

# Philosophy & Reason subject report

2025 cohort

January 2026





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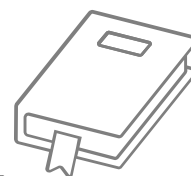
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# Introduction



The annual subject reports seek to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement of internal and external assessment processes for all Queensland schools. The 2025 subject report is the culmination of the partnership between schools and the QCAA. It addresses school-based assessment design and judgments, and student responses to external assessment for General and General (Extension) subjects. In acknowledging effective practices and areas for refinement, it offers schools timely and evidence-based guidance to further develop student learning and assessment experiences for 2026.

The report also includes information about:

- how schools have applied syllabus objectives in the design and marking of internal assessments
- how syllabus objectives have been applied in the marking of external assessments
- patterns of student achievement
- important considerations to note related to the revised 2025 syllabus (where relevant).

The report promotes continuous improvement by:

- identifying effective practices in the design and marking of valid, accessible and reliable assessments
- recommending where and how to enhance the design and marking of valid, accessible and reliable assessment instruments
- providing examples that demonstrate best practice.

Schools are encouraged to reflect on the effective practices identified for each assessment, consider the recommendations to strengthen assessment design and explore the authentic student work samples provided.

## Audience and use

This report should be read by school leaders, subject leaders, and teachers to:

- inform teaching and learning and assessment preparation
- assist in assessment design practice
- assist in making assessment decisions
- help prepare students for internal and external assessment.

The report is publicly available to promote transparency and accountability. Students, parents, community members and other education stakeholders can use it to learn about the assessment practices and outcomes for senior subjects.

## Subject highlights

**37**

schools offered  
Philosophy &  
Reason



**98.18%**

of students  
received a  
C or higher

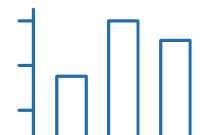


**9%**

increase in enrolment  
since 2024



# Subject data summary



## Unit completion

The following data shows students who completed the General subject.

**Note:** All data is correct as at January 2026. Where percentages are provided, these are rounded to two decimal places and, therefore, may not add up to 100%.

Number of schools that offered Philosophy & Reason: 37.

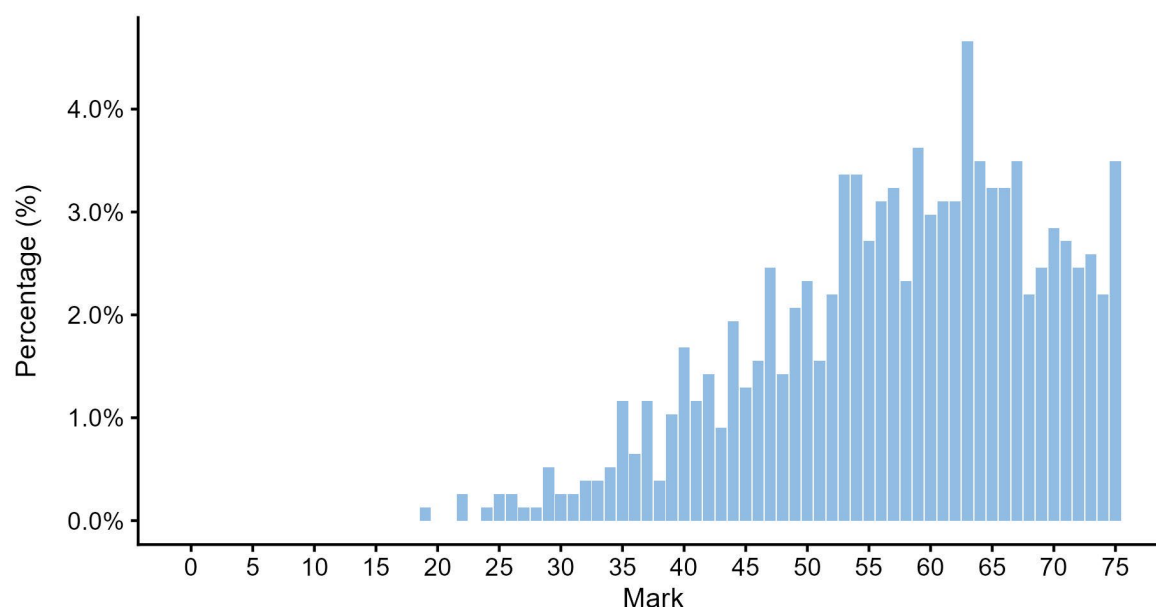
Completion of units	Unit 1	Unit 2	Units 3 and 4
Number of students completed	897	840	769

## Units 1 and 2 results

Number of students	Unit 1	Unit 2
Satisfactory	836	813
Unsatisfactory	61	27

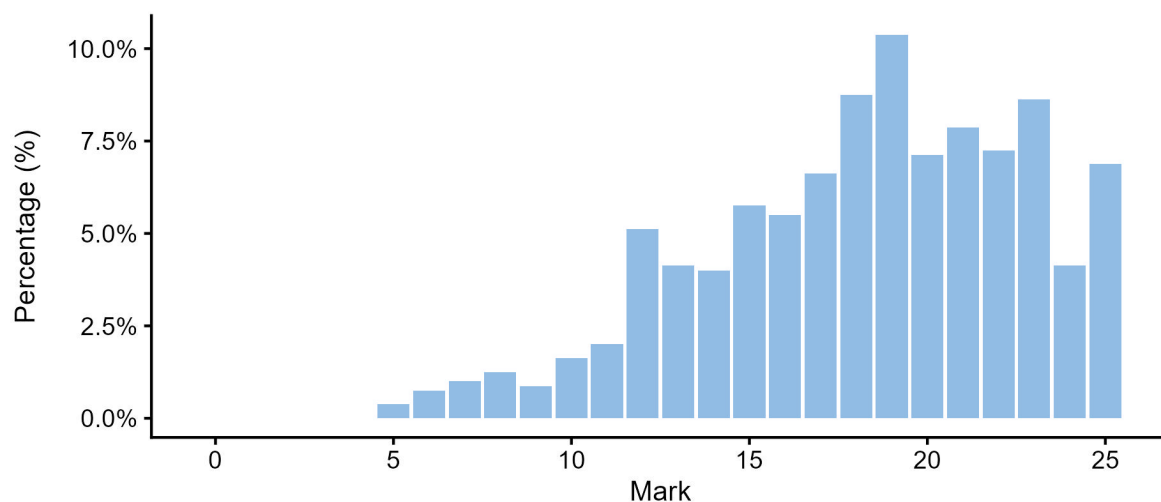
## Units 3 and 4 internal assessment (IA) results

### Total marks for IA

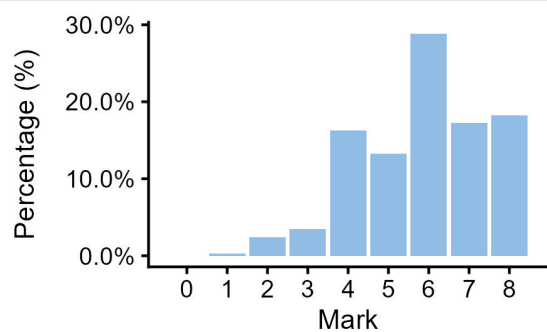


## IA1 marks

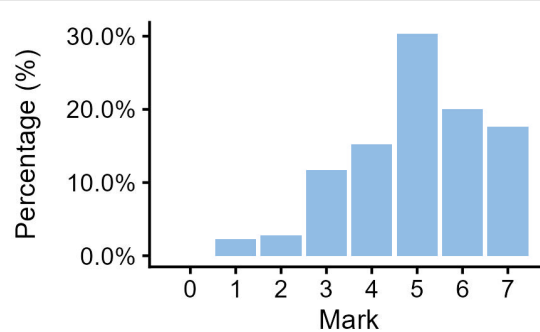
### IA1 total



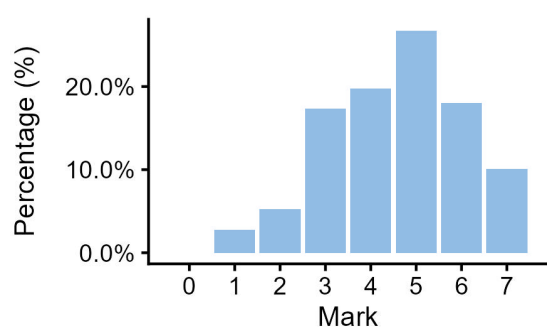
### IA1 Criterion: Defining, using and explaining



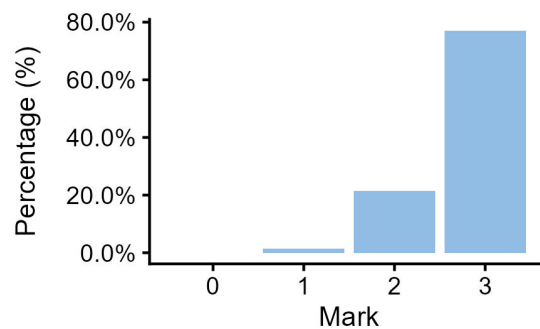
### IA1 Criterion: Interpreting and analysing



### IA1 Criterion: Organising, synthesising and evaluating

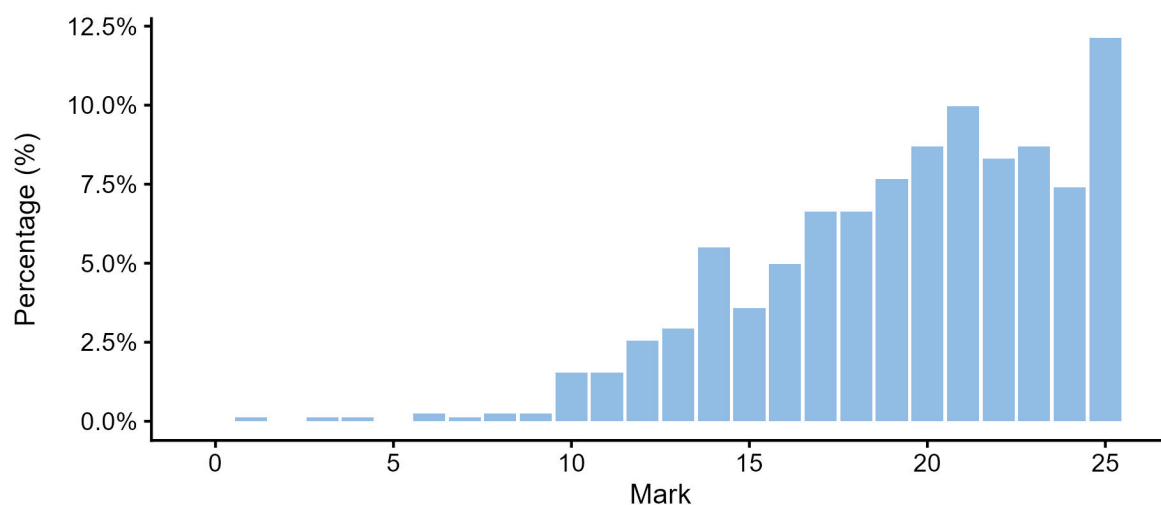


### IA1 Criterion: Creating and communicating

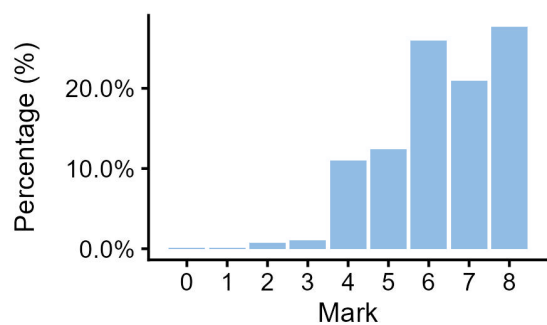


## IA2 marks

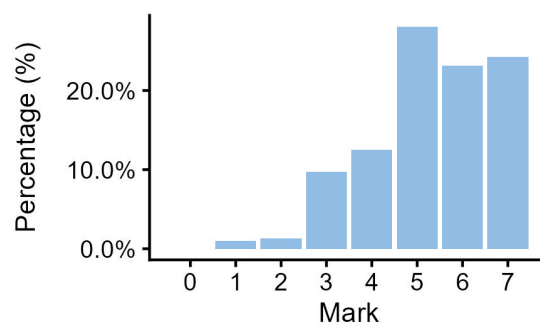
**IA2 total**



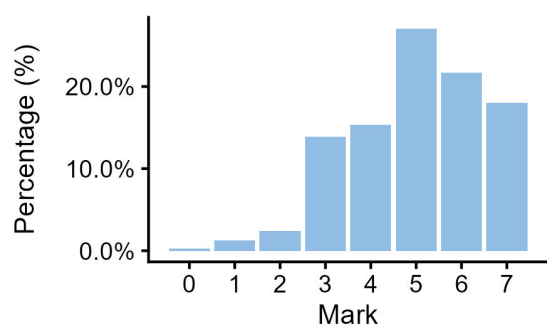
**IA2 Criterion: Defining, using and explaining**



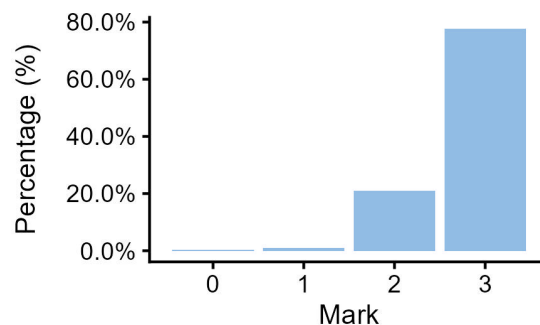
**IA2 Criterion: Interpreting and analysing**



**IA2 Criterion: Organising, synthesising and evaluating**

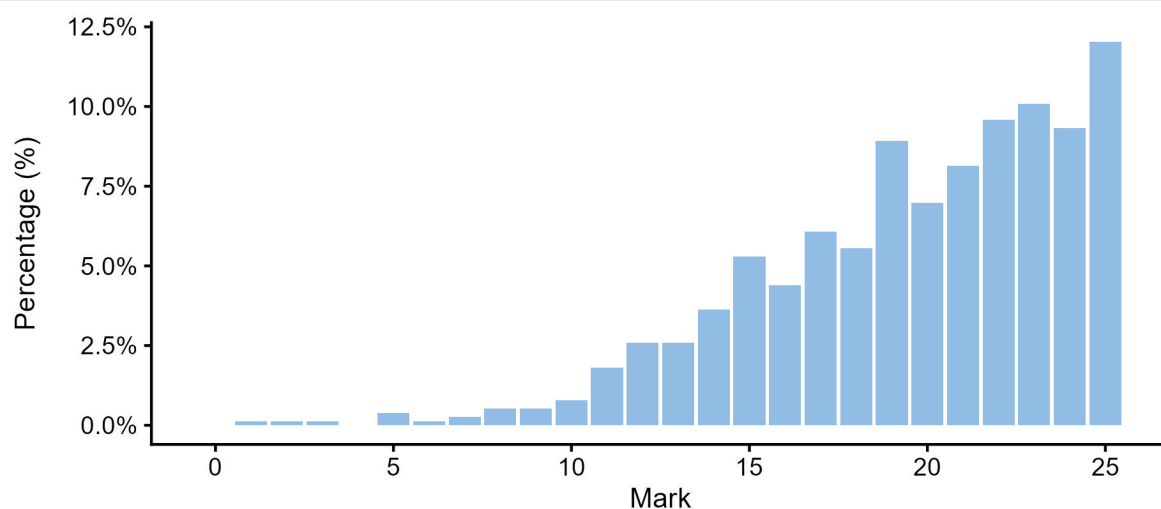


**IA2 Criterion: Creating and communicating**

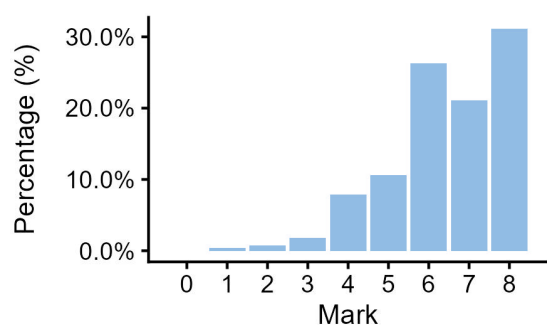


## IA3 marks

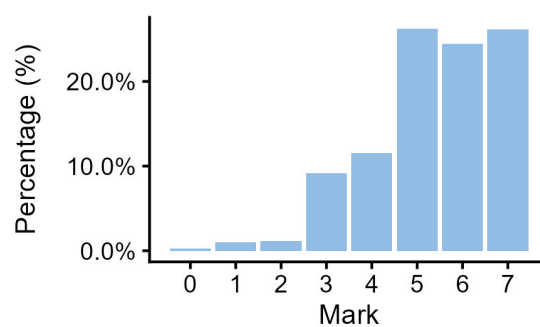
### IA3 total



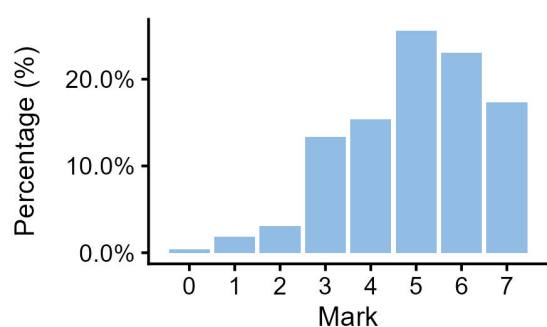
### IA3 Criterion: Defining, using and explaining



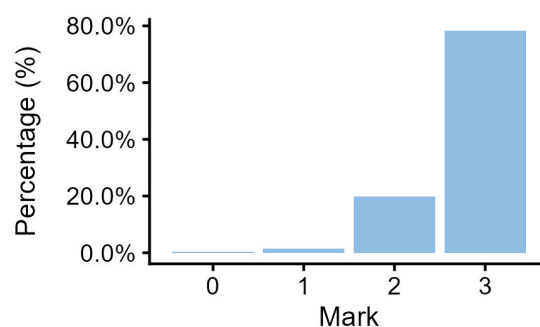
### IA3 Criterion: Interpreting and analysing



### IA3 Criterion: Organising, synthesising and evaluating

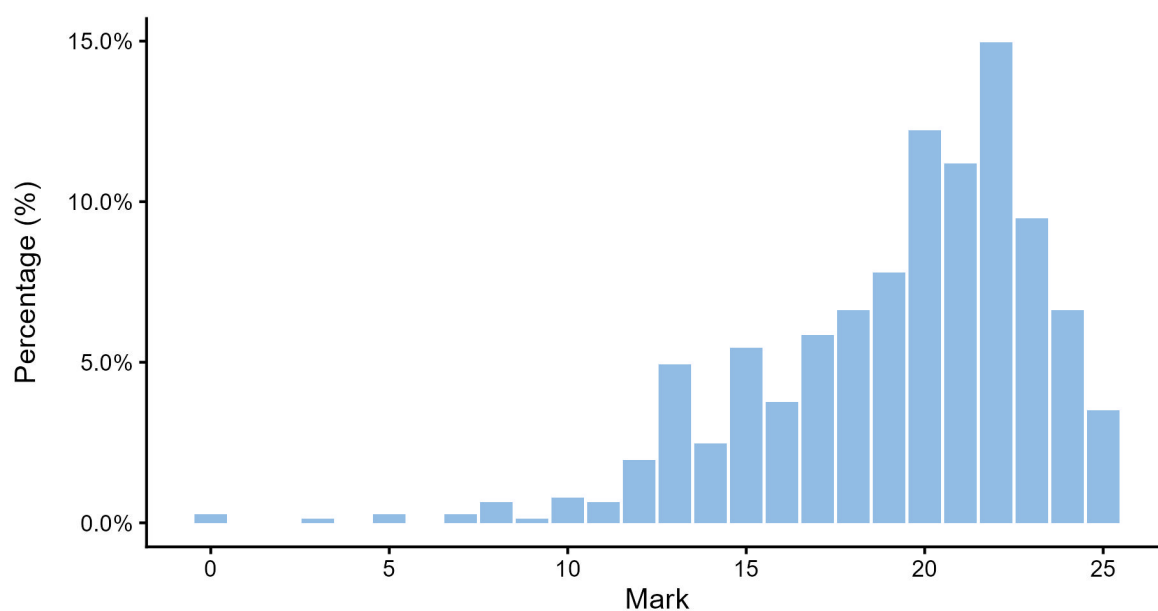


### IA3 Criterion: Creating and communicating



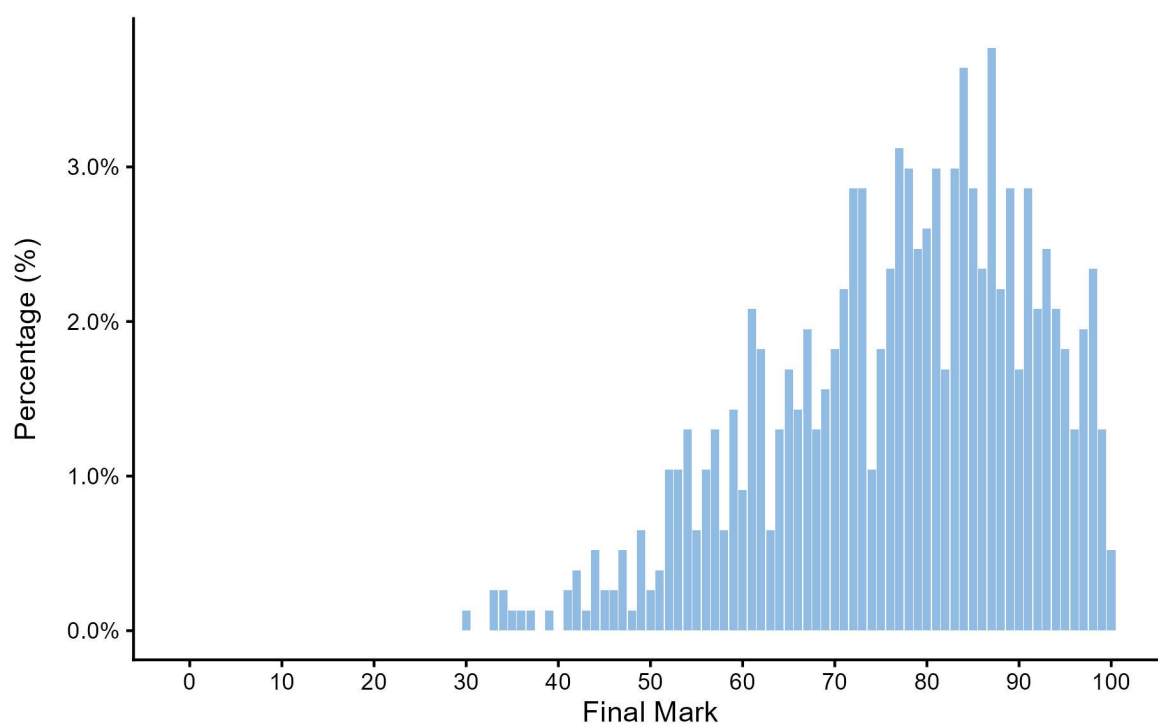


## External assessment (EA) marks



## Final subject results

### Final marks for IA and EA



## Grade boundaries

The grade boundaries are determined using a process to compare results on a numeric scale to the reporting standards.

Standard	A	B	C	D	E
Marks achieved	100–83	82–65	64–43	42–19	18–0

## Distribution of standards

Number of students who achieved each standard across the state.

Standard	A	B	C	D	E
Number of students	316	298	141	14	0
Percentage of students	41.09	38.75	18.34	1.82	0.00

# Internal assessment



This information and advice relate to the assessment design and assessment decisions for each IA in Units 3 and 4. These instruments have undergone quality assurance processes informed by the attributes of quality assessment (validity, accessibility and reliability).

## Endorsement

Endorsement is the quality assurance process based on the attributes of validity and accessibility. These attributes are categorised further as priorities for assessment, and each priority can be further broken down into assessment practices.

Data presented in the Assessment design section identifies the reasons why IA instruments were not endorsed at Application 1, by the priority for assessment. An IA may have been identified more than once for a priority for assessment, e.g. it may have demonstrated a misalignment to both the subject matter and the assessment objective/s.

Refer to *QCE and QCIA policy and procedures handbook v7.0*, Section 9.5.

### Percentage of instruments endorsed in Application 1

Internal assessment	IA1	IA2	IA3
Number of instruments	37	37	37
Percentage endorsed in Application 1	49	62	57

## Confirmation

Confirmation is the quality assurance process based on the attribute of reliability. The QCAA uses provisional criterion marks determined by teachers to identify the samples of student responses that schools are required to submit for confirmation.

Confirmation samples are representative of the school's decisions about the quality of student work in relation to the instrument-specific marking guide (ISMG) and are used to make decisions about the cohort's results.

Refer to *QCE and QCIA policy and procedures handbook v7.0*, Section 9.6.

The following table includes the percentage agreement between the provisional marks and confirmed marks by assessment instrument. The Assessment decisions section for each assessment instrument identifies the agreement trends between provisional and confirmed marks by criterion.

### Number of samples reviewed and percentage agreement

IA	Number of schools	Number of samples requested	Number of additional samples requested	Percentage agreement with provisional marks
1	37	274	0	67.57
2	37	277	0	78.38
3	37	274	0	64.86

# Internal assessment 1 (IA1)



## Examination — extended response (25%)

The examination assesses the application of a range of cognitions to a provided problem, question or hypothesis.

Student responses must be completed individually, under supervised conditions, and in a set timeframe.

## Assessment design

### Validity

Validity in assessment design considers the extent to which an assessment item accurately measures what it is intended to measure and that the evidence of student learning collected from an assessment can be legitimately used for the purpose specified in the syllabus.

### Reasons for non-endorsement by priority of assessment

Validity priority	Number of times priority was identified in decisions
Alignment	15
Authentication	0
Authenticity	0
Item construction	0
Scope and scale	1

### Effective practices

Validity priorities were effectively demonstrated in assessment instruments that:

- included brief primary source philosophical material in the stimulus, rather than material from secondary sources, to enable students to demonstrate interpretation and explanation of the selected ethical theories
- explicitly directed students to use the terminology of reason in their responses, where appropriate.

### Practices to strengthen

It is recommended that assessment instruments:

- provide in the stimulus a contemporary issue with a clear ethical dimension so students can interpret, apply and evaluate principles of the selected ethical theories in relation to the issue
- provide cues in the task instructions that direct students to demonstrate all required objectives of the task, including the use of reasoning terminology
- direct students to use two of the following ethical theories — utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics
- describe in the stimulus a contemporary ethical problem or dilemma that students can adequately engage with in the planning time.

## Accessibility

Accessibility in assessment design ensures that no student or group of students is disadvantaged in their capacity to access an assessment.

### Reasons for non-endorsement by priority of assessment

Accessibility priority	Number of times priority was identified in decisions
Bias avoidance	0
Language	3
Layout	8
Transparency	2

### Effective practices

Accessibility priorities were effectively demonstrated in assessment instruments that:

- gave succinct and precise task instructions
- informed students of the cognitions they were required to demonstrate, using verbs aligned to the cognitions in the assessment objectives and ISMG descriptors
- featured a contemporary ethical issue that was not likely to alienate or distress students, given the issue must be unseen and responded to under examination conditions.

### Practices to strengthen

It is recommended that assessment instruments:

- use the exact language of the syllabus specifications, e.g. Kantian ethics rather than deontological ethics, virtue ethics rather than Aristotelian ethics
- frame the task clearly and objectively to avoid inadvertently positioning students to argue for a particular conclusion
- do not contain any hyperlinks in stimulus material references to preserve academic integrity if the assessment instrument is administered using information and communication technology (ICT).

### Additional advice

When developing an assessment instrument for this IA, it is essential to consider the following key differences between the 2019 and 2025 syllabuses:

- A contemporary ethical problem or dilemma is the only stimulus now required. A hypothetical moral problem or dilemma may be used as stimulus if it has contemporary relevance.
- Assessment conditions no longer include a word limit for responses.
- Instructions should make clear that analysis and evaluation should focus on the application of the two selected ethical theories in terms of their effectiveness in determining a resolution to the stimulus problem/dilemma.

## Assessment decisions

### Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which the results of assessments are consistent, replicable and free from error.

#### Agreement trends between provisional and confirmed marks

Criterion number	Criterion name	Percentage agreement with provisional	Percentage less than provisional	Percentage greater than provisional	Percentage both less and greater than provisional
1	Defining, using and explaining	75.68	21.62	2.70	0.00
2	Interpreting and analysing	86.49	10.81	2.70	0.00
3	Organising, synthesising and evaluating	78.38	18.92	2.70	0.00
4	Creating and communicating	97.30	0.00	2.70	0.00

### Effective practices

Reliable judgments were made using the ISMG for this IA when:

- judgments recognised that
  - responses are to be presented using the analytical essay genre to convey a reasoned argument to the set question. Responses informed the reader of the key claim or assertion they sought to establish through the positing of a clear central thesis
  - a key feature of the analytical essay genre in Philosophy & Reason is a focus on rational rather than rhetorical persuasion, e.g. modality terms used in a response need to be proportionate to the strength of evidence and reasoning supporting a claim.

### Practices to strengthen

To further ensure reliable judgments are made using the ISMG for this IA, it is recommended that:

- when matching evidence to descriptors in the Using and explaining criterion, judgments recognise that
  - terminology use includes the terminology of argumentation, i.e. reasoning
  - to constitute *accurate* use, key reasoning criteria is to be employed without error
  - use is *sustained* by employing the correct terminology in all appropriate contexts to facilitate the logical analysis and evaluation supporting the overall argument being made
  - the inclusion of reasoning terminology that serves little purpose in facilitating analysis or evaluation is appropriately matched to the lower performance levels

- when matching evidence to descriptors in the Interpreting and analysing criterion, judgments recognise that
  - interpretation of ideas and information relating to moral philosophy is revealed in responses through the application of principles of the selected ethical theories to the given problem or dilemma. Descriptions and explanations of ethical principles independent of their application to the given problem are more appropriately assessed by the third descriptor in the Using and explaining criterion
  - the determination of relationships within or between ideas, arguments and/or theories at the mid and upper performance levels requires an explanation of the connection within or between the ideas, arguments and/or theories. Responses that only name a connection without further elaboration more appropriately match identification of relationships at the lower performance levels
- when matching evidence to descriptors in the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion, judgments recognise that
  - at the upper performance levels for the synthesis of ideas and information relating to moral philosophy, the analysis and evaluation of deconstructed arguments must advance or otherwise help establish the essay's central thesis. The analysis and evaluation of deconstructed arguments unconnected to the reasoning employed to establish the essay's central thesis demonstrates synthesis at the lower performance levels
  - *considered* and *insightful* evaluation of claims, arguments, theories and views in moral philosophy (5–6 mark and 7–8 mark performance levels respectively) requires critical reflection on the selected ethical theories in their application to the given problem. Responses that simply recall perceived strengths or deficiencies in the ethical theories without connection to the problem demonstrate evaluation at the lower performance levels
  - the incorrect selection of evaluative criteria by which to assess deconstructed arguments and their premises matches, at best, the 3–4 mark performance level.

## Additional advice

It is essential to consider the following key differences between the 2019 and 2025 syllabuses:

- One mark has been reallocated from the Using and explaining criterion to the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion in the 2025 syllabus.
- The first and second descriptors in each performance level of the Using and explaining criterion have been revised to focus the first descriptor on the use of relevant philosophy terminology and the second descriptor on the use of terminology of argumentation, i.e. reasoning.
- Descriptors at each performance level in the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion have been reduced from five to three. In the 2025 syllabus, the deleted fifth descriptor on use of stimulus material is now incorporated in the first descriptor focusing on synthesis of ideas and information. The deleted fourth descriptor (criteria used in the evaluation of claims and arguments) is addressed by both the revised second descriptor (evaluation of claims, arguments ... using criteria) and the revised second descriptor in the Using and explaining criterion focusing on terminology of argumentation.
- Amendments have been made to qualifiers used in performance-level descriptors across criteria.



## Samples

The following excerpt demonstrates comprehensive and accurate descriptions and explanations of concepts, methods, principles and theories relating to moral philosophy. Within the conditions of the task, Kantian ethics is precisely explained, using relevant terminology in a way that indicates an astute understanding of meaning. Once an overview of the theory is provided, the author demonstrates discernment in identifying the relevant aspect of Kant's moral theory that the remainder of the response will focus on. The subsequent application of the universalisability principle to the stimulus problem provides evidence to determine the quality of the interpretation of Kant's ideas.

**Note:** The characteristic/s identified may not be the only time the characteristic/s occurred throughout a response.

Kantianism is a deontological moral philosophy, meaning it places morality on duty and obligation over evaluating consequences. <sup>the core idea is</sup> It orders that an action is morally permissible so long as it conforms to a rational principle that can be universalised. This principle is the Categorical Imperative which rational agents give onto themselves to then act from reason. <sup>two</sup> ~~The~~ key formulations <sup>from</sup> of the Categorical Imperative include: the formula of universal law, which states that an action is morally permissible so long as the universalisation of its maxim does not result in a contradiction of conception or will, and the formula of humanity that states that an action is morally impermissible if it treats people as ~~a~~ mere means to an end. Because the latter formula is difficult to apply to John's situation, the essay will focus on the formula of universal law and whether the maxim of using AI for academic benefit could logically be willed.



The following excerpt illustrates an appropriate match of evidence in the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion requiring insightful evaluation of claims, arguments, theories and views in moral philosophy. In applying principles of utilitarianism to a stimulus problem involving organ donation for medical research, the response's critique of the moral theory is focused on its application to the given problem. The quality of the evaluation is augmented through careful use of language, with the modality proportionate to the strength of the reasoning provided, and the appropriate criteria (e.g. truth, credibility) used to assess premises.

**Note:** The characteristic/s identified may not be the only time the characteristic/s occurred throughout a response.

P2 makes a reasonable approximation of what may result after donating Sam's body. Donating a body can help make ~~large~~ <sup>and medicine</sup> large strides over time in the knowledge and technology associated with science, potentially benefitting many people<sup>(S3)</sup>. However, this is not certain as Sam's body might not be used or, if it is, contribute in a significant way (S3). ~~Therefore~~ Additionally, the pain experienced by Sam's family if they were to discover her body was not used and disposed of, or, just the pain experienced by letting her body go, <sup>could be</sup> far more substantial than previously thought. This highlights significant problems with the use of the hedonic calculus to determine ~~a~~ <sup>a</sup> moral action because it is <sup>currently</sup> ~~impossible~~ impossible to accurately judge the pain or happiness that will be experienced in the aftermath of an action. If there is no <sup>and</sup> ~~practical~~ trustworthy way to determine the truth of the consequences proposed in P2 then this consequentialist method proposed by utilitarianism is problematic. ~~Despite the fact, pain experienced by Sam's family~~ Thus, P2 is judged to be <sup>only</sup> ~~moderately~~ moderately credible.

# Internal assessment 2 (IA2)



## Extended response — analytical essay (25%)

This assessment focuses on the interpretation, analysis, examination and/or evaluation of ideas and information. It is an open-ended task responding to a particular situation or stimulus materials. While students may undertake some research when writing the extended response, it is not the focus of this technique.

This assessment occurs over an extended and defined period of time. Students may use class time and their own time to develop a response.

## Assessment design

### Validity

Validity in assessment design considers the extent to which an assessment item accurately measures what it is intended to measure and that the evidence of student learning collected from an assessment can be legitimately used for the purpose specified in the syllabus.

### Reasons for non-endorsement by priority of assessment

Validity priority	Number of times priority was identified in decisions
Alignment	13
Authentication	0
Authenticity	0
Item construction	1
Scope and scale	5

### Effective practices

Validity priorities were effectively demonstrated in assessment instruments that:

- explicitly directed students to use the terminology of reason in their responses, where appropriate
- presented tasks that focused the inquiry on one philosophical school of thought explicitly listed in the syllabus (Unit 3 Topic 2)
- included scaffolding that did not position students to argue for certain outcomes, but rather supported students to demonstrate the cognitions in the ISMG performance-level descriptors.

### Practices to strengthen

It is recommended that assessment instruments:

- provide an appropriate contextualising issue in relation to which students can interpret and apply claims and arguments from the selected philosophical school of thought, so students can argue for a conclusion about the applicability of the philosophy's claims and arguments
- supply sufficient stimulus on both the contextualising issue and claims and arguments from the philosophical school of thought to enable students to formulate a response. Students are best placed to address the assessment objectives when the philosophy stimulus includes

substantive philosophical arguments inclusive of reasoning to analyse and evaluate, rather than brief statements or quotes without the supporting reasoning.

## Accessibility

Accessibility in assessment design ensures that no student or group of students is disadvantaged in their capacity to access an assessment.

### Reasons for non-endorsement by priority of assessment

Accessibility priority	Number of times priority was identified in decisions
Bias avoidance	1
Language	1
Layout	0
Transparency	3

### Effective practices

Accessibility priorities were effectively demonstrated in assessment instruments that:

- gave succinct and precise task instructions
- informed students of the cognitions they were required to demonstrate, using verbs aligned to the cognitions in the assessment objectives and ISMG descriptors.

### Practices to strengthen

It is recommended that assessment instruments:

- use accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar
- provide a context statement that
  - does not position students to argue for a certain conclusion
  - only includes information related to the inquiry
  - avoids including information that would be better placed in the stimulus, so students can be rewarded for using it.

### Additional advice

When developing an assessment instrument for this IA, it is essential to consider the following key differences between the 2019 and 2025 syllabuses:

- The task now requires students to arrive at a conclusion about the *applicability* of claims, arguments and ideas from the selected philosophical school of thought to an aspect of contemporary society (rather than the relevance of the school of thought to today's society).
- The stimulus must now
  - contain primary philosophical texts, and not exclusively secondary source material
  - include claims, arguments ideas and/or theories from more than one perspective
  - include information on the societal issue or topic selected
  - be sufficient to enable students to formulate a response, although there is no prohibition on students conducting their own research and consulting a broader range of sources.

## Assessment decisions

### Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which the results of assessments are consistent, replicable and free from error.

#### Agreement trends between provisional and confirmed marks

Criterion number	Criterion name	Percentage agreement with provisional	Percentage less than provisional	Percentage greater than provisional	Percentage both less and greater than provisional
1	Defining, using and explaining	86.49	13.51	0.00	0.00
2	Interpreting and analysing	86.49	13.51	0.00	0.00
3	Organising, synthesising and evaluating	81.08	16.22	0.00	2.70
4	Creating and communicating	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

### Effective practices

Reliable judgments were made using the ISMG for this IA when:

- judgments recognised that the
  - language of reasoning constitutes part of the terminology of the philosophical school of thought, as such language facilitates the doing of philosophy through logical inquiry. Errors in the choice and use of evaluative criteria for claims, premises and arguments were appropriately matched to lower-level descriptors in both the Defining, using and explaining criterion concerning use of terminology, and the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion concerning use of relevant criteria in the evaluation of claims and arguments
  - focus of IA2 responses is on the interpretation, analysis, explanation and evaluation of the selected philosophical school of thought, rather than the societal issue or topic provided as context for the inquiry. Selection of appropriate ISMG performance-level descriptors was based on a response's quality of engagement with philosophical ideas, claims and arguments within and in response to the school of thought.

### Practices to strengthen

To further ensure reliable judgments are made using the ISMG for this IA, it is recommended that:

- for the Creating and communicating criterion, judgments recognise that
  - an analytical essay is connected prose that has the purpose of establishing a central thesis through careful reasoning, with the emphasis on logical rather than rhetorical persuasion
  - where the views of others are used, including from stimulus sources, such references must be clearly acknowledged using a recognised referencing system to match mid and upper performance-level descriptors

- if subheadings are included, they should be used to organise ideas within the essay rather than merely signpost the cognition being demonstrated. Academic integrity also requires that any subheadings used are devised by the student
- the thinking undertaken by the student should be self-evident in their response to the set inquiry question. While it is an acceptable convention within philosophical inquiry for a response to adopt the first person grammatical position, students should be discouraged from describing to the reader what thinking their response will display
- across all criteria, care is taken to correctly apply the principle of best fit. In a performance level that contains a two-mark range, the upper mark of the range can only be awarded if evidence in the response matches all descriptors within (or above) the performance level. The lower mark in the range is to be awarded where evidence in the response matches a majority of descriptors within the performance level. For more information on the application of best fit, see the *Making judgments* webinar in the resources section of the Syllabuses application (app) in the QCAA Portal.

## Additional advice

It is essential to consider the following key differences between the 2019 and 2025 syllabuses:

- One mark has been reallocated from the Using and explaining criterion to the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion in the 2025 syllabus.
- Amendments have been made to qualifiers used in performance-level descriptors across criteria.
- The first and second descriptors in each performance level of the Using and explaining criterion have been revised to focus the first descriptor on the use of relevant terminology of the philosophical school of thought and the second descriptor on the use of terminology of argumentation, i.e. reasoning.
- Subject matter has been strengthened across all units of the 2025 syllabus concerning the translating and symbolising of propositions using logical operators. This should be considered when determining whether an argument deconstruction (Interpreting and analysing criterion) is precise at the top performance level.
- Descriptors at each performance level in the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion have been reduced from five to three. In the 2025 syllabus, the deleted fifth descriptor on use of stimulus material is now incorporated in the first descriptor, synthesis of ideas and information relating to the philosophical school of thought and the selected issue/topic. The deleted fourth descriptor (criteria used in the evaluation of claims and arguments) is addressed by both the revised second descriptor (evaluation of claims, arguments ... using criteria) and the revised second descriptor in the Using and explaining criterion focusing on terminology of argumentation.

## Samples

The following excerpt demonstrates a detailed and accurate deconstruction of relevant arguments relating to the philosophical school of thought (Existentialism). The response employs standard argument form to summarise and present Sartre's argument from his essay, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (contained in the stimulus package). The argument presentation is comprised of clear propositions, which are precisely arranged using a deductively valid inferential structure (chain of *modus ponens*). The precision and accuracy of the deconstruction is aided by symbolised propositions and logical operators. While a dictionary for the symbolised propositions would have further aided the precision of the deconstruction, in the present context their meaning is self-apparent. The connections between ideas highlighted through the use of the conditional

( $\supset$ ) is subsequently expanded on in the response to provide evidence of the determination of relevant and significant relationships within and between ideas in the school of thought.

**Note:** The characteristic/s identified may not be the only time the characteristic/s occurred throughout a response.

One's ability to choose a university course raises an existential dilemma regarding bad faith and authentic decision making. Sartre's existentialist philosophy states that we must use our free will to act authentically despite other influences of bad faith. A standard Sartrean existentialist argument can be presented as follows:

P	P1: Existence precedes essence
$P \supset Q$	P2: If existence precedes essence, then we are condemned to be free
$Q \supset R$	P3: If we are condemned to be free, then we face infinite choices
$R \supset S$	P4: If we face infinite choices, then we will experience vertigo
$S \supset T$	P5: If we experience vertigo, then we will have existential anxiety
$T \supset U$	P6: If we have existential anxiety, then people have a tendency to act in bad faith when making important decisions
$\therefore U$	$\therefore$ People have a tendency to act in bad faith when making important decisions

The following excerpt illustrates an appropriate match of evidence in the Interpreting and analysing criterion requiring the determination of relevant and significant relationships between ideas and arguments of the philosophical school of thought (Existentialism). The response perceptively contrasts the ideas of de Beauvoir to those of Sartre, using de Beauvoir's thought to challenge a number of Sartre's key claims. The ability of the response to position this critique within the context of the contemporary issue provided in the task (selecting university pathways) assists demonstration of insightful evaluation of Sartre's philosophical ideas.

**Note:** The characteristic/s identified may not be the only time the characteristic/s occurred throughout a response.



While this argument is logically valid, it is unsound because premise 2 is not credible. A philosopher from Sartre's time, Simone de Beauvoir, critiques the notion that all individuals possess radical freedom in her seminal work *The Second Sex* (De Beauvoir, 1949). She argued that societal structures have historically relegated women to the status of the "other", positioning them as objects defined in opposition to men. This sexist marginalisation denied women the autonomy and freedom afforded to men. De Beauvoir contends men occupy "the role of the self", while women are viewed as inessential and incomplete, lacking independence (De Beauvoir, 1949). This perspective challenges the assumption that everyone is radically free, highlighting how systemic disadvantages limit the freedoms of marginalised groups. De Beauvoir's analysis asserts that without addressing these inequities, Sartre's claims of radical freedom remain fundamentally flawed. She instead argues for situated freedom, emphasising that our choices and actions are always embedded within and shaped by our specific social, historical, and personal contexts (De Beauvoir, 1949). Within the context, students have situated freedoms in choosing a university course based on authenticity, due to financial, social, and structural constraints. These constraints can include lack of access to resources, such as tutoring or mentorship, which may limit their ability to pursue their true passions. Additionally, the pressure to choose a course that guarantees financial stability or social reputation can override personal interests, as individuals may feel compelled to prioritise practicality over authenticity. This is further complicated when an individual highly excels in a highly regarded field that does not align with personal passions, especially when systemic barriers are in place forcing them to give in to "bad faith". These findings challenge Sartre's claim that we are "condemned to be free", and with this freedom we must act authentically. Sartre's argument assumes that individuals, regardless of their circumstances, possess the freedom to make authentic choices. However, when systemic disadvantages restrict access to resources, opportunities, and social influence, the ability to act authentically with free will is not a given. This is not simply a matter of individuals failing to act authentically due to bad faith, it's that their very freedom to do so is constrained by factors beyond their control. Sartre's argument relies on an idealised notion of freedom, one that overlooks profound limitations imposed by social and economic systems. His skewed world view restricts the credibility of premise 2. Given the evidence of these systemic constraints, his claim that individuals can always choose authentically is deeply flawed. Therefore, as Sartre's assertion of radical freedom is false, his argument is unsound, and his existentialist theory should be rejected.

# Internal assessment 3 (IA3)



## Extended response — analytical essay (25%)

This assessment focuses on the interpretation, analysis, examination and/or evaluation of ideas and information. It is an open-ended task responding to a particular situation or stimulus materials. While students may undertake some research when writing the extended response, it is not the focus of this technique.

This assessment occurs over an extended and defined period of time. Students may use class time and their own time to develop a response.

## Assessment design

### Validity

Validity in assessment design considers the extent to which an assessment item accurately measures what it is intended to measure and that the evidence of student learning collected from an assessment can be legitimately used for the purpose specified in the syllabus.

### Reasons for non-endorsement by priority of assessment

Validity priority	Number of times priority was identified in decisions
Alignment	7
Authentication	1
Authenticity	1
Item construction	5
Scope and scale	8

### Effective practices

Validity priorities were effectively demonstrated in assessment instruments that:

- clearly conveyed the thinking students were required to demonstrate in their responses, using cognitive verbs aligned to those in the assessment objectives and ISMG descriptors
- explicitly directed students to use the terminology of reason in their responses, where appropriate.

### Practices to strengthen

It is recommended that assessment instruments:

- direct students to arrive at a conclusion about the existence, source or status of a specific right or category of rights
- avoid conflating the rights inquiry with the contextualising contemporary issue
- in the stimulus, include primary source philosophical material of sufficient complexity for students to demonstrate interpretation and explanation of philosophical arguments, theories and ideas at the upper performance levels of the ISMG
- include stimulus material relating to the contextualising contemporary issue.



## Accessibility

Accessibility in assessment design ensures that no student or group of students is disadvantaged in their capacity to access an assessment.

### Reasons for non-endorsement by priority of assessment

Accessibility priority	Number of times priority was identified in decisions
Bias avoidance	1
Language	2
Layout	2
Transparency	1

### Effective practices

Accessibility priorities were effectively demonstrated in assessment instruments that:

- described the selected rights issue consistently across all sections of the instrument — the context, task and stimulus.

### Practices to strengthen

It is recommended that assessment instruments:

- articulate the rights inquiry precisely enough to ensure the task is conceptually clear to students
- provide a context statement that
  - does not position students to argue for a certain conclusion
  - only includes information related to the inquiry
  - avoids including information that would be better placed in the stimulus, so students can be rewarded for using it.

## Additional advice

When developing an assessment instrument for this IA, it is essential to consider the following key differences between the 2019 and 2025 syllabuses:

- The stimulus must now
  - contain primary philosophical texts, and not exclusively secondary source material
  - include claims, arguments ideas and/or theories from more than one perspective
  - include information on the contemporary issue selected
  - be sufficient to enable students to formulate a response, although there is no prohibition on students conducting their own research and consulting a broader range of sources.
- There is no requirement that tasks be limited to only inquiring into the rights theories specified in Unit 4 Topic 1.

## Assessment decisions

### Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which the results of assessments are consistent, replicable and free from error.

#### Agreement trends between provisional and confirmed marks

Criterion number	Criterion name	Percentage agreement with provisional	Percentage less than provisional	Percentage greater than provisional	Percentage both less and greater than provisional
1	Defining, using and explaining	81.08	18.92	0.00	0.00
2	Interpreting and analysing	78.38	21.62	0.00	0.00
3	Organising, synthesising and evaluating	78.38	21.62	0.00	0.00
4	Creating and communicating	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

### Effective practices

Reliable judgments were made using the ISMG for this IA when:

- judgments focused on the interpretation, analysis, explanation and evaluation of philosophical ideas, theories and arguments relating to rights, rather than the contemporary issue provided as context for the inquiry
- matching to the ISMG performance-level descriptors was based on a response's quality of engagement with the philosophical ideas, theories and arguments relating to rights.

### Practices to strengthen

To further ensure reliable judgments are made using the ISMG for this IA, it is recommended that:

- evidence of interpretation of ideas and information relating to rights in the Interpreting and analysing criterion includes the application of philosophical ideas concerning rights to the selected contemporary issue. However, detailed unpacking and explanation of philosophical concepts and theories relating to rights is required to match upper performance-level descriptors in the Defining, using and explaining criterion
- deconstructed arguments that are stated to be valid but are not set out using clear propositions and an inferential structure demonstrating deductive validity are matched to the 'deconstruction of arguments' descriptor in the Interpreting and analysing criterion at mid to lower performance levels
- the misuse of reasoning criteria (e.g. incorrectly labelling an argument as deductively valid) provides evidence that matches the mid to lower performance-level descriptors in the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion concerning 'criteria used in the evaluation of ...arguments' and in the Defining, using and explaining criterion concerning 'use of terminology'

- across all criteria, care is taken to correctly apply the principle of best fit. In a performance level that contains a two-mark range, the upper mark of the range can only be awarded if evidence in the response matches all descriptors within (or above) the performance level. The lower mark in the range is to be awarded where evidence in the response matches a majority of descriptors within the performance level. For more information on the application of best fit, see the *Making judgments* webinar in the resources section of the Syllabuses app in the QCAA Portal.

## Additional advice

It is essential to consider the following key differences between the 2019 and 2025 syllabuses:

- One mark has been reallocated from the Using and explaining criterion to the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion.
- Amendments have been made to qualifiers used in performance-level descriptors across criteria.
- The first and second descriptors in each performance level of the Using and explaining criterion have been revised to focus the first descriptor on use of relevant terminology relating to rights and the second descriptor on the use of the terminology of argumentation, i.e. reasoning.
- Subject matter has been strengthened across all units of the 2025 syllabus concerning the translating and symbolising of propositions using logical operators. This should be considered when determining whether an argument deconstruction (Interpreting and analysing criterion) is precise at the top performance level.
- Descriptors at each performance level in the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion have been reduced from five to three. In the 2025 syllabus, the deleted fifth descriptor on use of stimulus material is now incorporated in the first descriptor focusing on synthesis of ideas and information relating to rights and the contemporary issue. The deleted fourth descriptor (criteria used in the evaluation of claims and arguments) is addressed by both the revised second descriptor (evaluation of claims, arguments ... using criteria) and the revised second descriptor in the Using and explaining criterion focusing on terminology of argumentation.

## Samples

The following excerpt illustrates an appropriate match of evidence in the Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion requiring insightful evaluation of claims, arguments, theories and views relating to rights. Inquiring into the degree to which it is legitimate for the state to infringe on citizens' entitlement rights to pursue greater social equality, the response analyses and critiques the argument of the libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick. A feature of the evaluation of Nozick's theory is how it is contextualised to the contemporary issue and stimulus provided with the task.

**Note:** The characteristic/s identified may not be the only time the characteristic/s occurred throughout a response.

His theory only works if current property holdings are the result of fair acquisition and voluntary exchange, but wealth is often inherited, not earned; historical injustices like colonisation, slavery, and sexism helped create today's wealth inequalities, and land ownership, especially in Australia, is deeply tied to the dispossession of Indigenous people. If wealth was never justly acquired, defending entitlement rights is morally indefensible. Therefore, infringement of these so-called "entitlements" via redistribution is not necessarily unjust - it may be a form of justice or rectification. Nozick's theory is also individualistic; it treats each person's property and income as isolated, whereas in reality, economic outcomes are shaped by social factors: race, gender, class, geography, and education. The "least advantaged" are often victims of structural barriers beyond their control. Source 11 shows that women in female-dominated jobs are underpaid despite their social importance. Nozick's system would preserve this injustice, since it doesn't allow interference in market outcomes. Therefore, redistributive policies may be just, because they correct unfair systemic disadvantages, not violate moral rights. Finally, Nozick's view that taxation equals theft or forced labour is widely considered extreme. In modern democracies, taxation is part of a social contract where citizens oblige to follow rules like agreeing to fund services like roads, schools, and healthcare in exchange for the benefits of living in a structured society (Ethics Unwrapped, n.d.). No one is truly "self-made"; we rely on public infrastructure to succeed. Source 5 shows that redistributive systems increase social trust, reduce violence, and create healthier, more stable societies. Denying all redistribution in the name of absolute property rights could undermine justice, not uphold it.

The following excerpt illustrates a detailed and informed interpretation of significant ideas relating to rights (Interpreting and analysing criterion) and a coherent and thorough synthesis of ideas and information (Organising, synthesising and evaluating criterion). Informing the author's argument on the basis of a right to a liveable environment, the response capably interprets material provided in the stimulus package (Norton) to apply the philosophical idea of weak anthropocentrism to the issue. Synthesis of ideas is demonstrated through the adroit use of Rawlsian concepts (e.g. the veil of ignorance) in advocating for the weak anthropocentric position.

**Note:** The characteristic/s identified may not be the only time the characteristic/s occurred throughout a response.

Weak anthropocentrism allows for long-term ethical deliberation that accounts for humanity's self-interest. Through this approach, Norton suggests that the health of nature is intrinsically associated with human flourishing – while humans are the primary source of value, the survival and flourishing of humanity is dependent on maintaining functional ecosystems. As such, weak anthropocentrism supports sustainable decision-making through ecological stability as a pre-condition to human flourishing. Accordingly, this framework demonstrates that anthropocentrism is both sustainable and aligned with the interests of humanity, thus affirming the truth of Premise 3.

This approach can be demonstrated through Rawls' ethical stance; more specifically, his "original position" framework. With his theory, a rights claim is justified if it would be decided by self-interested and rational individuals from behind the "veil of ignorance" – a position in which decision-makers are unaware of their position in society. Rawls' concept of justice emphasises fairness; that rational agents behind the veil of ignorance would agree on a world in which every individual has equal opportunity and disadvantage. When applying this to environmental ethics, it is reasonable to assume that anthropocentrism – particularly, weak anthropocentrism – aligns with Rawlsian ethics through encouraging the conditions necessary for justice across generations. Weak anthropocentrism ensures that individuals, regardless of their circumstances, have access to a liveable world.

Crucially, Rawls does not assign intrinsic moral worth to resources or nature themselves – his theory is explicitly fixed on the rights, interests, and opportunities of persons. As such, Rawlsian ethics would endorse sustainability insofar as it aligns with rational human interest and preserves just conditions for members of society. It then follows that Norton's weak anthropocentric approach aligns with Rawls' logic – it recognises that ecological protection is not valuable for its own sake, but rather as it maintains the structures and resources necessary for humanity. This affirms premise 3: anthropocentrism is both sustainable and aligned with human interest, making it an effective and morally justified approach towards climate change.

### References

- Norton, Bryan G. (1984). Environmental ethics and weak anthropocentrism. *Environmental Ethics*, 6(2):131–148.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press.

# External assessment



External assessment (EA) is developed and marked by the QCAA. The external assessment for a subject is common to all schools and administered under the same conditions, at the same time, on the same day. The external assessment papers and the external assessment marking guide (EAMG) are published in the year after they are administered.

## Examination — extended response (25%)

### Assessment design

The assessment instrument was designed using the specifications, conditions and assessment objectives described in the summative external assessment section of the syllabus.

The examination consisted of one paper (50 marks).

The examination assessed subject matter from Unit 4. The question was derived from the context of Unit 4 Topic 2: Political philosophy.

The assessment required students to create an analytical essay response that communicated a philosophical argument justifying whether a hypothetical law to ban a popular form of transport would constitute an appropriate exercise of government power. Students were required to support their position by analysing and evaluating arguments relating to the limits of governmental power in libertarianism and a second political philosophy selected from the four offered in the question. The stimulus comprised a hypothetical scenario involving an election promise to ban e-scooters and a counter-argument. The intent of the stimulus was to elicit analysis and evaluation of the quality of reasoning employed in the provided arguments, and of the tenets of libertarianism and the selected political philosophy relevant to their conception of the appropriate exercise of government power.

### Assessment decisions

Assessment decisions are made by markers by matching student responses to the EAMG.

### Effective practices

Overall, students responded well when they:

- directly addressed both the question and the stimulus, rather than provide a largely rehearsed answer lacking in responsiveness. Responsiveness was facilitated by reading the question carefully, and following the direction to analyse and evaluate the ideas, claims and arguments *in the stimulus* relevant to libertarianism
- selected for explanation and evaluation those tenets in libertarianism and their selected political philosophy that were relevant to the given problem, rather than discuss concepts that were not necessarily related, e.g. views on resource distribution
- synthesised their analysis and evaluation of relevant ideas, claims and arguments in both libertarianism and their selected political philosophy to support an argument that expressed *their position* on the stated question, rather than simply espouse how proponents of libertarianism and their selected political philosophy would likely respond to the given problem
- demonstrated a command of principles of reasoning (i.e. logic) in their argument deconstructions through setting out valid deductions using clearly identified propositions that were correctly transferred, e.g. in the case of a standard form deconstruction set out in the



form of a *modus ponens*, the antecedent of the conditional in premise 1 was affirmed in premise 2, thereby validly deducing the consequent proposition in premise 1 as the conclusion.

## Practices to strengthen

When preparing students for external assessment, it is recommended that teachers:

- encourage students to pay particular attention to cues in the question/s and to directly engage with ideas and arguments contained in the stimulus
- advise students in the planning phase of their response to identify then subsequently focus their explanation, analysis and evaluation on those tenets of the political philosophies that are pertinent to the inquiry issue. Such skills can be honed by providing students with opportunities to engage with various scenarios to identify philosophical concepts that are relevant, as well as with arguments to analyse and evaluate
- impress upon students that the determination of relationships requires explanation of the connections between tenets of the political philosophies. In this respect, students should seek to demonstrate their understanding of how the various tenets of a philosophy cohere to form a holistic world view, e.g. how a philosophy's understanding of human nature influences its conception of political ideas such as freedom, equality, fairness and justice, which in turn influences its view on the role of government and the appropriate exercise of power
- encourage students to have a questioning disposition. For instance, a premise is not necessarily true simply because it aligns with a philosopher's point of view. Rather, the truth or plausibility of all premises contained in standard form argument deconstructions should be evaluated on their own merits.

## Additional advice

- The specifications for the external assessment examination in the 2025 syllabus require students to analyse and evaluate *two* political philosophies that have been studied in Unit 4 Topic 2: Political philosophy. The number of political philosophies listed in the subject matter of Unit 4 Topic 2 has been decreased from five to four: anarchism, libertarianism, social liberalism and socialism.
- Schools and students should not assume that any more than two of the listed political philosophies will be provided on the assessment instrument each year.
- It is prudent to address all the subject matter in Unit 4 Topic 2, including the specified reasoning skills. It is expected that students be able to apply such analysis and evaluation skills to arguments presented in the stimulus material.

## Samples

### Extended response

Effective student responses:

- clearly explained relevant tenets of libertarianism and the selected political philosophy that were plausible in all key aspects
- insightfully established connections within or between relevant ideas
- provided a precise deconstruction of arguments, accurately identified premises and conclusions, and examined claim/s or idea/s derived from the stimulus

- provided an insightful evaluation of relevant ideas, claims and/or arguments from libertarianism contained in the stimulus and the selected political philosophy
- used all appropriate reasoning criteria in the evaluation of arguments and claims
- consistently and appropriately used relevant terminology
- skilfully constructed a cogent argument that considered and resolved key aspects of the question, using relevant philosophical ideas and the stimulus effectively to support the argument
- conveyed ideas and an argument in response to the question succinctly, purposefully and fluently, using the analytical essay genre, with paragraphs logically sequenced to support the central thesis.

This excerpt has been included:

- to demonstrate use of the analytical essay genre, including the provision of a central thesis. In providing the overall conclusion it will argue for, the response makes clear the criteria on which this decision is based, and which the body of the response unpacks and elaborates on. The purposefulness of the introduction, and its responsiveness to the stimulus, is indicative of effective thinking and planning prior to the production of the final response.



Political philosophies provide frameworks for determining how societies ought to organise power, freedom, and justice. Among ~~the~~ the most prominent theories, libertarianism and social democracy offer contrasting views on ~~how~~ the role of the state in safeguarding these values. Within the context of the allowance of ~~the~~ electric scooters (e-scooters) and whether banning them is an appropriate exercise of government power, the ~~concept of~~ tensions between positive and negative freedom become central to evaluating which political theory offers a more coherent and reasonable response. This essay will ~~argue that libertarianism provides a more plausible conclusion through~~ deconstruct and analyse <sup>libertarianism and social democracy regarding</sup> the key ideas ~~are~~ relevant ~~to~~ e-scooters to ultimately come to the conclusion that libertarianism provides a more plausible and practical resolution rather than social democracy which leads to internal contradictions and ambiguity.

This excerpt has been included:

- to demonstrate the insightful establishment of connections between relevant ideas. The views of communitarian philosopher Charles Taylor, explained earlier in the response, are validated through the application of further philosophical ideas — the interest theory of rights and Millsian utilitarianism.

The above argument is also deductively valid through modus ponens reasoning. Therefore, it too must be evaluated according to soundness, dependent on the truth of its premises. Premise one functions as a necessary condition for the legitimacy of a state. The logic underpinning this premise is derived from Taylor's conception of freedom as positive liberty, which suggests individuals are truly free given that the conditions required for them to realise their full potential are present. A ban on e-scooters can be justified under this definition of liberty through applying the interest theory of rights, by which an individual has a right if they have a moral interest sufficient to place another under a duty to protect it. As individuals have a moral interest to remain uninjured via the necessity of their positive liberty for action, others are morally obligated to protect that interest. In general, the socialist approach resembles Millsian utilitarianism in how it values the wider community above individual interests, deriving the greatest good for the greatest number. Arguably, this provides a more holistic view of human nature in that the interrelatedness of human interests through social connection is accounted for. Furthermore, lending credibility to premise two, collective flourishing is guaranteed through the prevention of e-scooter related injuries, reducing the strain on the individual, their connections, and the broader community (Stimulus 2).

This excerpt has been included:

- to demonstrate the skilful construction of a cogent argument that effectively uses relevant philosophical ideas and the stimulus. In examining the application of the harm principle to the provided scenario, the posing of the counter-example constitutes both an insightful evaluation of a key libertarian tenet and the demonstration of the technical facility of practising philosophy. The response uses relevant philosophical ideas (e.g. the libertarian non-aggression principle) in support of its overall argument, with effective use of the stimulus also featured.

intervention become justified? If so, libertarianism must concede some positive duties, undermining its absolute commitment to negative freedom.

In response, a libertarian ~~will~~ would invoke the non-aggression principle, claiming that an act must be a direct and intentional act to ~~be~~ be ~~be~~ considered harm. Accidents on e-scooters, whilst unfortunate, do not constitute harm, and is "little different from other relatively high-risk activities" (stimulus 3) and if e-scooters were banned, where is the line drawn between ~~banning~~ banning ~~dangerous~~ other dangerous activities as well? Ultimately, it is the rider of the e-scooters decision on whether that risk is worth taking, not the government's.

banning e-scooters is not an appropriate use of government power.

However, a counterargument arises when considering the ambiguity of ~~that~~ 'harm'. Harm can also be inflicted through inaction or neglect - for ~~example~~<sup>instance</sup>, the allowance of e-scooters in the past few years has led to a "substantial number of riders [sustaining] serious injuries" (stimulus 2) which undeniably constitutes a level of harm. If the state fails to act, it could be interpreted as harm through omission, contradicting the libertarian claim to protect life and liberty. This exposes an internal tension within the theory: if non-interference indirectly permits harm, does I agree with this defence, ~~but~~ although it does tie on the assumption that individuals have the rationality ~~and~~ to be in control of their own safety. ~~I would~~ But because ~~only~~ riders of e-scooters must be at least 16 years of age, I view this assumption to be reasonable, and overall, libertarianism provides a coherent and plausible justification of why