



# HSC

assessment  
in a  
standards-  
referenced  
framework

**A GUIDE TO  
BEST PRACTICE**



BOARD OF STUDIES  
NEW SOUTH WALES

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# CONTENTS

Introduction		5
Section 1	HSC Assessment: a standards-referenced approach	6
	An overview	6
	What are schools expected to do?	7
	Best practice in a standards-referenced approach	8
Section 2	Board of Studies requirements for Stage 6 Assessment	9
	2.1 Assessment of Preliminary courses	9
	2.2 Internal Assessment of HSC courses	9
Section 3	Developing and evaluating a school's HSC Assessment policies and procedures	12
	3.1 Developing and evaluating an HSC Assessment policy for a school	13
	3.2 Developing and evaluating an Assessment policy for an HSC course	26
	3.3 Developing and evaluating advice provided to students on HSC Assessment	30
Further Information		
	Board of Studies publications	31
	Other publications	31
	Advice	31



# INTRODUCTION

This document has been produced to assist schools and teachers in continuing to design and implement good policies and procedures for the Higher School Certificate Assessment Program. It will also assist in the evaluation of the effectiveness of current practices. It builds on earlier documents in this field, *HSC Assessment Checklist* (1989), *HSC Assessment: A Guide to Developing Procedures in Schools* (1997) and *The New Higher School Certificate Assessment Support Document* (1999), and is consistent with the requirements of the current syllabuses and the standards-referenced approach to assessing student achievement.

Schools will already have in place policies and procedures for conducting the HSC Assessment Program. This document will assist schools in reviewing and updating their policies and practices, where necessary. The checklist on page 8 will enable schools to determine quickly which aspects, if any, of their current practices need to change.

Section 1 of this document provides general advice about standards-referenced assessment for the HSC.

Section 2 outlines the Board's requirements for Stage 6 Assessment.

Section 3 provides checklists and advice to assist a school or faculty to develop or evaluate its Assessment policy in order to meet the Board's requirements and ensure the smooth conduct of the HSC Assessment Program.

## Section 1

# HSC ASSESSMENT: A STANDARDS-REFERENCED APPROACH

### An overview

Assessment is the process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about student achievement. Assessment can be used for a number of key purposes, including to:

- assist student learning
- evaluate and improve teaching and learning programs
- provide information on student learning and progress in a course in relation to the syllabus outcomes
- provide evidence of satisfactory completion of a course
- report on the achievement by each student at the end of a course.

In the context of the Higher School Certificate a major requirement of the internal assessment program is to provide a summative measure of a student's achievement in each course based on:

- a wider range of syllabus outcomes than may be measured by external examination alone
- multiple measures and observations made throughout the HSC course rather than a single assessment event.

It is a requirement of the HSC school assessment program that for each course they teach, schools must establish a program of assessment tasks. These tasks are conducted throughout Year 12 and each has a weighting determined by the school within guidelines provided by the Board of Studies. School-based assessment tasks are linked to standards because the tasks focus on outcomes, they are valid instruments for what they are designed to assess, and where appropriate, the marking guidelines are related to the wording of the outcomes and the performance standards.

Each task enables teachers to collect information about the students' achievement in relation to several outcomes, to award marks in accordance with marking guidelines, and to provide constructive feedback to students on their performances highlighting their strengths and where they could make improvements. The marks awarded for each task should be commensurate with the quality of the response. Work that shows more complex development and higher order achievement should receive more marks than work that demonstrates a more basic level of achievement.

Measuring achievement at several points during the course can provide a better indication of student achievement than a single, final measure on its own as:

- multiple measures generally give a more accurate measure of each student's achievement
- this caters for any knowledge and skills outcomes that are better assessed in specific settings or at specific times (for example research, fieldwork or practical skills).

At the end of the course the marks for each task are aggregated using appropriate weightings previously published in the school's assessment policy to arrive at a final assessment mark for each student. These assessment marks, which are then submitted to the Board provide a rank order of students and show relative differences between students' performances. This is best achieved when a sufficiently wide mark range is used in allocating the marks for the individual tasks.

Marks will continue to be used to measure and report student achievement in both the external examination and the school-based assessment at the HSC. Marks enable the characteristics that discriminate between different degrees of performance to be captured and used in reporting student performance in ways that are not possible if bands (or grades or levels) alone are used.

In a standards-referenced approach, the assessments submitted to the Board reflect the rank order and relative differences between the achievements of students, based on the extent to which students have demonstrated the specific knowledge and skills being assessed.

The standards that the rank order and differences are based on are explicit and are incorporated in the syllabus, examination tasks, performance descriptions and the HSC standards packages.

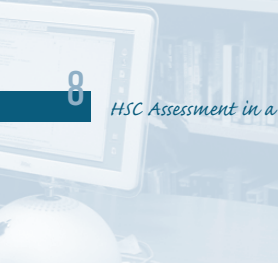
Moderation will continue to be necessary in the high stakes environment of the HSC. Moderation is important in ensuring the assessments submitted by different schools can be compared. Statistical moderation is an effective and efficient means for ensuring comparability.

In the moderation process for the HSC, the assessment marks for a course submitted by each school are adjusted by a statistical process that takes into account the performance of the school group on the examination. This process ensures comparability between the assessment marks submitted by each school. The school group's initial examination marks, before they are aligned to the performance scale, are used to moderate the school group's assessment marks. Following the application of this procedure the assessment marks are then aligned to the course performance scale using the same adjustments as used for the examination marks.

## What are schools expected to do?

In summary, in a standards-referenced approach to HSC Assessment, schools are expected to:

- conduct sound assessment programs that allow students to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their knowledge, skills and understanding
- develop quality assessment tasks and well-constructed marking guidelines
- provide effective feedback to students in relation to their strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement
- encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning
- evaluate and refine teaching programs in response to student performance
- report student achievement to various audiences including parents, employers and others, in ways that meet their needs
- report assessments to the Board as in the past that provide appropriate discrimination between students in terms of their overall achievement.



## Best practice in a standards-referenced approach

The checklist below show how best practice can be achieved in relation to:

- (i) assessment practice – design and marking of tasks
- (ii) reporting – feedback to students and reporting final Assessment marks to the Board.

### Checklist

The standards-referenced approach to assessment for the HSC involves schools ensuring that in the :

#### *Design and marking of tasks:*

- assessment tasks are designed to focus on outcomes
- the types of assessment tasks are appropriate for the outcomes being assessed
- students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their level of achievement of the outcomes in a range of different task types
- tasks reflect the weightings and components specified in the relevant syllabus
- students know the assessment criteria before they begin a task
- marking guidelines for each task are linked to the standards by including the wording of syllabus outcomes and relevant performance descriptions
- marks earned on individual tasks are expressed on a scale sufficiently wide to reflect adequately the relative differences in student performances.

#### *Feedback and reporting:*

- students get meaningful feedback about what they are able to do and what they need to do in order to improve their level of performance
- the ranking and relative difference between students result from different levels of achievement of the specified standards
- marks submitted to the Board for each course are on a scale sufficiently wide to reflect adequately the relative differences in student performances.

#### *Note that:*

- measures of objectives and outcomes that address values and attitudes should not be included in school-based assessments of students' achievements. As these objectives are important elements of any course, schools may decide to report on them separately to students and parents, perhaps using some form of descriptive statements
- measures that reflect student conduct should not be included.

## Section 2

# BOARD OF STUDIES REQUIREMENTS FOR STAGE 6 ASSESSMENT

### 2.1 Assessment of Preliminary courses

The Board does not require schools to submit assessment marks for students completing Preliminary courses. Principals will certify that students have satisfactorily completed Preliminary courses in accordance with the course completion criteria. These include demonstration of achievement in relation to some or all of the course outcomes.

In Preliminary courses, the syllabus provides a suggested set of components, weightings and tasks that may be varied to suit school needs.

Most schools adopt a similar approach to the assessment of the Preliminary course as they do for the HSC course.

See *ACE Manual* 11.4.1 and 11.13.1

### 2.2 Internal Assessment of HSC courses

Using the assessment requirements in the syllabus, schools must develop an internal Assessment program for each HSC course that must:

- specify the assessment tasks and the weighting for each task (except for VET curriculum frameworks)
- provide a schedule of the tasks for the course.

#### 2.2.1 Assessment requirements for Board Developed courses and Board Endorsed courses

Schools are required to provide the Board with an assessment mark for each student enrolled in each Board Developed course (BDC) with the exception of Life Skills and Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses. (See Section 2.2.2 for specific advice relating to VET courses.)

The mark must be calculated in accordance with the Board's requirements for that course, as specified in the syllabus.

The assessment marks submitted to the Board are devised from assessment tasks set in accordance with the internal assessment program for each course. Marks must be calculated on the basis of the mandatory assessment components and weightings found in the syllabus for each course. The assessment marks provide the rank order of students and the relative differences between students based on their performances in the assessment tasks.

Schools are not required to submit descriptions of student performance with the assessment marks or to indicate a performance band for students.

The internal assessment mark is based on the HSC course only (except in Mathematics). Once the assessment of the HSC course has commenced, some Preliminary course work can be included in assessment tasks for Mathematics. No more than 20% of the Mathematics assessment is to be based on the Preliminary course.

See *Assessment and Curriculum Information for the Mathematics, Mathematics Extension 1 and Mathematics Extension 2 Courses*. This is a syllabus support document available on the Board's website at [www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus\\_hsc/pdf\\_doc/maths\\_assess\\_curr\\_info.pdf](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/maths_assess_curr_info.pdf)

School assessment for the Mathematics Extension 1 HSC course can be based on the whole of the Mathematics Extension 1 course (Preliminary and HSC courses). Assessment for this course should not begin until the school program of HSC Assessments for other subjects begins (this is usually no earlier than Term 4 of Year 11).

See *ACE Manual* 11.13.2

Up to 30% of the internal assessment in General Mathematics Stage 6 may be based on the Preliminary course.

See *General Mathematics Syllabus* (1999) page 84

All requirements for the assessment of Board Developed courses apply to the assessment of Board Endorsed courses.

Schools are required to submit internal assessment marks for students undertaking any HSC Board Endorsed course (except for VET courses and University Developed Board Endorsed courses).

These marks are reported on the Record of Achievement but are not moderated by the Board.

## 2.2.2 Assessment requirements for Vocational Education and Training courses

Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses are competency based. The purpose of assessment in this context is to judge competence on the basis of performance. A student's performance is judged as being either competent or not yet competent against a prescribed standard. The judgement is made on the basis of evidence which can be in a variety of forms.

The Board of Studies requires providers of VET curriculum framework courses to:

- ensure that all courses are delivered under the auspices of a Registered Training Organisation (RTO)
- use a competency-based approach to assessment
- maintain a record of all of the competencies achieved by each student
- progressively record the achievement of elements of competency and units of competency in a competency record book (student log) supplied by the RTO
- use only qualified assessors to carry out assessment
- report to the Board via *Schools Online* both the units of competency each student intends to study in a year and the units of competency actually achieved by each student in each course

- verify that students have completed the mandatory work placement hours that have been assigned to each course
- prepare students enrolled in 240-hour courses for the optional HSC examination, if the students elect to present for the examination.

Schools are not required to submit school-based assessment marks for these courses. They are, however, required to provide an estimated examination mark for all students entered for any of the optional VET curriculum framework examinations. This mark should be an estimate of likely performance in the HSC examination and should reflect each student's achievement on a task or tasks similar in nature to the HSC examination, such as a trial HSC examination. It must be submitted at the same time as the school assessment marks for other HSC courses, but will be used only in the case of a successful illness/misadventure appeal.

See *ACE Manual* 11.13.7.1, 11.4.5.2, the relevant syllabus and the Curriculum Framework Stage 6 Support Document for each VET course.

## Section 3

# DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING A SCHOOL'S HSC ASSESSMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Schools must develop and implement policies and procedures to:

- inform students in writing of the assessment requirements for each course before the commencement of the HSC course, including the number, mark values and types of tasks to be used
- ensure that students are given adequate written notice of the nature and timing of assessment tasks
- provide meaningful feedback on students' performance in all assessment tasks
- maintain records of marks awarded to each student for all assessment tasks
- address issues relating to illness, misadventure and malpractice in assessment tasks
- address issues relating to late submission and non-completion of assessment tasks
- address issues relating to students who transfer, or accelerate or accumulate
- advise students in writing when they are not meeting the assessment requirements in a course and indicate what is necessary to enable the students to meet the requirements satisfactorily
- ensure students know how they can collect their *Assessment Rank Order Notice* at the end of the HSC examinations and understand its purpose
- inform students about their entitlements to school reviews and appeals to the Board
- conduct school reviews of assessment when requested by students.

This section provides advice to schools in developing and evaluating a school's HSC Assessment policies and procedures. Pertinent issues are raised and advice is provided based on Board advisory documents, the *ACE Manual*, and examples of best practice in schools.

To ensure that the Board's requirements for HSC Assessment are met, and that all aspects of the process are as explicit as possible many schools develop a document, or set of documents, containing:

- the school's overall HSC Assessment policy and procedures
- an Assessment policy for each HSC course offered by the school
- a student information guide to HSC Assessment.

To assist schools in ensuring they have appropriate policies and procedures in place a checklist has been provided for each of the above areas. Further detail on each of the areas in a checklist then follows.

Some schools establish an assessment committee to assist in the development and implementation of a consistent approach to the Board's procedural requirements for assessment.

## 3.1 Developing and evaluating an HSC Assessment policy for a school

A school HSC Assessment policy is an internal school document containing general school-wide policies for HSC assessment related matters.

### Checklist

The school's HSC Assessment policies and procedures must contain:

- guidelines on the number and types of tasks to be used
- procedures to ensure students are informed in writing of their assessment schedules prior to commencing the HSC course
- procedures relating to the administration of tasks
- school procedures relating to malpractice
- guidelines for maintaining records of marks awarded
- procedures for providing assessment marks for students who transfer into the school
- procedures for dealing with assessment of accelerants and accumulants
- procedures for awarding marks and providing feedback to students
- procedures for advising students in writing when they are in danger of not meeting the assessment requirements in a course
- procedures for conducting school reviews of final assessment marks and appeals to the Board
- procedures for communicating the policy
- procedures for evaluating the policy.

The school HSC Assessment policy should include the following elements.

### 3.1.1 Guidelines on the number and types of tasks to be used

#### What will constitute a minimum number of tasks for each course?

A balance is required between obtaining sufficient information and not overassessing. Three to five tasks, including the trial HSC, are considered sufficient to adequately assess the components of most courses; for one unit courses, two to three tasks generally would be sufficient.

#### What types of assessment tasks should be used?

The assessment tasks used should be appropriate to the outcomes and component of the course being assessed, for example tasks could include assignments, fieldwork studies and reports, model making, oral reports, research projects, practical tests and open-ended investigations, viva voce, improvisations, arrangements, original compositions, portfolios, and presentations of performance. The syllabus provides guidance in relation to the types of tasks that are suitable.

### 3.1.2 Procedures to ensure students are informed in writing of their assessment schedules prior to commencing the HSC course

Schools may wish to consider conducting student, parent and teacher information meetings at which students are provided with the relevant documentation. Some schools have procedures for students to acknowledge receipt of this information. Students who enrol after the start of the HSC course will need to be given the information at the time of enrolment.

#### What procedures are in place to plan the scheduling of tasks in a coordinated way?

Assessment for the HSC course must not commence until after the completion of the Preliminary course.

Schools need to ensure some coordination exists between subject areas so that students do not have too many assessment tasks scheduled close together. Schools should also consider having assessment-free blocks of time, for example immediately prior to trial examinations.

### 3.1.3 Procedures relating to the administration of tasks

It is important that schools develop consistent procedures that will be applied across all courses. The school's Assessment policy should, however, give the principal the discretion to make rulings in special cases or exceptional circumstances.

#### What procedures are to be followed for:

- **Providing adequate notice for tasks?**  
In addition to the schedule of dates for assessment tasks, there must be provision for adequate notice of the precise timing of each assessment task. Generally, at least two weeks' notice of the details of a task should be given.
- **Students absent from school when assessment information is given out?**  
Schools may wish to consider displaying all assessment advice in a central, prominent location. Student responsibility, in checking for this information when they return, should be emphasised.
- **The submission of tasks?**  
It must be made clear to students to whom the task is to be given, what format is required (for example, whether electronic submission is acceptable) and whether receipt is to be formally acknowledged.
- **Teacher absence on the day of a task?**  
In the case of students submitting work, schools may consider having a system of 'signing-in' or 'receipting' assessment tasks. This may also include details of when, where and by whom the task was received.  
If a teacher is absent on the day a written, oral or performance task is to be administered, schools need to determine whether the task can be conducted by another teacher, or whether it will need to be rescheduled, with all students being appropriately informed.

- **Students who hand in work late?**

Schools need to consider fair and equitable procedures that will apply across all courses for work handed in late without a valid reason. A clear definition of when a piece of work will be regarded as late, whether extensions will be granted, and who will make the final decisions in these matters needs to be determined. Details of these procedures could be included in all course Assessment policies and student information.
- **Student absence from tasks?**

See *ACE Manual* 11.13 for requirements related to students' absence from, or failure to submit, assessment tasks.
- **Prolonged absences?**

If possible, students who are absent with leave during the conduct of a scheduled assessment task should complete the task or substitute task under supervised conditions while they are absent. If not, students may complete a comparable task on their return to school, or in exceptional circumstances, are given an estimate.

See *ACE Manual* 11.5.1.1
- **Occasions when estimates are given or substitute tasks administered?**

If a student fails to complete an assessment task specified in the assessment program and the teacher considers the student has a valid reason, for example illness or endorsed leave, an extension of time may be granted or a mark may be awarded based on a substitute task.

In general, administering a substitute task is preferable to providing an estimate mark.

See *ACE Manual* 11.13
- **Occasions when zero marks are awarded?**

Schools should be aware that zero marks are not to be given as a disciplinary measure. However, where the judgement is made that a student has not made a genuine attempt, or does not have a valid reason for not completing a task, or there is evidence of serious malpractice, such as plagiarism and cheating at examinations, then a zero mark should be recorded for that task.
- **Invalid tasks/parts of tasks or non-discriminating tasks?**

It is advisable to have procedures to cover situations where tasks do not function as required, or where there are problems in their administration. In these circumstances, the policy should allow the school to determine a suitable approach, such as reducing the weighting assigned to the task and adding an additional task (with sufficient notice), and adjusting weightings accordingly. In extreme cases, an invalid task may need to be discarded completely, or a replacement task may be organised.
- **Special provisions?**

Principals have the authority to grant special provisions in assessment tasks for students with special needs or for students who have been injured. Schools should consider providing special provisions similar to those available for the HSC examinations, for example, writers, additional time, separate supervision. For some students with disabilities alternative tasks may be devised.

See *ACE Manual* 13.3 and 16.6
- **More than one class following the same course?**

Where possible, common assessment programs should be followed with common tasks, conditions and marking procedures. Where this is not possible, procedures should be in place to ensure that when marks are aggregated and placed on a common scale, this is done reliably. Standards packages may be used to develop a shared understanding of standards, and to inform the setting of comparable tasks and collaborative marking. The use of the Board's *Motorised Markbook* software package may be helpful in standardising marks from different classes.

### 3.1.4 Procedures relating to malpractice

#### What procedures are to be followed when dealing with malpractice in tasks?

The student guidelines should contain a section on what constitutes malpractice, including plagiarism, and how the school will act should it become aware of any form of malpractice brought to its attention.

Malpractice is any activity undertaken by a student that allows them to gain an unfair advantage over others. It includes, but is not limited to:

- copying someone else's work in part or in whole, and presenting it as their own
- using material directly from books, journals, CDs or the internet without reference to the source
- building on the ideas of another person without reference to the source
- buying, stealing or borrowing another person's work and presenting it as their own
- submitting work to which another person such as a parent, coach or subject expert has contributed substantially
- using words, ideas, designs or the workmanship of others in practical and performance tasks without appropriate acknowledgement
- paying someone to write or prepare material
- breaching school examination rules
- using non-approved aides during an assessment task
- contriving false explanations to explain work not handed in by the due date
- assisting another student to engage in malpractice.

Schools may find it useful to establish a committee to review any cases of suspected malpractice and determine the appropriate action should the malpractice be proven.

If the malpractice is proven, a zero mark should be considered for that task. In some circumstances, the school may decide to administer a substitute task with significantly different supervision. Whatever approach is taken the penalty should be appropriate to the seriousness of the offence.

#### What strategies can schools use to ensure the authenticity of student responses to tasks completed partially or wholly outside of class time?

Strategies include:

- providing advice to students on what constitutes malpractice and how to avoid it
- thoroughly briefing all students in relation to the requirements of each task
- allocating class time to the planning of a response to a task
- requiring that students maintain a process diary or journal to show how their response or project or work was developed
- asking students to submit a task at critical points in its development
- having students submit their original drafts in addition to their final work
- incorporating student oral presentations on the progress of their work
- communicating clearly to students the extent of teacher, or other expert or outside, involvement permitted in the development of the work.

When group tasks are required for internal assessment, the school should ensure that:

- they are designed to assess the contribution of individual group members
- they allow each student's understanding of the process to be demonstrated
- the group agrees on procedures for how the task will be developed.

### **3.1.5 Guidelines for maintaining secure records of all marks awarded for assessment tasks**

**What procedures will be used for recording assessment marks:**

- by the teacher?
- for school records?

Marks for individual assessment tasks, and records of competency, should be recorded by the teacher responsible for marking the task.

Schools need to ensure that procedures exist for protection of the data in the event of fire, theft or other misadventure. These procedures may include having a centrally-filed hard or electronic copy of the marks and duplicates stored off-site.

While schools are not required to retain test papers, student assignments, projects or practical exercises, as evidence of student achievement, all marks need to be available so that the computations determining the final assessment mark can be checked in the case of a school review of assessments.

### **3.1.6 Procedures for providing assessment marks for students who transfer into the school after the commencement of the HSC course**

For students who transfer into a school after 30 June in the year of the Higher School Certificate examination, the previous school is to provide assessment marks.

In the case of VET curriculum framework courses for the Higher School Certificate, students who have achieved units of competency through study or experience are not required to be reassessed for recognition of those units of competency. However, a qualified assessor from an RTO must have assessed such competencies.

See *Recognition of Prior Learning for the Higher School Certificate* under 'Manuals and Guides' on the Board's website.

### **What procedures will operate for students who enter the HSC course after the commencement of the HSC Assessment program?**

The principal must be satisfied that students who are changing courses have satisfactorily completed the relevant Preliminary course (or equivalent), and that they will be able to complete all HSC course requirements, including Assessment.

For students transferring into the school, the procedures in place should ensure that a fair and valid assessment mark can be calculated.

See *ACE Manual* 11.13.12

### **What procedures are in place to monitor the provisional entry of students into HSC courses?**

The principal may allow a student who has received an 'N' determination in a Preliminary course, to proceed to an HSC course provisionally while concurrently satisfying any outstanding Preliminary course requirements. Principals will, however, be required to confirm at the time of HSC entries, that the student has now satisfactorily completed the relevant Preliminary course requirements and that their entry for the HSC course is valid.

The school should document all details of communication with parents and students relating to the conditions applied to the provisional entry of students into HSC courses.

See *ACE Manual* 11.4.2

## **3.1.7 Procedures for dealing with the assessment of accelerants and accumulants**

### **What procedures are to be followed to accommodate:**

- **accelerants?**
- **accumulants?**

Accelerants should complete all assessment tasks, or their equivalent, that are undertaken by students completing requirements in the normal time frame. However, there may need to be flexibility in the order and timing of assessment tasks. Therefore, programs of work may have to be specifically tailored to the accelerant's needs.

See *Guidelines for Accelerated Progression* (revised 2000)

In the case of an accumulant who is repeating a subject where a major work or project is required, the major work or project entered and marked in a previous year cannot be resubmitted without the special permission of the Board.

See *ACE Manual* 11.6.3.3 and 12.3.3.1

### 3.1.8 Awarding marks for an assessment task and providing feedback to students on their performance in tasks and their progress

#### What marks will be awarded for an assessment task?

It is important to ensure that marks earned on individual tasks adequately reflect the differences in student performance. To achieve this, marking guidelines need to use the full range of marks available for the task.

This does not necessarily mean that student marks must be spread across the whole range. Nor does it mean that only marks in the top half of the mark range should be awarded because most students' final assessment mark on their *Record of Achievement* will be between 50 and 100. It is important to remember that both the initial examination marks obtained by students following the marking process, and the initial moderated assessments, are aligned to the performance scale through the standards-setting process. This results in most students receiving reported marks between 50 and 100. The initial marks may have been spread across a wider range.

Students will be awarded marks commensurate with the quality of their response in relation to the marking guidelines. The marking guidelines for assessment tasks should enable teachers to reward work that shows more complex development and higher order achievement with higher marks. At the same time, students whose work demonstrates only a basic level of achievement should receive relatively low marks.

#### What level of discrimination should schools use when they apply standards?

Provided the marking guidelines have been well constructed to enable the full range of marks to be awarded for each task, where appropriate, it is likely that for most groups the final assessment marks will show sufficient discrimination between the achievements of the students. For some school groups, particularly if the group is small or particularly homogeneous in ability, the range of assessment marks may be relatively small. For many school groups, however, particularly those containing students with a wider range of abilities, the range of assessment marks might well be very large (eg 20–90 marks, or more).

Where students are placed on the same mark, any subsequent processing of the marks cannot separate these performances. When 'clumped' assessment marks are moderated, all the students who are grouped on one mark remain on one mark – which can disadvantage some of them if in fact there are even small differences between their achievements as measured by the school's assessment program.

Students' performances in the HSC are also used in the calculation of the students' University Admission Index (UAI). Their initial examination marks and initial school assessment marks after the statistical moderation is applied to the assessments (that is, before the alignment to the performance scales) are re-scaled by the Universities Admission Centre to create the UAI rank used in the selection of students for tertiary courses.

## **What feedback will be given to students in relation to the standards?**

Teachers provide feedback to students to assist their learning. The effectiveness of feedback to students on their performance on assessment tasks can now be significantly improved in the standards-based system used for the HSC. Teachers can work through with their students some of the materials in the HSC standards packages. For example, when teaching a topic they might identify the questions that were related to that topic in the 2001 or 2002 HSC examination. They can discuss the requirements of that question with their students, show them the marking guidelines that were used to allocate marks and then show them the responses of a number of students whose responses represented different levels of achievement. By working through these responses the teacher can highlight the important features of the responses, including their strengths and any shortcomings.

This approach could be even more effective if the teacher gives a student the opportunity to compare a piece of work they have produced on the same topic with the works in the standards packages. While initially such an approach would be best undertaken with the involvement of the teacher, at a later point it is quite likely that many students would be quite capable of undertaking such an activity as part of their self-assessment. Schools are encouraged to find ways of making the materials in the standards packages available to students, such as placing the standards packages on their computer servers and making them available to students as well as teachers.

Using the performance band descriptions in relation to individual assessment tasks can be a useful way to let students know where they stand in relation to the standards. In doing this, however, teachers need to take care that students do not conclude that this is the band they finally will achieve. Students and parents need to understand that the final assessment marks reported to the Board will be statistically moderated, and then reported on a scale where the majority of marks will lie between 50 and 100 marks. Hence, the school-based marks below 50 submitted to the Board can be aligned to a mark of 50 and above, provided the achievement demonstrated is above the minimum standard expected.

In the case of VET courses, the assessment of competencies is on the basis of performance against the performance criteria set out under each element of competency. A participant is judged either competent or not yet competent. This judgement is made on the basis of a range of evidence, which may be in a variety of forms.

## **How can marks that discriminate be reconciled with the descriptions in the performance bands?**

Students (and parents) need to understand that the marks awarded for individual tasks and the final school assessment marks do not need to mimic the marks on the scale used for reporting the final HSC mark. Students need to understand that the full range of marks is applied to questions in the HSC examination. When these marks are added together a total mark below 50% can end up equal to or greater than 50% depending upon how the work of students who have achieved that mark relates to the performance standards for the course.

Feedback on tasks should be meaningful and provide students with an indication of their performance relative to the outcomes being assessed and their general progress. The wording of outcomes and the band descriptions can be used, where appropriate, for providing feedback to students.

## **If teachers report students' performance by using bands, is there a danger that some students will not receive the same band in the HSC? What can be done about this?**

If schools use the performance bands as part of the information they report to students the danger is that at least some students will not receive the same band in their final results. If schools wish to report using performance bands there needs to be strong evidence that teachers are engaging with the contents of the standards packages

and are internalising the standards, as this may reduce the risk of significant differences between the school's judgements and the final reported marks.

Parents, students and teachers need to understand that the performance band reported by the school is an estimate only. They need to understand there is a process of moderation of assessment marks used to obtain comparability between different schools and the process used by the Board to align marks to standards. Materials are available to assist schools to advise parents.

Particular care needs to be taken if schools refer to performance bands in their reporting during the course – either for individual tasks or at some point in time (eg at the end of Year 11 or the end of Semester I, Year 12.) In general, students will build on their knowledge and skills as they progress through the courses. Hence, any comparison of a student's achievement part of the way through the course with the course standards may underestimate the student's final achievement. The message needs to be given that:

- within the limits of the knowledge and skills so far covered in the course, the student's achievements most closely match that in the band reported, and
- if the student continues to progress in their learning at the same rate, they are on target to achieve that particular band.

It must be emphasised, however, that student performance will not necessarily be consistent throughout the course and that students may often improve significantly or perform below earlier expectations at later points in time.

Teachers can refer to bands and help students understand the strengths and weaknesses of their work in the manner referred to in the previous section when providing feedback to students. It does not necessarily follow that a band needs to be formally recorded or reported in such cases.

### **Will students be given an indication of their general progress?**

Some schools may decide that it is appropriate to give each student a cumulative rank after each assessment task or at key points throughout the course. However, schools need to be sure that correct weightings have been applied to the tasks before reporting such a measure of general progress. It should also be noted that later tasks generally have greater weighting than tasks completed early in the program, and as a consequence, rankings may change.

### **What procedures will be established for the distribution of the *Assessment Rank Order Advice* to each student at the end of the HSC exams?**

It is stressed that actual marks should not to be revealed to students, but students must be informed that they can collect their *Assessment Rank Order Notice* from the school after the last HSC examination at their centre and within the period of time for appeals. Students may also see their final rank in each course by using the *Students Online* service. Schools should note that the *Assessment Rank Order Lists* are provided for the information of the principal and staff only.

See *ACE Manual* 11.13.17

### 3.1.9 Procedures for advising students in writing when they are in danger of not meeting the assessment requirements in a course

#### What procedures are in place to monitor satisfactory completion of a course?

A student will be considered to have satisfactorily completed a course if, in the principal's view, there is sufficient evidence that the student has:

- followed the course developed or endorsed by the Board; and
- applied themselves with diligence and sustained effort to the set tasks and experiences provided in the course by the school; and
- achieved some or all of the course outcomes.

While the Board of Studies does not stipulate attendance requirements, principals may determine that, as a result of absence, the course completion criteria may not be met. Clearly, absences will be regarded seriously by principals who must give students early warning of the consequences of such absences. Warning letters must relate the student's absence to the non-completion of course requirements.

Some schools appoint an assessment coordinator to track student progress.

See *ACE Manual* 11.4.1

#### What procedures are in place to inform parents when students have failed to submit or undertake assessment tasks?

If there is no valid reason for not completing or submitting an assessment task a zero mark must be recorded for that task. The parent/guardian should be advised, in writing, if the student is under 18.

See *ACE Manual* 11.13.11.1

#### What procedures will be used to warn students who are in danger of being given an 'N' determination?

Students studying an HSC course must make a genuine attempt to complete course requirements. These requirements include students applying themselves with diligence and sustained effort to the set tasks and experiences provided in the course by the school, regardless of whether or not these tasks contribute to the final assessment mark. It is a matter for the teacher's professional judgement to determine whether a student has made a genuine attempt to complete these requirements.

Students should receive meaningful feedback in all aspects of their course work. This may be in the form of marks, grades and/or written comments. Comments may be informed by the performance band descriptions. The feedback given for tasks that do not contribute to the final HSC assessment mark should assist students in their preparation for tasks that are part of the HSC Assessment program.

Students must make a genuine attempt at assessment tasks that, combined, contribute more than 50% of the total assessment mark.

The school should document all details of communication with parents and students regarding failure to meet requirements.

See *ACE Manual* 11.4, 11.13

Sample warning letters regarding 'N' determinations are provided in the *ACE Manual* (Section 11 Appendix 6).

### **3.1.10 Procedures for conducting school reviews of final assessment marks and appeals to the Board**

#### **What procedures will be used when disputes arise over assessment tasks?**

Disputes typically arise over marks awarded, the administration of the task, or whether the task conforms to the school's HSC Assessment policy.

Schools can minimise the possibility of disputes arising by:

- providing clear instructions and expectations for each task
- providing clear criteria for marking
- administering a task simultaneously to all classes in the school studying the course
- using a range of marking strategies, such as common or consensus marking of tasks
- checking that each task conforms with the assessment program.

Schools may wish to consider setting up a panel to settle disputes that cannot be resolved by the class teacher and/or course coordinator. Any panel should be carefully constituted, and it should ensure that evidence from all affected parties is heard.

There can be no appeal to the Board against a school's judgement of a student's performance on a particular task. Any disputes over an individual task must be resolved within the school at the time the task is returned.

#### **What procedures will be established for conducting school reviews of assessment?**

Students need to be aware that they may apply for a school review, and make any subsequent appeal to the Board, only on the basis of the assessment program and the procedures used in arriving at the final assessment mark.

See *ACE Manual* 11.13.18 and 15.4.1

### **What procedures will be established for handling appeals to the Board? How will the relevant documentation be processed?**

Schools must advise students of the provision of an appeal to the Board if they are not satisfied by the school's review of their placement in the rank order for a course. Students should be aware of the grounds for such an appeal, and the closing date for submissions.

See *ACE Manual* 11.13.19 and 15.4.2

### **3.1.11 Communicating the policy**

#### **How does the school make students aware of their rights and responsibilities regarding the assessment program?**

The booklet *Studying for the NSW Higher School Certificate* is made available by the Board to students in Year 10. It is designed to assist students understand their responsibilities in relation to the HSC.

Many schools find it useful to publish an assessment guide for students that provides information about the school's HSC policies and procedures.

Page 30 of this document outlines the features of such a guide.

HSC students also receive a personal copy of the Board publication *Rules and Procedures for Higher School Certificate Candidates* early in the year in which they present for the HSC.

These documents can be quoted in the school's information guide to students.

#### **Where in the school can students, parents and staff go for advice?**

A copy of the *ACE Manual* and relevant Board documents should be available in the school library. Electronic versions of these publications are also available on the Board's website:  
[www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/manuals/acemanual02.html](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/manuals/acemanual02.html)

Copies of the school's policy documents should also be accessible through the school library.

Standards packages are available in schools for most 2001 and 2002 HSC examinations. These contain the relevant syllabus and illustrate the standards established for each course.

Board of Studies Liaison Officers (BOSLOs) are located throughout the state and are available to assist schools with the Board's policies and practices relating to curriculum, assessment and credentialing.

BOSLOs are listed on the Board's website at [www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/contacts/staff\\_boslos.html](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/contacts/staff_boslos.html)

### **What procedures are in place to convey to students, parents and teachers information about the Board's Assessment moderation, judging and alignment procedures, as well as information on university scaling of marks for UAI purposes?**

Information on these procedures can be found in the Board of Studies *2002 HSC Update Newsletters* on the Board's website ([www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc/index.html](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc/index.html)) and *You and Your UAI* (2001) published by the Universities Admissions Centre on UAC's website ([www.uac.edu.au](http://www.uac.edu.au)). These can be used in the development of presentations or documents prepared for students, parents and staff.

### **3.1.12 Evaluating the policy**

#### **Who will monitor and review the assessment program?**

Many schools appoint an HSC assessment coordinator, to oversee the school's assessment program and to provide advice where required. An HSC review panel could be convened to evaluate policies, procedures and lines of communication on a regular basis.

#### **What are the features of quality assessment tasks?**

The following checklist can assist teachers to ensure that the tasks they design promote student learning as well as obtaining accurate measures of student achievement.

Assessment tasks should:

- focus on outcomes
- give students the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do and assist their learning
- be valid and reliable, measuring what the task purports to assess, and providing accurate information on each student's achievement
- allow for discrimination between the performances of individual students.

The effective marking of assessment tasks requires:

- marking guidelines or criteria that provide clear descriptions of the quality of response required to receive each mark
- a mark range that allows for discrimination between the performances of individual students
- a shared understanding of the demands of the tasks among the teachers responsible for the marking
- consistent application of marking guidelines.

Feedback and reporting on student progress and achievement should be:

- meaningful and constructive, designed to assist students to improve their performance
- linked to the specific outcomes and marking criteria addressed by the task
- provided in a timely manner.

Marks for individual assessment tasks and records of competency should be:

- recorded by the teacher responsible for marking the task
- checked to ensure any marks for various parts of a task have been correctly totalled
- transferred to a file or record containing the marks awarded for all tasks for all students in the course
- maintained in a secure and safe location. Some schools choose to keep a secure set of records off-site.

## 3.2 Developing and evaluating an Assessment policy for an HSC course

**An Assessment policy for an HSC course is the working document for teachers involved in teaching each course. Each course Assessment policy is a subset of the school's HSC Assessment policy and must be consistent with it.**

### Checklist

For each HSC course taught within the school there must be policies and procedures that contain:

- statements of the mandatory components and weightings for Board Developed Courses, as set out in the relevant syllabus documents
- details of assessment tasks to be used for each course
- procedures for informing students about the assessment tasks
- procedures to ensure that appropriate tasks are used
- procedures to ensure marks accurately reflect relative differences in achievements between students within the group
- procedures for dealing with separate class groups in the same course
- procedures for recording and processing marks, or for recording VET competencies entered and achieved.

For each course, specific decisions will need to be made relating to the following issues.

### 3.2.1 Board of Studies mandatory components and weightings for Board Developed courses, as set out in the relevant syllabus documents

**How will the course assessment components given in syllabus documents (assessment components, weightings and tasks) be incorporated into the assessment program?**

It is up to the school to determine the various tasks on which the school assessment is to be based and the marks to be allocated to each task. The tasks will be derived from the usual assessment activities associated with the conduct of the course. The syllabuses provide advice on the types of suitable tasks.

### **What procedures are in place to ensure that the course assessment components and weightings given in the syllabus documents are adhered to in the assessment program for each course?**

A strategy many schools have found effective is to appoint an HSC assessment coordinator or an assessment panel to oversee such matters. Developing an assessment grid for each course containing components, weightings and tasks, and conducting a review by the school executive prior to publication of assessment information for students is generally a useful activity.

### **3.2.2 Details of the assessment tasks to be used for each course, including the number of tasks, the nature of each task, the value of each task and the schedule of the tasks**

#### **How many tasks will be used?**

See *The New Higher School Certificate Assessment Support Document* (1999)

A balance is required between obtaining sufficient information and not overassessing. Three to five tasks are considered to be sufficient to assess the components of most two unit courses; for one unit courses, two or three tasks would be sufficient.

Assessment requirements for VET courses are detailed in individual curriculum framework documents.

#### **What will be the nature of each task?**

See *The New Higher School Certificate Assessment Support Document* (1999)

There should be a balance between the assessment of knowledge and understanding outcomes and course content, and skills outcomes and course content. Final assessment should be based on a range and balance of assessment instruments.

The assessment strategies used must be appropriate to the components of the course being assessed.

#### **What will be the value of each task?**

An individual task should not normally be worth less than 10%, nor more than 40%, of the total assessment marks. One task may address several course outcomes. In general, later tasks should carry more weight than earlier tasks.

### When will each task be scheduled?

As a guide, at least two weeks' notice of the details of a task should be given, though longer may be appropriate in some instances (eg submission of a stage of a major project). Teachers must ensure that students have adequate time to prepare for the task.

Due consideration needs to be given to both student and teacher workloads. Sufficient time after the final assessment task should also be allowed in case a substitute task needs to be scheduled.

## 3.2.3 Procedures for informing students about the assessment tasks

### What procedures will be used to ensure students are informed of:

- the scope of each assessment task?
- the form the assessment task will take?
- the proposed timing and duration of the task?
- the outcomes being assessed?
- the marking guidelines or criteria?

## 3.2.4 Procedures to ensure that appropriate tasks are used

The assessment strategies used should be appropriate to the outcomes and components of the course being assessed, for example tasks could include assignments, fieldwork studies and reports, model making, oral reports, research projects, practical tests and open-ended investigations, viva voce, improvisations, arrangements, original compositions, portfolios and presentations of performance. Syllabuses provide advice on the appropriateness of tasks for each subject.

Tasks need to be set at an appropriate level of difficulty that allows the full range of marks to be available.

## 3.2.5 Procedures to ensure marks accurately reflect relative differences in achievement between students within the group

Marking guidelines should indicate the marks to be awarded for different levels of achievement in each task, using the full range of marks. They should be clearly linked to course outcomes. Standards packages provide examples of different standards of performance, and can assist teachers in developing marking guidelines that will appropriately reward students.

In some cases double or panel marking of tasks may be appropriate. When a task, or part of a task, is to be marked once only, consistency may be improved if one person marks the task for the entire candidature.

To maintain the task's stated weightings schools may consider using statistical methods when aggregating the marks for parts of tasks. Software packages such as the Board's *Motorised Markbook* may assist in this process.

### 3.2.6 Procedures for dealing with separate class groups in the same course

**What mechanisms are in place to ensure that all students, including separate class groups, are dealt with equitably in the same course, and that their marks are on the same scale?**

Where more than one class is doing the same course, schools need to ensure that assessment tasks are administered and marked in the same way. Where this is not possible, procedures should be in place to ensure that marks are aggregated and placed on a common scale reliably. This may mean that students' achievement in some tasks will need to be moderated on the basis of performance in common tasks, such as the common components of the trial examination.

### 3.2.7 Procedures for calculating final assessment

**What procedures are in place to ensure that the marks from individual tasks can be aggregated validly?**

The final school-based assessment marks for a course may be reached by the simple aggregation of marks awarded for each assessment task or through statistical standardising procedures. Either method, if applied with care, should ensure that the final rank order and relative differences accurately reflect the achievements of the students.

Although schools are not required to use statistical procedures in producing assessment marks, such procedures may help ensure that the weightings for each task are as intended. There are computer programs, such as the Board's *Motorised Markbook*, which can assist in calculating and storing assessment marks.

Statistical procedures may not be appropriate in courses with small candidatures.

Whether using statistical procedures or not, care should be taken with task design and marking procedures to ensure that unintended weighting of components does not occur. Quality assessment tasks in a variety of styles, pitched at an appropriate level to cater for the full range of students, and that use marking schemes that discriminate and avoid compacting the differences between the best students should result in a good spread of marks. This will assist in ensuring that tasks carry the correct weightings and that the final assessment marks accurately reflect the relative achievements of the students.

### 3.3 Developing and evaluating advice provided to students on HSC Assessment

Schools must provide information about the school's HSC Assessment policies and procedures to all students before they begin their HSC courses. This information provides a guide to students and their parents regarding the school's assessment procedures. It must be consistent with all aspects of the school's overall HSC Assessment policy. Some schools have procedures for students to acknowledge receipt of this information.

#### Checklist

**Typically, a student information guide to HSC Assessment includes the following features:**

- information on the nature and purpose of HSC Assessment, and may include information on the judging, moderation and alignment processes used by the Board of Studies  
See *Further Information*, (page 31)
- student responsibilities regarding assessment tasks, and the consequences of failure to submit assessment tasks  
See 3.1.3 (page 14), and 3.1.9 (page 22)
- details of procedures relating to assessment tasks, including how and when students will be notified of tasks, to whom and how tasks are to be submitted, whether the electronic submission of work is acceptable, what happens in cases of late submission and absence from tasks. These details would also include illness/misadventure provisions and the general procedures the school will adopt in the event that there are problems with a task  
See 3.1.2 and 3.1.3 (page 14)
- definitions of malpractice in tasks and how the school will act should it become aware of any form of malpractice brought to its attention  
See 3.1.7 (page 18)
- what feedback students can expect on their performance in assessment tasks and on their ranking in individual courses  
See 3.1.8 (page 19)
- guidelines on how students can resolve any concerns about the outcome of a task  
See 3.1.10 (page 23)
- information on the final *Assessment Rank Order Notice*, including when and how it can be obtained  
See 3.1.8 (page 19)
- student entitlements regarding school reviews and appeals to the Board  
See 3.1.10 (page 23)
- where advice may be sought, both within and outside the school (HSC Coordinator, Assessment Coordinator, Head Teacher, Careers Adviser or Board of Studies Liaison Officer)  
See *Further Information* (page 31)
- details of assessment programs in all courses, including Board of Studies Assessment requirements, and a list of all tasks for each of their courses showing the nature of each task, its mark value and its approximate date.  
See 3.2.1 (page 26)

# FURTHER INFORMATION

## Board of Studies publications

Details of the Board's rules and procedures for the Higher School Certificate can be found in:

*Assessment, Certification and Examination (ACE) Manual* (current edition)

Further details on various aspects of the Higher School Certificate can be found in the following documents:

*The New Higher School Certificate Assessment Support Document* (1999)

*Rules and Procedures for Higher School Certificate Candidates*, published annually by the Board

*2002 HSC Update Newsletters Numbers 1-6*

All Stage 6 syllabus documents, including VET curriculum frameworks, have sections on Assessment requirements.

Electronic copies of these publications can be obtained from the Board of Studies website:

[www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au)

## Other publications

Details of rules and procedures for the Universities Admissions Index can be found in:

*You and Your UAI* (December 2001)

*Universities Admissions Centre Guide*, published annually by the Universities Admissions Centre (UAC)

Electronic copies of these publications can be obtained from the Universities Admissions Centre website:

[www.uac.edu.au](http://www.uac.edu.au)

The Universities Admissions Centre can be contacted at:

UAC  
Locked Bag 112  
Silverwater NSW 2128  
Phone: (02) 9752 0200

## Advice

Board of Studies Liaison Officers are located throughout the state and can explain the Board's policies and practices relating to curriculum, assessment and credentialing.

To find out how to contact your closest BOSLO, telephone or write to the Board at:

Office of the Board of Studies NSW  
Policy and Development Branch  
GPO Box 5300  
Sydney NSW 2001

Phone: (02) 9367 8356 (Coordinating BOSLO)

**NOTES**