

Some frequently asked questions about assessment in the New Higher School Certificate

The New Higher School Certificate will result in changes to assessment practice, but these changes will occur over several years commencing in 2001.

The following frequently asked questions deal with changes to assessment practice.

What will need to be done for assessment of Year 11 students in 2000?

For the first Year 11 cohort of the New Higher School Certificate it will not be necessary to make any immediate changes. The Board's requirements remain the same.

The components and weightings for some Preliminary courses in the Assessment and Reporting section of the syllabus may have changed. Teachers may wish to alter their assessment programs to reflect these changes. However, Preliminary course components and weightings are advisory not mandatory.

What will need to be done for Year 12 students in 2001?

The Board's procedural requirements for internal assessment have not changed. If the school's current policies meet the Board's requirements they will be appropriate for 2001.

For each HSC course an internal assessment program for 2001 will need to be prepared. A suggested timeframe for this is June 2000. This will allow plenty of time for schools to publish their assessment programs prior to the first HSC tasks being set.

For the 2001 HSC teachers will provide an assessment mark to the Board as they do now and give clear feedback to students on their achievement of outcomes and relative positions within the school group.

It is suggested that in the school assessment program teachers will:

- focus their assessment tasks on syllabus outcomes
- use a range of task types
- assist students to know and understand the outcomes to be assessed
- develop marking schemes for assessment tasks using words from the outcomes and, where appropriate, the draft performance bands.

What other assessment materials will be available to schools and when will those materials be available?

Specimen examination papers will be available during Term 1 2000.

Following the 2001 HSC examinations, materials which will be available to schools include:

- examination reports on the 2001 examinations including marking schemes for each course
- samples of students' examination responses at the cut-off marks between performance bands

The performance bands will have been enhanced through consideration of:

- internal assessment achievements not currently reflected in the bands, and
- information gained from the 2001 HSC examinations.

This material will help teachers understand the different levels of achievement in each course.

Will it matter if teachers' judgements about standards differ from school to school when determining the internal assessment mark?

No, this will not disadvantage any students. Moderation of school assessments using the examinations will still be in place. This will ensure comparability of assessment marks from each school by matching those assessment marks to the performance of each school group on the common external exam. Over time it is expected that judgements of student achievement across the state will converge as teachers develop a clear understanding of the standards.

Is it appropriate to moderate the course assessment marks submitted by the school by using the exam performance of the school group?

It is important that school assessments are comparable across schools. While school assessments can assess a wider range of syllabus outcomes than the HSC examination it is important to remember that the exam still covers a range of outcomes and that the skills, knowledge and understanding assessed internally often are linked to those required in the examination.

Do the performance scales apply to Preliminary courses as well as HSC courses?

The performance scales are primarily a tool for reporting student achievement at the end of the HSC course. The scales are based on the HSC outcomes. However, they can have a useful place in supporting teaching and learning throughout Years 11 and 12. They can be used to provide:

- goals for the development of student learning
- a common language for providing feedback to students, and
- a means for helping students chart their progress.

They become more relevant the further into the HSC course students have progressed.

In Preliminary courses do all outcomes have to be included in assessment programs?

Schools are responsible for the design of assessment programs for Preliminary courses. In designing those programs all of the course outcomes should be addressed.

It is important for the progress of individual students that teaching programs address all of the outcomes and that feedback is given by teachers on achievement in all aspects of the course. In specifying what is expected to be learned in the course, the course outcomes should be seen in conjunction with the aims, objectives and course content.

It is important not to over assess. Teachers will find that often a number of outcomes can be assessed by a single task.

Outcomes related to values and attitudes are not part of the assessment program.

In HSC courses do all outcomes have to be included in internal assessment programs?

All course outcomes are to be included in internal assessment programs for HSC courses. The HSC examination will also enable students to demonstrate their level of achievement of the course outcomes. The external examination will focus on a sample of course outcomes in any one year. Across a number of years it is expected that all outcomes able to be assessed in an examination will be covered by the HSC exam.

When deciding on satisfactory completion of a Preliminary or HSC course, what does achievement of some or all of the outcomes mean?

Board of Studies course completion criteria have not changed. Satisfactory completion of Preliminary and HSC courses will continue to include the requirement that some or all of the course outcomes have been achieved. This means that a teacher makes an on balance decision that there has been at least some achievement by the student of what students are expected to learn in the course. Teachers have been making this decision for many years under the current Higher School Certificate.

Should I use a mark below 50 for internal assessment to indicate that students are not meeting the minimum standard expected?

Teachers should continue to use a range of marks to reflect the rank order and relative differences in student achievement. Once the performance scales move from draft form after the 2001 HSC examination teachers might use the scales as a broad guide to the range of marks for their internal assessment.

How can the internal assessment mark most accurately reflect the standard achieved by an individual student by the end of the course if their performance varies during the course?

Internal assessment measures overall performance in all the components of the course. The performance of some students during the course of the HSC assessment program might significantly alter from the first assessment task to the last. Changes in performance can vary for a variety of reasons including which outcomes are the focus of the assessment task.

In assessing student achievement against standards the final assessment mark is more likely to reflect the standards achieved when:

- the weight of individual tasks is not less than 10 per cent nor more than 40 per cent so that no one task counts too little or too much
- tasks towards the end of the assessment program have higher weight values so that the later performances count more
- outcomes and components are assessed by more than one task so that there is more than one opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes.

It is important that the weightings allocated to each task in the school's assessment program be adhered to.