

# Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks (QCATs) – Information Statement

## What are QCATs?

QCATs are a component of the QCAR Framework. They are authentic, performance-based assessments that:

- involve solving a meaningful problem
- emphasise critical thinking and reasoning
- provide students with the opportunity to do their best work
- produce evidence of what students know and can do in relation to a selection of Essential Learnings.

## Why have QCATs?

QCATs are intended to provide teachers, students and parents/carers with information about student learning. They are designed to:

- support and improve over time, consistency of teacher judgment of student achievement using the Standards
- provide a model of quality assessments aligned to the Essential Learnings
- provide parents/carers with information on how well their child is achieving in the assessment of a selection of Essential Learnings
- provide feedback to students
- support school planning by providing information about what students know, understand and can do through Ways of working and Knowledge and understanding.

## What will be assessed?

QCATs will assess a selection of the Essential Learnings in the key learning areas (KLAs) of English, Mathematics and Science in Years 4, 6 and 9 Essential Learnings:

- in Year 4 — by the end of Year 3 Essential Learnings and Standards
- in Year 6 — by the end of Year 5 Essential Learnings and Standards
- in Year 9 — by the end of Year 9 Essential Learnings and Standards.



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Department of Education, Training and the Arts



**Queensland  
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*Partnership and innovation*

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## How will schools know which Essential Learnings will be selected for QCATs?

A *Design brief*, clearly identifying the Essential Learnings to be assessed, will be provided to schools around June of the year prior to implementation of QCATs. For example, the selected Essential Learnings for the 2009 implementation of QCATs were published on the QSA website in July 2008 to inform schools. The *Design briefs* for the 2010 QCATs will be available on the QSA website in July 2009.

## When will QCATs be implemented?

Full implementation of QCATs will begin in 2009. Schools have eight school weeks to implement QCATs. This allows sufficient time to organise school programs and provides flexibility to implement the assessment tasks at any time within the timeframe. The information below outlines the implementation periods for Years 4, 6 and 9:

Years 4 and 6: Schools **receive** the assessment packages four weeks prior to the Easter vacation: **16 March 2009**.

Schools **return** assessment results to QSA four weeks after the Easter vacation: 18 May 2009.

Year 9: Schools **receive** the assessment packages four weeks prior to the September vacation: 24 August 2009.

Schools **return** assessment results to QSA four weeks after the September vacation: 2 November 2009.

For most schools, these timeframes incorporate a student free day. Schools may elect to use this day for marking of assessment tasks or for strategies to improve consistency of teacher judgments.

## Should QCATs be embedded in a unit of work?

QCATs are designed to assess how well students know, understand and can apply their learning in relation to a selection of Essentials Learnings. The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) does not recommend the embedding of QCATs in units of work, as this may reduce the capacity of the assessments to demonstrate how well students can apply their learning in contexts other than those in which the knowledge and skills were acquired.

## How can teachers prepare for QCATs?

It is important that teachers read the materials provided by the QSA. It is recommended that teachers work through each QCAT before it is given to students to gain an insight into what is required and thus support planning for implementation.

School administrators can support teachers with the implementation of QCATs through classroom and whole-school planning as well as by ensuring that teachers understand the purpose and strengths of performance-based assessment.

## How can teachers prepare students for QCATs?

Students should have had the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding described by the selected Essential Learnings well in advance of participating in the QCATs.

There is an expectation that teachers will orient students to the assessment. This could involve ensuring that students practise any specific skills they have not used for a significant period of time. Inappropriate activities would involve a teacher rehearsing the actual or similar task.

The *Teacher guidelines* provide information for teachers on how to accommodate and make adjustments for those students who have been identified as having specific educational needs.

## What resources will teachers receive?

QCAT packages will be delivered to schools. Each QCAT package includes the following:

- *Student booklet* (one per student)
- *Guide to making judgments* (provided both in the *Student booklet* and the *Teacher guidelines*)
- *Teacher guidelines* (specific information for teachers to support the administration of QCATs); a model response is included.

In addition to the QCAT packages, teachers are provided with a range of examples of Sample student responses on the QSA Assessment Bank website.

## How long does it take to implement each QCAT?

Each QCAT will take approximately 90 minutes for students to complete. Schools may choose when to implement each QCAT within the nominated implementation period of eight weeks. Some preparation time may be needed to prepare students before undertaking a QCAT. The decision whether to implement QCATs in one session, or over multiple sessions, depends on the school.

## What role do teachers have in implementing QCATs?

Teachers have a central role in the successful implementation of QCATs. *Teacher guidelines* are provided. However, teachers make informed decisions appropriate to their context about:

- preparing students for QCATs
- choosing how and when the QCATs will be implemented (within the given eight weeks)
- providing sufficient scaffolding to ensure students have every opportunity to do their best work
- grading and evaluating student responses to the QCATs
- improving the consistency of teacher judgments
- providing feedback to students on the strengths and weaknesses of their performance
- using the information to plan for the next stage of learning.

## What will QCATs look like?

Each QCAT is designed to be an authentic performance-based assessment task.

QCATs require students to use relevant and useful knowledge, thinking and practical skills to create a product or a response to a meaningful problem.

Each QCAT begins with a Group discussion during which students with their teachers explore the context of the problem to be solved. This discussion is designed to support all students in the class so that they have the best opportunity to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do in relation to the selection of Essential Learnings for the QCAT.

Below is an extract, Setting the Scene: Group discussion, from a Year 6 Science QCAT.

*Student booklet — Year 6 Science*

### Setting the scene: Group discussion

The picture below is a photograph of a moonrise.


If we watch the Moon over a few hours, it appears to rise above the horizon and move across the sky.

We notice the Moon and how it changes, but do we ever stop to wonder about it?

There are many questions that we could ask about the Sun and Moon. Talk about these with your class:

- What causes the Moon to rise and set?
- Why does the shape of the Moon change from one night to the next, and why does it not always rise at the same time?
- Why do we sometimes see the Moon during the day?
- The Sun also rises, but it doesn't change shape and we never see it at night. Why?

In this task you will use your scientific understanding to explain ideas about the Moon, Earth and Sun.



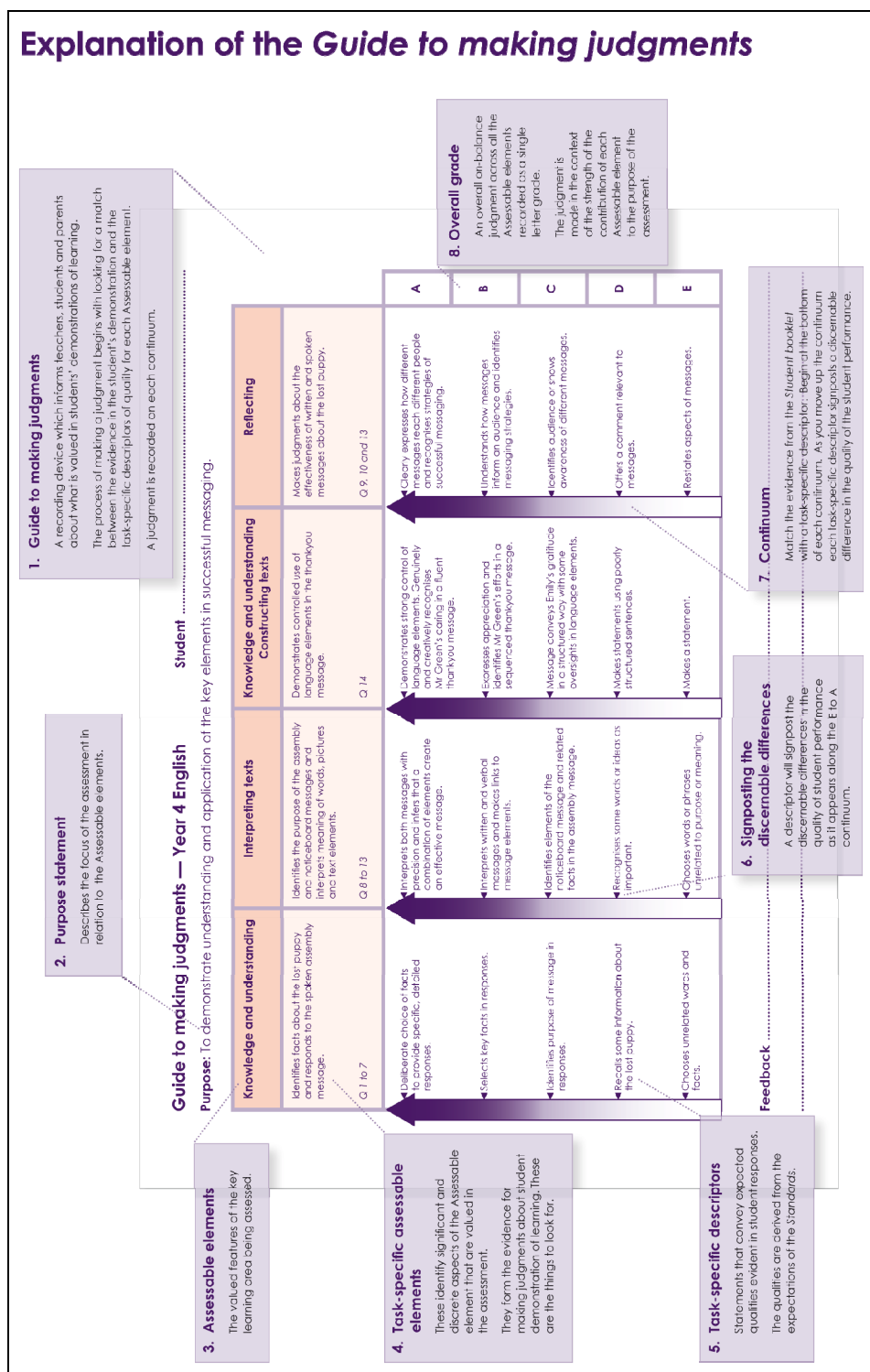
(Image: Bad moon rising, Creative Commons: Attribution 2.0 Generic licensed photo from Peterasin's Flickr stream, accessed 28 May, 2008.)

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## How are student responses marked?

Teachers will make judgments about the quality of their students' responses using the common *Guide to making judgments* provided with each QCAT. A model response is provided in the *Teacher guidelines*. If teachers require further examples, they will find a range of annotated student responses on the QSA Assessment Bank website. *Sample student responses* for each standard are accompanied by annotations that explain the match to the task-specific assessable elements and their descriptors. These examples will support the development of a shared understanding about the interpretation and application of the Standards.

This is an example of a *Guide to making judgments* used for QCATs.



## How can QCATs improve consistency of teacher judgments across the state?

QCATs provide opportunities for teachers to build a shared understanding of the Standards and enhance the consistency of their judgments about the quality of student work through discussing, critiquing and analysing student responses to the QCATs. The Standards, through the assessable elements and the task-specific descriptors in the *Guide to making judgments*, provide teachers with a common language to use when describing how well students have completed the QCAT.

This means a consistent process for making judgments is used by teachers of Years 4, 6 and 9 to prepare and implement QCATs, and then grade and moderate student responses.

## The information collected from the QCATs is “low-stakes data”. What does this mean?

The information collected from QCATs is considered to be of most value for use within the school. It is “low-stakes” because it is not intended or suitable for use in measuring school or teacher effectiveness. Individual student information from QCATs is used to give students and parents/carers feedback on the student’s learning. School-level QCATs data can be used by teachers as valuable information to improve teaching and learning within the school. The information forwarded by schools to the QSA is not suitable for a comparison of the performance of students in one school against the performance of students in other schools.

## What information will be available to schools?

Teachers will have immediate access to information about individual student performance via their records on the *Guide to making judgments*. Schools will use an on-line application called the *QCATs Data tool 2009* to submit QCATs data to the QSA. The *QCATs Data tool 2009* strips unique identifiers and provides only aggregate data to QSA.

The data tool allows a school to access its individualised school report only available to the school owning the data. EQ schools will enter their data using OneSchool.

This information can be used by schools and teachers as a basis for professional conversations about planning and to guide future teaching and learning.

## What will happen to the information schools provide to the QSA?

The QSA will provide a report to schools on the implementation of the QCATs. This report will be based on analysis of all data collected.

The QSA collects a random sample from schools of a selection of teacher judgments representative of standards A to E. QSA will also conduct a teacher survey to capture information about the implementation of the QCATs.

The report will provide teachers with insights into the way students typically responded to the QCATs. This information can be used for the purposes of informing the teaching and learning process.

The QCATs report will contribute to:

- teacher understanding of student strengths
- furthering consistency of teacher judgment
- comparability of reported results of student achievement and progress.

The QSA does not require schools to publish their student achievement data in annual reports or other publications. No individual school, cluster or sector data will be disaggregated and published by the QSA. The value of the data is at the school level, where teachers are able to analyse individual and class responses to improve teaching and learning.

## How do QCATs differ from the Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 literacy and numeracy tests?

The Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 literacy and numeracy tests are intended to assess acquired student knowledge in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Part of the purpose of these tests is to provide the Australian Government with data on the number of students who have met the national benchmark standards for literacy and numeracy. These tests are managed under strict conditions of security and rigour — generally termed “test conditions”. These tests are marked centrally.

QCATs assess achievement in a selection of Essential Learnings in English, Mathematics and Science. Teachers grade student responses using a common *Guide to making judgments* that provides a set of task-specific descriptors derived from the Essential Learnings and Standards. QCATs are deliberately constructed to reflect school-based assessments rather than external tests.

## How are QCATs reported to students and parents/carers?

Schools provide students and parents/carers with information about student achievement on each QCAT as part of the twice-yearly reporting process. Teachers report to parents/carers using five grades, A to E, at the end of the semester in which the QCAT is undertaken.

The QSA provides teachers with concise descriptions of the QCATs being implemented in Years 4, 6 and 9. The format of the descriptions will be suitable for inclusion in school report cards and will:

- describe the targeted Essential Learnings and assessable elements assessed in each QCAT
- be updated annually to describe the QCAT.