

A Review of the HSC Assessment Program

New South Wales. Board of Studies, 1998

Overview of the document

100 page review of the Higher School Certificate (HSC) Assessment Program which examines the use of school-based assessment in the HSC. The review has its origins in the 1997 McGaw recommendations for reform of the HSC and aims to provide a picture of current practices to assist with the implementation of the changes proposed in the McGaw Report. The review makes 10 recommendations including a key recommendation that the use of school-based assessment as part of the HSC program should be continued.

Keywords

Assessment; external examinations; school-based assessment; HSC; validity; reliability; moderation; relationship between school assessment and external examinations.

Table of Contents

FOREWORD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

Scope of the Review

Conduct of the Review – Steering Committee/Project Team

Review Methodology

The Report Format

2. A BACKGROUND TO HSC ASSESSMENTS

3. SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR HSC ASSESSMENT

4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SCHOOL ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION MARKS

Introduction

Theoretical Argument for an Expected Correlation

The Observed Correlation

The Need for Moderation

Effects of Moderation on the Exam/Assessment Correlation

The Relationship between Inflated Assessments and Academic Performance

5. PHASE 1: FOCUS GROUPS

6. PHASE 2: SCHOOL AND STUDENT SURVEYS

School Survey

Student Survey

7. FINDINGS FROM THE HSC SUBJECT EVALUATIONS

Research Methodology

Research Findings

8. PHASE 3: FEEDBACK SEMINARS

9. A SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

APPENDICES

A. The Steering Committee and Project Team

B. Chronology of HSC Milestones

C1. Review of HSC Assessment Program – School Survey

C2. Review of HSC Assessment Program – Student Survey

D. Statistical Findings from School Survey

E. Statistical Findings from Student Survey

Summary of Contents

FOREWORD

- Written by Bernie Shepherd, Chair, HSC Assessment Review.
- Notes that the Review was initiated following issues raised in HSC Report by Barry McGaw and that it is timely for the Board of Studies to obtain a ‘snapshot’ of school-based HSC assessment prior to the implementation of changes based on Securing Their Future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Overviews the contents of the Report.

1. INTRODUCTION

- Notes the origin of this Review in the release of McGaw Report, ‘Shaping their Future’ and the subsequent White Paper, ‘Securing their Future’, which proposed changed to school-based and external assessment. Proposes that in order to implement these recommendations, a picture was needed of current practices.

Scope of the Review

- Notes that in profiling current practices, information was sought from teachers, parents and students in relation to three major issues:
 - “What are the “good” or positive aspects about the present use of school assessment in the HSC program?”
 - “What are the “bad” or negative aspects?”
 - “What would you like to change?” (p. v)
- Notes that issues in each of these areas were “identified and quantified using survey methodology”. Notes that subject evaluations were undertaken as part of the White Paper, a series of teacher feedback sessions was also used and that a synthesis of these findings was used to develop a series of recommendations for the use of school assessment in the HSC. (p. v)

Conduct of the Review – Steering Committee/Project Team

- Notes that the Review was undertaken by staff of the Office of the Board of Studies under the direction of a Steering Committee.

Review Methodology

- Notes that survey techniques were primarily employed for data collection, focus groups were used to develop survey instruments and that feedback seminars on survey findings were held with teachers.
- Notes that this Review drew on an earlier review of HSC Assessment (Eltis) but that the major difference is that this Review had broader scope.

The Report Format

- Lists the contents of the Report, noting that it is organised into different part to facilitate the Board’s consideration of the Review and its findings.

2. A BACKGROUND TO HSC ASSESSMENTS

- Presents a short chronology of the use of school based data for HSC assessment.
- Notes that the most significant milestone in student credentialing was the requirement for schools to provide assessment for the HSC, which began in 1986.

- Notes that since that time, students have received two separate marks for each course: one is their external examination mark, the other is the assessment mark submitted by schools which is “statistically moderated to a common scale using the examination marks”. (p. 4)
- Notes that since 1986, changes to procedure have “evolved through school experience”. (p. 8)

3. SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR HSC ASSESSMENT

- Notes that there are two constructs – reliability and validity – which need to be considered when measuring student achievement.
- Outlines the rationale for the introduction of the school assessment component of the HSC, arguing that it provided a means of increasing both the reliability and the validity of HSC measures, thus reducing measurement error.

4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SCHOOL ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION MARKS **Introduction**

- Notes that this chapter provides a statistical profile of the relationship between the school assessments and external examination marks.

Theoretical Argument for an Expected Correlation

- Begins with the statement “In general, school assessments provide an opportunity to assess students on a broader range of outcomes than external examinations.” (p. 12)
- Presents a theoretical model of “the underlying abilities being measured”. (p. 12)

The Observed Correlation

- Notes that although Key Learning Areas “are no longer in official use” they provide “a convenient way to summarise information”. (p. 13)
- Lists descriptions of the observed correlations between the moderated assessments and external examination marks using the KLAs. (p. 14)

The Need for Moderation

- Discusses the need for moderation and notes the high correlation between the moderated school assessment and the examination and that raw assessments produced by schools are “generally not a common scale”. (p. 16)
- Argues that while schools can accurately rank students within the school, they are not accurate in comparing students in other schools.

Effects of Moderation on the exam/assessment Correlation

- Moderation statistically adjusts the raw assessments for each school group to have a similar distribution to the examination marks obtained by the school group. (p. 17)

The Relationship between Inflated Assessments and Academic Performance

- Notes that there is a tendency for raw assessments to be higher than moderated assessments and presents tables and figures to illustrate this point.

Summary of Findings

- Makes the following points:
 1. “There are theoretical arguments to expect the total school assessment to correlate with the examination mark, even though the former has been considered to be a much broader measure. Firstly, the external examining

process itself has broadened to include many skills that were not formerly measured by external examinations. Secondly, the additional components captured by the school assessment (considered to be conceptually distinct skills from those tested in a written examination) may themselves be correlated with the written examination. When the marks for these skills are aggregated in forming school assessment, they will each contribute to the total correlation between the aggregate school assessment and the examination.” (p. 23)

2. “The statewide course correlations between the moderated assessment and the examination mark are generally very high with a median correlation of 0.90.” (p. 24)
3. “There are considerable variations in the strength of these statewide correlations across the various KLAs. The highest correlations tend to occur in Science and LOTE with mathematics and TAS closely following. The lowest mediation correlations occur in English with there being little difference between the correlations across the various English courses.” (p. 24)
4. “The necessity for moderation is obvious from a number of facts:
 - The statewide course correlations increase from a median of 0.76 to a median of 0.90 after correlation;
 - Scatterplots of school raw assessment means against examination means show a broad scatter, with some schools having raw assessment means well in excess of their examination means.” (p. 24)
5. “The tendency for schools to produce inflated assessments is related to their average level of academic performance. The lower performing schools tend to produce more inflated assessments than the higher performing schools.” (p. 24)

5. PHASE 1: FOCUS GROUPS

- Notes that the first phase of Review involved focus groups at eight schools with the school executive, Stage 6 teachers and Year 12 students.
- Notes that the following issues were canvassed in focus groups:
 1. The strengths and benefits of the HSC Assessment.
 2. Numbers and types of tasks (Tests, examinations, practical work, research, home-based tasks, performance, oral presentations, etc.).
 3. Timing of tasks (in relation to other tasks, to holidays and other HSC commitments).
 4. Clarity of school policy; clarity of Board policy.
 5. Authenticity of take-home tasks.
 6. School rules associated with the assessment program (eg. Absences).
 7. Assessment “rorts”.
 8. Stress and the HSC assessment (positive and negative effects).
 9. Tasks across two or more classes, including moderation of marks.
 10. Tasks for each component with the correct weightings.
 11. Equity in the assessment processes (for example in group work).
- Notes that the questions posed in focus groups included the following:
 - “What are the “good” or positive aspects about the present use of school assessment in the HSC program?”
 - “What are the “bad” or negative aspects?”
 - “What would you like to change?” (p. v)
- Overviews the major themes that emerged from the focus groups.

6. PHASE 2: SCHOOL AND STUDENT SURVEYS

- Notes that the second phase of the Review involved the school and student surveys.
- Provides an overview of results from School Survey in the following areas:
 - Purpose of the HSC Assessment.
 - School Assessment Programs.
 - Completion of Tasks by Students.
 - Effect of HSC Assessment on Staff and Students.
 - Moderation and Reporting.
 - Training and Support.
 - Assessment Guidelines and Policies.
 - Open-Ended Responses.
- Provides overview of results from Student Survey in the following areas:
 - Purpose of the HSC Assessment.
 - School Assessment Programs.
 - Completion of Tasks by Students.
 - Effect of HSC Assessment on Students.
 - Assessment Policies and Guidelines.
 - Open-Ended Responses.

7. FINDINGS FROM THE HSC SUBJECT EVALUATIONS

- Notes that as part of the HSC White Paper, the Board of Studies endorsed a process of subject evaluations and as part of this evaluation, the Board commissioned a research company to ascertain the views of practising teachers.
- Outlines the research methodology and findings of this study.

8. PHASE 3: FEEDBACK SEMINARS

- Notes that the third phase of the Review involved a series of feedback seminars with teachers where the findings of the statewide surveys of schools and students were presented. Provides a description of these feedback seminars.
- Notes that one of the major issues to come out of the feedback seminars that was not evident in the school survey was the matter of training and development needs arising from the move to the Standards Based Assessment foreshadowed in the Government's HSC White Paper.

9. A SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

- Notes that this chapter summarises common themes that emerged from the review and presents recommendations for consideration of the Board of Studies.
- Makes the following recommendations:
 - The Pace of Assessment in the HSC Program:
 - Recommendation 1: "The current system of using school-based assessment as part of the HSC credentialing process be retained." (p. 54)
 - The Number and Weighting of Tasks:
 - Recommendation 2: "The Board specify that the number of tasks to be used in a school's HSC Assessment program for 2 Unit courses be no less than 4 and no greater than 7 tasks (including Trial HSC and other major school examination where schools decide to use these)." (p. 55)

- Recommendation 3: “The Board specify the weighting of individual Assessment tasks to be set between 10% (minimum) and 40% (maximum).” (p. 55)
 - Degree of Prescription:
 - Recommendation 4: “Schools should have as much flexibility as possible in deciding the nature of their total assessment program. However, the Board requires at least one “non-test” task within each course.” (p. 55)
 - Recommendation 5: “The Board provide advice and guidance on the issue of the authenticity of students’ work when they undertake home assignments.” (p. 55)
 - Advice and Support for Schools:
 - Recommendation 6: “The Board endorse a program of support to schools in the areas of HSC Assessment with such support to include:
 - The provision of examples of “best practice” within various aspects of the HSC Assessment processes
 - The provision of a range of sample assessment tasks for in-school use and to generate “assessment ideas”
 - The revision and re-issue of the Assessment Issues pamphlets, as appropriate, and the preparation of additional pamphlets relevant to the changing assessment context
 - Investigation of the feasibility of enhancing available computer software, such as the Motorised Markbook and Principal’s Analysis Package, to assist teachers with the collection and processing of student assessment data.” (p. 56)
 - Relationship between Assessment and Examination Scores:
 - Recommendation 7: “The Board seek expert statistical advice on the effects of examination mark/school assessment correlations on students’ HSC results, including the UAI.” (p. 57)
 - Recommendation 8: “On the basis of this expert advice the Board provide definitive advice to schools, on the appropriate relationship between the school assessment and external examination marks.” (p. 57)
 - The Change to Standards Based Assessment:
 - Recommendation 9: “The Board develop a set of guidelines for the implementation of standards based assessment and reporting within schools.” (p. 58)
 - Recommendation 10: “These guidelines serve as the basis for a statewide training and development program for teachers developed in cooperation with the educational systems.” (p. 58)