adjusts school assessment marks through a moderation process and places the assessment marks on the same scale as the reported examination marks.

Some teachers have expressed concern about the 'inflation' and 'compression' of school assessment marks in the moderation process.

This is understandable given that school assessment marks distributed over a 0–100 scale were moderated into line with examination marks that largely conformed to a 50–100 range on the new reporting scale.

School assessment marks have always differed in mark range from subject to subject and across schools. They have been validly moderated against the examination marks for many years.

Masters found no reason why students would have been disadvantaged in 2001.

An analysis of statewide correlations between examination marks and school assessment marks (see table opposite) indicates that reporting in 2001 of the great majority of HSC examination marks in a 50–100 range had no adverse effect on the moderated school assessment marks.

It remains the case in 2002 that schools should not adjust students' final assessment marks to conform to a 50–100 scale in reporting them to the Board.

Year	Number of courses	Median correlation	Minimum correlation	Maximum correlation
1995	91	0.88	0.48	0.99
1996	92	0.88	0.55	0.98
1997	93	0.88	0.56	0.97
1998	91	0.90	0.66	0.98
1999	91	0.90	0.63	0.99
2000	87	0.90	0.47	0.97
2001	61	0.89	0.48	0.97

Statewide correlations between examination marks and school assessment marks 1995–2001

Using the Term ‘Band’

The Board of Studies decided at its May meeting to retain the term ‘band’ to refer to performance descriptions for Higher School Certificate courses.

It also decided to continue to report the proportions of students achieving the standards in each performance band in each course.

While accepting the view that it would be confusing to discontinue using the term ‘band’, the Board acknowledged the value of Professor Masters’ advice about overuse of the term.

Masters was suggesting the removal of the bands terminology itself – not the removal of the approach to standards to which the term refers.

He believed that an overemphasis on band numbers in reporting, at the expense of the marks and the descriptions of the standards achieved, could increase misunderstandings about the comparability of bands across courses and subjects. Furthermore, the band numbers might become attached not only to levels of achievement but also to students themselves.

In the Higher School Certificate it is the mark and the description of performance that gives meaning to the mark that is important.

A student with a mark of 79 has performed better than a student who has scored 72, even though both students have performed within the mark range that corresponds to the Band 4 performance description.

The student who has scored 79 can be said to have a strong command of the knowledge, skills and understanding described in Band 4, bordering on

the standard of performance described in Band 5.

The student who has scored 72 is more likely to be consolidating the knowledge, skills and understanding described at Band 4.

It is also important that students are not labelled in relation to bands as they progress through a course.

It is not appropriate to label a student as simply a ‘Band 5 student’ or a ‘Band 3 student’ for example, or to refer to a student’s achievement simply with reference to a band number.

The standards described in the performance bands outline a range of achievement of the full suite of outcomes within a course. They are summative in nature, but can provide formative guidance to both teachers and students in establishing expectations for continuing improvement in achievement throughout a course.

In a standards-referenced system band levels cannot be considered to be equivalent across courses, nor can we expect that there should be an equivalence in the proportions of students achieving at different band levels across courses.

While there is a good degree of consistency across courses in terms of the generic skills and knowledge demands required at each band level, the described performance standards have been developed independently for each course by subject experts.

Given the very different kinds of content and learning outcomes across courses, differences in the proportions of students achieving the range of standards in each course are to be expected.

Statewide HSC meetings for teachers and parents

The Board of Studies is conducting a series of more than 50 parent and teacher meetings at locations across the state to provide the most up-to-date and relevant information about the setting, marking and reporting of the 2002 Higher School Certificate examinations.

The meetings are being presented by Board of Studies Liaison Officers or other senior officers of the Board. They consist of an after-school session for teachers (4.00pm to 5.30pm) followed by a parent session (7.30pm to 9.00pm).

The sessions focus on:

- key aspects of the 2002 HSC exam program, including the HSC marking, standards-setting and reporting processes
- important refinements put in place this year, following the Masters review of the 2001 program

- the relationship between the HSC and the UAI.

Each meeting provides teachers and parents with ample opportunity to ask questions and to provide Board officers with feedback on this year's refinements.

Feedback from the small number of meetings held so far indicates that teachers and parents have found the presentations to be very informative. They also appreciated the opportunity to ask detailed questions of Board officers, which helped clarify their understanding of aspects of the HSC exam program.

The full schedule of statewide HSC information meetings is detailed below. It is also available from the Board of Studies website www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au

Further information about the meetings may be obtained by contacting your local Board of Studies Liaison Officer.

Centre	Schools	Date
Parramatta	James Ruse Agricultural High School	July 22, 2002
Bankstown	La Salle College, Bankstown	July 23, 2002
Hornsby	Asquith Girls High School	July 23, 2002
Armidale	Armidale High School	July 23, 2002
Shellharbour (Nowra)	Kiama High School	July 23, 2002
Illawarra/Wollongong	Smith's Hill High School	July 24, 2002
Newcastle	Lambton High School	July 24, 2002
Tamworth	Tamworth High School	July 24, 2002
Orange	Orange High School	July 24, 2002
Albury	Murray High School	July 25, 2002
Sutherland	St Patrick's Parish Centre	July 25, 2002
Bathurst	Bathurst Entertainment Centre	July 25, 2002
Inner West	Blackwattle Bay Campus Sydney Secondary College (Glebe High School)	July 25, 2002
Eastern Suburbs	Dover Heights High School	July 29, 2002
Upper North Shore	Chatswood High School	July 29, 2002
Taree	Taree High School	July 29, 2002
Batemans Bay	Batemans Bay High School	July 29, 2002
Northern Beaches	Manly High School	July 31, 2002
Griffith	Temora High School	July 31, 2002
Inverell	Inverell High School	August 1, 2002
Campbelltown	Campbelltown Performing Arts High School	August 1, 2002
St George	Oatley Education Centre	August 7, 2002
Fairfield	Fairvale High School	August 7, 2002
Granville	Homebush Boys High School	August 8, 2002
Penrith	Penrith High School	August 8, 2002
Bega	Bega High School	August 8, 2002
Mt Druitt	St Clair High School	August 12, 2002
Deniliquin	Deniliquin High School	August 12, 2002
Lake Macquarie	Toronto High School	August 14, 2002
Liverpool	Ashcroft High School	August 14, 2002
Scone	Scone High School	August 14, 2002
Dubbo	Dubbo Senior College	August 15, 2002
Blacktown	St Andrew's Marayong	August 19, 2002
Wagga	Koorringal High School	August 19, 2002
Broken Hill	Willyama High School	August 20, 2002
Maitland	Rutherford High School	August 26, 2002
City	Randwick Boys High School	August 26, 2002
Lower North Shore	Marsden High School	August 27, 2002
Goulburn	Goulburn High School	August 28, 2002
Queanbeyan	Queanbeyan High School	August 28, 2002