

P–12 assessment policy

Students in Queensland benefit from a formal program of standards-based assessment. The major purposes of an assessment program are to improve teaching, help students achieve the highest standards they can within their own capabilities, and provide meaningful reports to parents/carers on students' achievements.

This document outlines the Queensland Studies Authority's (QSA) P–12 assessment policy and guides assessment practices. The major audiences for this document are members of the QSA's committees and panels, staff of the QSA and teachers who work in partnership with the QSA to assess and report on students' achievements.

The QSA's functions

The QSA was established by the *Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Act 2002* (the Act), which has the following objects:

- to help schools achieve quality learning outcomes for their students
- to facilitate students' transition through the education sectors
- to maintain public confidence in certificates of achievement.

To achieve these objects, the QSA:

- develops and approves Years 1–12 syllabuses and curriculum guidelines for the early years
- develops and revises documents to support the implementation of approved syllabuses and the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines*
- provides professional development to teachers to implement approved syllabuses and the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines*
- accredits Years 1–12 syllabuses and preparatory guidelines
- develops, marks and administers tests, and reports students' test results
- decides assessment procedures
- provides moderation procedures to ensure comparability of teachers' judgments in deciding results
- issues certificates of achievement
- exercises delegated authority in vocational education and training (VET) matters

- provides students with Overall Positions (OPs) and Field Positions (FPs) as a basis for tertiary entrance (and related tertiary entrance functions).

The QSA's assessment responsibilities and commitments

The QSA has a range of responsibilities in a P–12 assessment program:¹

- Early Learning Record in the Preparatory Year of schooling
- Year 2 Diagnostic Net
- P–3 Literacy and Numeracy Indicators
- National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9
- Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks (QCATs) in Years 4, 6 and 9
- an online Assessment Bank (containing assessment resources for Years P–9)
- examples of high-quality assessment instruments and annotated samples of student work for Authority subjects in Years 11–12
- externally moderated school-based assessment for Authority subjects in Years 11–12
- quality-assured school-based assessment for Authority-registered subjects in Years 11–12
- assessment in Workplace, Community and Self-directed Learning Projects in Years 10–12
- competency-based assessment in VET in Years 10–12
- external examinations in selected subjects for some students in Year 12
- Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test in Year 12
- Overall Positions and Field Positions for tertiary entrance
- the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE), Senior Statement, Tertiary Entrance Statement and the Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA).

Assessment is the purposeful and systematic collection of information about students' achievements. All Queensland students deserve to benefit from high-quality assessment programs.

In school-based assessment, teachers are responsible for designing assessment programs and making judgments about the standards achieved by their students.

The QSA is committed to supporting teachers by providing them with exemplar assessment instruments that are accompanied by annotated samples of student responses, and engaging teachers in social moderation of their assessment practices and their judgments of the standards achieved by their students.

The QSA does not support the identification of individual school results during the public reporting of whole-cohort standardised testing results. Evidence from overseas shows that such practices do not improve teaching and learning. Rather, they result in the detrimental effect of teachers “teaching to the test”, thereby narrowing the rich teaching and learning opportunities and range of student achievements described in well-constructed syllabuses.

When school-based assessment is complemented by standardised assessment programs designed to measure the health of a system, the QSA supports the stance that such programs are best conducted as periodic sample tests, and results are reported at system level only. Examples of such tests are the triennial tests in Scientific Literacy conducted under the National Assessment Program and the Program for International Student Assessment.

The QSA promotes equitable outcomes for students, excellence in curriculum and assessment, and high-quality syllabuses and assessment programs. The QSA has a proactive stance on the appropriate representation of different kinds of cultural knowledge and experience (especially Indigenous knowledge and experience) in its syllabuses and assessment practices.

Syllabuses and assessment

Syllabuses approved by the QSA include a section on assessment to guide school and classroom assessment practices in the:

- early phase, which focuses on proficiency in early literacy and numeracy
- middle phase, which focuses on engagement with culturally and scientifically significant knowledge
- senior phase, which focuses on pathways with the goal of preparing students for further education, training, work and active citizenship.

The Act makes clear links between syllabuses² and assessment. The QSA-approved syllabuses for the early, middle and senior phases of learning prescribe the content and achievement standards for Queensland schools.

Content states what students are expected to know and do by the end of key junctures of schooling (general objectives and subject matter or *Essential Learnings*).

Achievement standards are fixed reference points used to describe how well students have achieved the general objectives or *Essential Learnings*. The description of achievement standards are derived by groups of teachers and subject experts describing the actual differences in examples of student work.

Achievement standards are described in the current senior syllabuses, the *Year 10 Guidelines*, the *Essential Learnings and Standards* and the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines*.

Purposes of assessment

The purposes of assessment are to:

- promote, assist and improve learning
- inform programs of teaching and learning
- provide information for those people – students, parents, teachers – who need to know about the progress and achievements of individual students to help them achieve to the best of their abilities
- provide information for the issuing of certificates of achievement
- provide information to those people who need to know how well groups of students are achieving (school authorities, the State Minister for Education and Training, the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training).

It is common practice to label assessment as being *formative*, *diagnostic* or *summative* according to the major purpose of the assessment.

The major purpose of formative assessment is to help students attain higher levels of performance. The major purpose of diagnostic assessment is to determine the nature of students’ learning and then provide the appropriate feedback or intervention. The major purpose of summative assessment is to indicate the standards achieved by students at particular points in their schooling. It is geared towards reporting and certification.

Assessment instruments

High-quality assessment instruments:³

- have construct validity (the instruments actually assess what they were designed to assess)
- have face validity (they appear to assess what you believe they are intended to assess)
- give students clear and definite instructions
- are written in language suited to the reading capabilities of the students for whom the instruments are intended
- are clearly presented through appropriate choice of layout, cues, visual design, format and choice of words

- are used under clear, definite and specified conditions that are appropriate for all the students whose achievements are being assessed
- have clear criteria for making judgments about achievements (these criteria are shared with students before they are assessed)
- are used under conditions that allow optimal participation for all
- are inclusive of students' diverse backgrounds
- allow students to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their achievements
- only involve the reproduction of gender, socioeconomic, ethnic or other cultural stereotypes if careful consideration has determined that such reproduction is necessary.

Principles of assessment and reporting

The following ten principles guide the QSA's assessment practices.⁴

1. Assessment is clearly linked to making judgments about how well students have achieved the *Essential Learnings* or general objectives within the scope of the content/subject matter of syllabuses.
2. Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process.
3. Assessment is a key element of the professional practice of teachers.
4. Informed teacher judgment is at the heart of good assessment practice.
5. Assessment practices are responsive to the diverse needs of students and are underpinned by equity principles.
6. Assessment judgments are standards-based.
7. In school-based assessment where assessment is continuous, all assessment is formative.
8. In school-based assessment, summative judgments about standards are made by teachers at key junctures of schooling for reporting purposes.
9. Reports of student achievement are defensible and comparable, based on sound evidence and shared understanding of *Essential Learnings* or general objectives and the scope of content/subject matter in syllabuses.
10. Reports of student achievement are readily interpreted by their intended audiences.

Reporting the results of assessment

Where assessment involves the public reporting of results, there needs to be:

- moderation of assessment instruments that have the capability to assess student achievement of *Essential Learnings* or syllabus general objectives and are within the scope of the syllabuses' content/subject matter specifications
- judgments of students' achievements with reference to articulated standards
- records of the standards attained by students
- feedback to teachers and syllabus writers
- moderation of teacher judgments of standards.

Comparability of standards

When the results of assessment are to be reported publicly, the QSA advocates social moderation of teachers' judgments as being the best system of ensuring comparability of standards across Queensland.

In a system of social moderation, groups of teachers meet formally to assure the quality of assessment instruments and ensure that judgments of standards are comparable from school to school through a process of negotiation.

For social moderation to work effectively, the following are required:

- syllabuses that clearly describe the content and achievement standards
- contextualised exemplar assessment instruments
- samples of student work annotated to explain how they represent different standards
- consensus through teacher discussions on the quality of the assessment instruments and the standards of student work
- professional development of teachers
- an organisational infrastructure encompassing the QSA and schools to ensure the above takes place.

The QSA's assessment capability

The QSA continually improves its assessment capability and practices by:

- regularly reviewing its methods, materials and the overall results of assessment
- providing regular professional development to QSA staff who work in the areas of teaching, learning, assessment and reporting
- engaging assessment experts to assist in the professional development of QSA staff

- training members of moderation panels, people who set the senior external examinations, test constructors, and test and examination markers
- ensuring consistent assessment nomenclature across the three phases of learning
- actively engaging in state, national and international discussions and debates about assessment issues.

Teachers' assessment capabilities

The QSA supports teachers from the Preparatory Year to Year 12 to develop the best possible assessment practices by providing:

- professional development for teachers who are required to assess students for QSA's reporting purposes⁶
- professional development of teachers to be able to construct high-quality assessment instruments, make defensible judgments of students' achievements and use test data and data from comparable assessment tasks for formative purposes
- models of assessment practices that can be accessed easily by all teachers
- avenues for teachers to engage in professional discussions about assessment issues.

End notes

1. This program is further described in the document, *P–12 assessment overview*.
2. The definition of "syllabus" in the Act is that a syllabus includes *standards of learning and standards of assessment, for an area of learning*.
3. Assessment instruments are the tools used by schools and the QSA to gather information about student achievement, for example:
 - recorded observation of students playing a game of volleyball in Health and Physical Education at Still Water College in Semester 1, 2007
 - write-up of a field trip to the local water catchment and storage area at Hidden Valley Christian School in August 2010
 - the April 2008 Year 3 class test of number facts at Yorky Bend SS
 - the 1999 Senior External Examination in Chinese
 - the 2006 QCS Test
 - the 2008 Year 4 English comparable assessment task.
4. The QSA's six principles for exit assessment are explained in syllabuses for authority subjects and study area specifications for authority-registered subjects.
5. See QSA's *Equity guidelines* and *Policy on special provisions for school-based assessments in authority and authority-registered subjects*.
6. The QSA's reporting purposes are summarised in the document, *P–12 Assessment Overview*.

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