Assessment and reporting for General senior syllabuses

Purpose

This advice informs schools about the scope of assessment information in syllabuses and the relationship between reporting standards and the results from school-devised assessments and external assessments. It informs local decision-making about how schools construct assessment instruments, grade student work and provide feedback to students and parents.

Scope of assessment advice

New and redeveloped General syllabuses provide more information about assessment than was previously available in the documents they replace. In particular, instrument-specific marking guides (ISMGs) are a new feature that provide fine-grain differentiation of student achievement. This information was previously provided by QCAA outside of syllabuses.

Reporting standards

Reporting standards are summary statements that succinctly describe typical performance at each of the five levels (A–E). They reflect the cognitive taxonomy and objectives of the course of study. The primary purpose of the standards is for certification, though they may be used for twice-yearly reporting on student progress and to provide formative feedback to students.
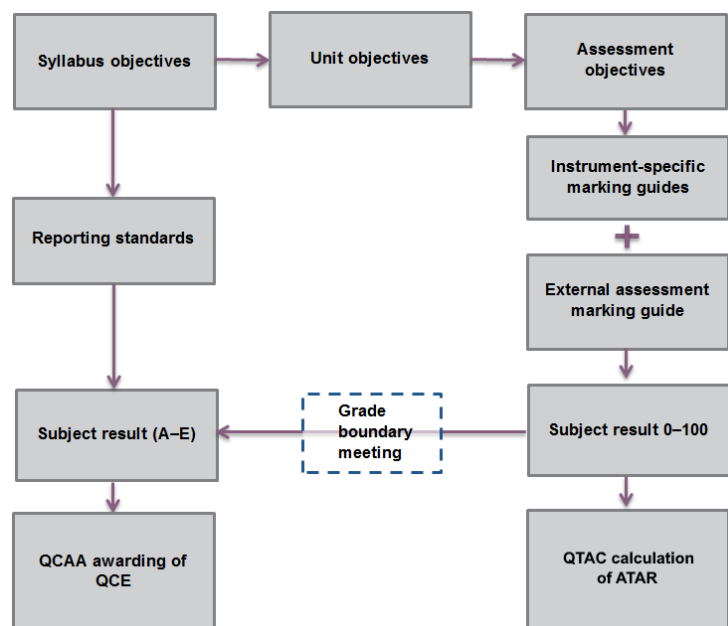
Assessments

Assessments are formative in Units 1 and 2, and summative in Units 3 and 4.

Assessment decisions are informed by syllabus constructs: syllabus objectives inform the reporting standards and unit objectives, and unit objectives inform assessment objectives. Figure 1 demonstrates this and captures how syllabus constructs are used for different purposes.

Units 3 and 4 consolidate student learning. Only the results from Units 3 and 4 will contribute to Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) calculations. The ATAR is the primary mechanism used nationally for tertiary admissions and indicates a student's position relative to other students.

Figure 1

QCAA
Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority

For all Queensland schools

Scope of assessment information

ISMGs

Teachers will use ISMGs to make judgments about internal, school-devised assessments in Units 3 and 4. Each internal assessment in a syllabus is accompanied by an ISMG, which aligns with the assessment objectives and describes the qualities of student work.

ISMGs identify the relative contribution of each internal assessment to a student's overall subject result. The combination of marks from each internal assessment, along with the mark on the external assessment, will produce a subject result of 0–100.

Subject results

Subject results inform standards-based judgments at exit, which are reported as a grade (A–E). QCAA will conduct grade boundary meetings to determine subject results. At these meetings, assessment and subject experts will analyse individual performance on assessment items to establish the relationship between the reporting standards and the marks aggregated using ISMGs and external assessments in any given year. Student work marked out of 100 will be matched to reporting standards to determine the minimum requirement for the Grades A to D and establish cut-offs for each subject. Student results will then be reported as a grade.

Tertiary entrance

An ATAR is a rank indicating a student's position overall relative to other students. It is expressed on a 2000-point scale from 99.95 (highest) down to 0, in increments of 0.05.

An ATAR is calculated by combining a student's best five subject scaled scores. This calculation is based on their best five General subject results or their best results in a combination of four General subject results, and a result from either an Applied subject or a Vocational Education and Training qualification at Certificate III, IV, Diploma or Advanced diploma level.

Scaled scores are derived from a student's subject results as reported to the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) by QCAA, using a process of inter-subject scaling.

Further information about tertiary entrance can be accessed at www.qtac.edu.au/atar-2020.

Assessment in Units 1 and 2

Units 1 and 2 provide foundational learning, which allows students to experience all syllabus objectives and begin engaging with the course subject matter. Students should complete Units 1 and 2 before beginning Units 3 and 4.

The major purpose of formative assessment is to improve teaching and student achievement. Information gathered through formative assessment may be used for other purposes, as schools see fit. Formative assessment provides feedback to both students and teachers about each student's progress in a course of study.

Schools develop internal assessments for each senior subject based on the learning described in Units 1 and 2 of the subject syllabus. Each unit objective must be assessed at least once.

For reporting purposes, schools should devise at least two but no more than four assessments for Units 1 and 2 of each subject. At least one assessment must be completed for each unit. Each school can decide the sequencing, scope and scale of assessments for Units 1 and 2, which should reflect the local context. Teachers are encouraged to use the A–E descriptors in the reporting standards to provide formative feedback and report on student progress.

Further information about teaching, learning and assessment in Units 1 and 2 of General subjects is available from www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/senior/new_snr_assess_features_qce_teaching_learning_assess_general_unit1_2.pdf.

Assessment guidance

In constructing assessment instruments for Units 1 and 2, schools should ensure that the objectives cover, or are chosen from, the unit objectives. If only one assessment instrument is developed for a unit, it must assess all the unit objectives; if more than one assessment instrument is developed, the unit objectives must be covered across those instruments.

All assessments in Units 1 and 2 are school-devised. They should provide students with opportunities to experience the types of assessment they will encounter in Units 3 and 4.

Local decision-making

Schools may use information and data gathered through formative assessment for purposes other than twice-yearly reporting on student progress. Schools will decide what these purposes are and how best to measure student achievement and evaluate performance to achieve local priorities. Local assessment decisions should be informed by syllabus constructs. For the purposes of certification, schools will also make satisfactory/unsatisfactory decisions for Units 1 and 2.

Reporting standards are a coarse-grain decision-making tool; they describe performance at five levels. However, schools may require fine-grain information to make local decisions; for example, they might wish to determine rank order of students in a cohort or year level. Schools may do this in range of ways: a five-point scale may be sufficient to differentiate students in a small cohort; larger cohorts may require a finer grain. A fine-grain decision for other purposes is a school decision, based on factors such as local resources, cohort size and school priorities.

The key to ensuring that an assessment response can be judged using the reporting standards is to use the syllabus and unit objectives to construct the assessment.

It is important to understand that a decision that ranks students and one that matches students to a standard may be related, but they are not the same. Any process that schools use must clearly establish the relationship of the ranking to the reporting standards. That process, through formative assessment, must start with the objectives, reflect the reporting standards and use a 'grain size' that is sufficient for the identified purpose.

Figure 2

Schools should be mindful that the grades and/or marks they report to students are provisional results. Marks for internal assessments in Units 3 and 4 are subject to QCAA confirmation processes. Subject results are ratified and reported by QCAA at exit.