

STRONGER HSC STANDARDS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



GENERAL

WHAT HAS THE NSW GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED?

The NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC) will undergo wide-reaching reform to support all students achieving a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy, to reduce excessive student stress, to remove opportunities for plagiarism and pre-prepared responses, and to motivate and challenge students to achieve at their highest possible levels.

HOW WILL THESE PROPOSALS IMPROVE THE CURRENT HSC?

The establishment of a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy for the award of the HSC will give students the essential skills they require for their daily lives, expand their career options and give employers confidence in their capabilities.

Syllabuses will place more emphasis on depth of learning and analytical skills, which will provide students with the solid foundation of knowledge and skills that can be applied after school in further studies and the workplace.

A stronger emphasis on the mastery of knowledge and skills, instead of a broad overview of content, will ensure that students have the space to engage in more complex content and skills.

Providing a new Science Extension course will motivate and challenge students to achieve at the highest levels.

Streamlining assessment will reduce excessive stress, and give students greater scope to demonstrate what they know.

WHO DESIGNED THESE PROPOSALS?

The Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES) has developed these proposals across three broad areas of reform – curriculum, assessment and a minimum standard for the HSC credential.

These proposals have been informed by frequent consultation with the NSW education community (including principal, parent, sector, teaching and union representatives) during 2015-16 and research and data from local, national and international high-performing education systems and experts.

MINIMUM STANDARD

WHAT HAS THE NSW GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED?

The NSW Government has announced that all Year 12 students must reach a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy to receive the HSC from 2020.

WHAT IS THE MINIMUM STANDARD?

The standard is set at the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) Level 3, a nationally agreed standard of functional literacy and numeracy.

The ACSF has been endorsed by federal and state governments. It describes the core literacy and numeracy skills required in personal, community, work and training contexts. The minimum standard for the award of the HSC will be set to a functional level of literacy and numeracy necessary to succeed in everyday life and work. The BOSTES Board has endorsed this standard for the award of the HSC at ACSF Level 3.

More information about the ACSF can be found at <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-core-skills-framework>

WHO HAS TO MEET THE NEW REQUIREMENT OF A MINIMUM STANDARD OF LITERACY AND NUMERACY?

Any student who wishes to receive the HSC from 2020 will be required to meet the minimum standard.

Students with disabilities undertaking Life Skills courses, and students from a non-English speaking background who have been learning English for less than one year will be exempt from meeting the standard.

HOW CAN A STUDENT MEET THE STANDARD?

Students can demonstrate they have met the standard by achieving:

- a Band 8 in each of their Year 9 NAPLAN¹ reading, writing and numeracy tests; or
- a pass in the online literacy and numeracy test in Years 10, 11 or 12.

A demonstration test indicating the level of skills required is available at hscliteracynumeracy.bostes.nsw.edu.au.

WHEN WILL THE LITERACY AND NUMERACY STANDARD APPLY TO STUDENTS?

The BOSTES Board has determined that the literacy and numeracy standard will apply to Year 12 students completing the HSC from 2020. These students will be undertaking Year 9 NAPLAN in 2017, which will be the first opportunity to satisfy the standard.

HOW MANY OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE TO ACHIEVE THE LITERACY AND NUMERACY STANDARD?

The first opportunity to meet the standard is Year 9 NAPLAN. This gives students, their teachers and schools time to improve their literacy and numeracy skills well before the HSC. This early opportunity also prompts a focus on literacy and numeracy in the earlier years of school, and on students meeting their progressive milestones in these core skills. This focus will help all students, not just HSC students. Those students who do not reach the standard in Year 9 will have sufficient time with their teachers, parents and schools to work on strategies and measures to improve their performance.

It is fair to provide students with multiple opportunities to reach the standard. Students mature at different stages, and may master essential literacy and numeracy concepts at different times.

The key purpose in introducing a standard is to ensure that students who complete secondary school and are awarded an HSC have a functional baseline of literacy and numeracy skills.

WHY HAS BOSTES INTRODUCED A MINIMUM STANDARD FOR THE AWARD OF THE HSC?

Literacy and numeracy are indispensable to function effectively in society. The best indicator of success in life after school – including in employment, higher salaries and good health – is a student's literacy and numeracy skills. Improving students' literacy and numeracy prepares them for life beyond school by providing better access to jobs and further training.

NSW NAPLAN data shows that about 24% of Year 9 students are at or below the national minimum standard for Reading and about 19% are at or below the standard for Numeracy. These students are already at risk of not attaining the skills they need in life unless they receive targeted intervention and support.

The HSC does not directly measure students' literacy and numeracy skills or require minimum standards to be met for the award of the credential.

However, the community, business and employers require an assurance that students have the literacy and numeracy skills they need when they leave school.

The minimum standard will prompt a whole-of-school focus on

literacy and numeracy to benefit students in all school years, including those who leave school without an HSC.

IF STUDENTS DO NOT REACH THE LITERACY AND NUMERACY STANDARD BY THE END OF YEAR 10, WILL THEY HAVE TO DO MATHS IN YEAR 11?

All students should complete high school with a functional level of numeracy for everyday life and employment.

There will be no mandatory requirement to take maths for the HSC. But students who do not meet the standard by the end of Year 10 will need to complete further work in numeracy courses or maths topics in Years 11 and 12 until they pass the online literacy and numeracy test.

Schools may choose to deliver short courses, topics or additional tutoring in numeracy skills. Some students may choose to continue studying maths as the best means of improving their numeracy skills to meet the standard.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A STUDENT DOES NOT MEET THE LITERACY AND NUMERACY STANDARD BY THE END OF YEAR 12?

Year 12 students who do not reach the standard and qualify for the HSC will receive the Record of School Achievement (RoSA). The RoSA was introduced by the NSW Government to replace the out-dated School Certificate. The RoSA is a record of a student's academic results and other achievements provided to those who leave school before finishing Year 12.

Students who do not demonstrate the standard will have five years after leaving school to meet the literacy and numeracy standard and receive an HSC.

HOW WILL BOSTES, SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS SUPPORT STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE THE STANDARD?

Support materials, including resources from BOSTES, will emphasise the early identification of students in primary and high school at risk of not meeting the standards. Strategies and materials will be available to assist teachers in supporting students to reach the standard.

English and maths courses in Years 11 and 12 have been redesigned by BOSTES to include units in literacy and numeracy linked to the standard, which will help ensure students develop the skills they need.

The minimum standard is part of a broader NSW Government strategy to support vulnerable citizens to succeed in life and work. The minimum standard complements a new cross-sectoral, statewide strategy to boost literacy and numeracy. More detail about the strategy will be released later in 2016.

HOW MANY STUDENTS WILL BE AFFECTED?

Every student will be affected by the introduction of a minimum standard, with every student benefiting from the resulting stronger focus on literacy and numeracy.

A whole-of-school focus on literacy and numeracy will help improve these essential skills for all students from the early years through to the HSC.

Even those students who leave school before completing Year 12 will benefit from a stronger emphasis on literacy and numeracy. BOSTES data shows that about 20,000 students already leave school between Year 10 and the end of Year 12 without an HSC.

HOW MANY STUDENTS WILL MEET THE MINIMUM STANDARD AND RECEIVE THE HSC IN 2020?

Of the 70,000 students who complete the HSC annually, the vast majority will meet the minimum standard of literacy and numeracy.

Based on an analysis of NAPLAN results, BOSTES forecasts that at least 50% of HSC students will pre-qualify for the minimum standard in Year 9, by achieving Band 8 in their NAPLAN reading, writing, and numeracy tests.

Students at risk of not meeting the standard will be supported to improve their literacy and numeracy skills through early intervention, tailored resources, and curriculum focused on these skills.

THE LITERACY AND NUMERACY STANDARD IS A MINIMUM. HOW DO THE HSC REFORMS RAISE STANDARDS FOR ALL STUDENTS, INCLUDING HIGH ACHIEVERS?

The minimum standard places a premium on the development of literacy and numeracy skills, which will lift achievement across the range of student ability. Introducing a standard in Western Australia, for example, is credited with lifting the proportion of students in the top two NAPLAN bands. Even advanced students will benefit from an increased focus on literacy and numeracy to develop more sophisticated skills.

The changes to the HSC foster the development of more complex knowledge and skills, reduce excessive student stress, decrease opportunities for plagiarism and pre-prepared exam responses, and motivate and challenge students to achieve at their highest possible level.

Standards set for the HSC influence teaching and learning priorities in the earlier years of school. Every student will benefit from a greater focus on the mastery of knowledge and skills as they move through school. The HSC is not the end of learning for students, but preparation for the next stage of a student's life.

CURRICULUM

WHAT HAS THE NSW GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED?

BOSTES will release draft new syllabuses for public consultation in English, maths, science and history for Years 11 and 12.

The draft syllabuses focus on students developing mastery of skills and understanding, rather than a broad overview of content.

Syllabuses will be kept up to date through a more efficient review cycle.

A new one-year extension course in science is proposed, starting for Year 12 students in 2019.

WHAT NEW SYLLABUSES WILL BOSTES RELEASE?

BOSTES is releasing 17 draft syllabuses for Year 11 and 12 students in English, maths, science and history for public consultation.

English

- English (Standard)
- English (Advanced)
- English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D)
- English Studies
- English Extension and English Extension 2

Mathematics

- Mathematics General 1
- Mathematics General 2
- Mathematics
- Mathematics Extension 1 and Mathematics Extension 2

Science

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Earth and Environmental Science
- Investigating Science
- Physics

History

- Ancient History
- Modern History
- History Extension

There will also be public consultation on draft Life Skills outcomes and content in English, maths, science and history.

The six-week consultation period on the draft syllabuses is the last, formal opportunity for the community to provide feedback on the new courses.

For more information on public consultation on draft syllabuses see: www.bostes.nsw.edu.au

WHEN WILL STUDENTS BE TAUGHT THE NEW SYLLABUSES?

The Year 11 students of 2018 will begin their senior secondary studies with the new syllabuses in English, maths, science and history. The Year 12 students of 2019 will be the first to complete HSC exams in these subjects.

WHAT ARE THE OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES IN THESE NEW SYLLABUSES?

The principles that apply to English, maths, science and history will apply to the renewal of the remaining syllabuses. These include:

- a focus on 'depth' of content studied rather than 'breadth' of topics covered
- online syllabus, rather than static, paper copies
- interactive e-syllabus linking new courses to teaching and assessment resources, such as lesson plans and assessment tasks

WHY ARE ONLY THE ENGLISH, MATHS, SCIENCE AND HISTORY SYLLABUSES BEING UPDATED?

English, maths, science and history are the first subject areas to be revised in line with NSW's commitment to align the syllabuses with Year 11 and 12 Australian Curriculum content. BOSTES will progressively review and update the remaining Years 11 and 12 syllabuses, starting with a review of technology and some Asian language syllabuses from 2017.

WHEN WILL THE NEW COURSES BE TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS?

The new draft syllabuses are now subject to public consultation, and will be finalised by the end of 2016.

BOSTES understands that teachers need time to adjust their teaching practices and process the new content. Schools and teachers will have all of 2017 to familiarise themselves with the new content, and to plan lessons, prior to implementation in 2018.

Introducing new syllabuses in English, maths, science and history for Years 11 and 12 students will require careful planning for everyone involved in secondary school education.

The 70,000 students who complete the HSC each year are required to study English; therefore changes to the English syllabus content and assessment alone will have a big impact. Maths, science and history are some of the most popular courses studied each year.

The process allowing teachers a year of familiarisation is well established in NSW.

HOW WILL THE SYLLABUS REVIEW PROCESS BE IMPROVED?

The HSC was last reviewed 17 years ago. Technological advances, changing national priorities and workplace expectations have affected NSW's social, economic and educational environment.

The Year 11 and 12 syllabuses need to be responsive to these advances in knowledge and technology to remain current and relevant.

Digital technologies allow a more regular and efficient syllabus review cycle. Online syllabuses can be easily updated for minor changes while the interactive e-syllabus links courses to teaching programs, assessment tasks and lesson plans.

ASSESSMENT

WHAT HAS THE NSW GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED?

School-based assessment will be capped to reduce excessive student stress from over-assessment and allow a greater focus on teaching and learning.

HSC exam questions will be redesigned to reduce the opportunity for formulaic responses and cheating. Stricter guidelines will be issued to assure the authorship of take-home assessments and projects.

A common scale will be introduced for the maths courses, giving students in advanced courses better recognition of their efforts and encouraging students to study the level of maths best suited to their ability. This removes the incentive for students to take easier courses in an effort to gain higher marks.

WHEN WILL THE ASSESSMENT CHANGES BE INTRODUCED?

Changes to assessment will be introduced as appropriate across all courses from 2018 (Year 11 students) and 2019 (Year 12 students).

WHY IS BOSTES CHANGING ASSESSMENT?

The HSC mark comprises 50% school-based and 50% external BOSTES assessment. School-based assessment was originally introduced to evaluate outcomes that are not as effectively measured in the final exam, and to reduce the stress and pressure experienced during the HSC exams.

Over time, this balance has shifted. Assessment is not simply a measure of the progress students have made; it is also part of the learning process and provides important feedback to teachers and students. These changes will shift the emphasis of assessment to allow a greater focus on teaching and learning.

Students feel over-assessed, experience relentless assessment regimes, and some resort to undesirable practices such as plagiarism and pre-prepared responses.

Resilience and an ability to cope with change are vital skills for a student to develop at school. However, students should not be subjected to assessment regimes that are endless, repetitive, and only mimic the HSC exam questions.

A greater focus on teaching and learning, and assessment as part of the learning cycle (and not simply a measure of the progress students have made), will increase student engagement and improve their learning.

HOW MANY SCHOOL-BASED ASSESSMENTS WILL THERE BE IN YEAR 11 AND IN YEAR 12?

BOSTES will cap school-based assessment to:

- a maximum of three assessments per course in Year 11
- a maximum of four assessments per course in Year 12, including the HSC trial exam.

The final HSC exams held in October and November each year will continue. These exams form 50% of a student's final HSC mark.

WHY CAP ASSESSMENTS?

In BOSTES consultations on the HSC over the past three years, teachers, parents and students have reported that Year 11 and 12 students experience assessment fatigue.

Some schools are using school assessments as a way to motivate students, or to ensure they attempt work. This means students can have up to six assessment tasks per course in each year. For example, a student with five 2 Unit subjects can have 25-30 assessment tasks over three terms - which equates to an average of one per week. In reality, assessment tasks are clustered at similar points of the school year.

From the student perspective, every assessment task counts, whether it is worth 5% or 25%. The assessments are not always single tasks, such as one essay, and often comprise sub-tasks that require a substantial amount of work to complete. Students often feel compelled to choose to do "what's due next", or "what's worth more".

Some assessment tasks replicate previous HSC exam questions, either in the form of an essay, or mimicking the exam. This limits the variety of tasks used to assess student knowledge.

Fewer assessment tasks will allow schools to spend more time on the knowledge and skills in a course, and shift the focus from superficial learning just for the exam.

WHY SHOULD BOSTES HSC EXAM QUESTIONS CHANGE?

Some HSC exam questions are very similar, year on year. Teaching and learning can become formulaic in reflecting this. Courses with a large number of options have a limited number of exam-type questions that can apply across all topics.

Students repeatedly practise their essay (particularly in English and History), resulting in pre-preparation and memorisation of essays. Some schools set the previous HSC essay questions for homework tasks, or under exam conditions for the HSC trial exam.

Memorising key facts and skills, such as times tables, formulas and quotations, is important. But memorising entire essays to adapt and reproduce in an exam is a narrow demonstration of a student's application of knowledge and skills.

BOSTES needs to shake up these negative learning practices by requiring HSC exam questions to be less predictable, so students are required to apply their knowledge and skills in

response to the exam question. Changing HSC exam questions will reduce opportunities to cheat and plagiarise.

WILL THERE STILL BE FINAL, WRITTEN HSC EXAMS?

Yes. The final HSC exams held in October and November of each year will continue. These exams will continue to form 50% of a student's final HSC mark.

The proposals relating to school-based assessment and the final exams aim to create a more complementary relationship between the two modes of assessment. They provide students with equal and appropriate opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do.

WHY SHOULD THERE BE A COMMON MARKING SCALE IN MATHS?

Maths courses, like English, will be on a common scale, which will allow comparison of students doing easier or harder courses.

Placing maths courses on a common scale will act as a disincentive for capable students who deliberately choose easier courses for a perceived ATAR advantage.

The common scale will allow better recognition of student efforts and encourage them to take a maths course that better suits their ability.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THESE HSC REFORMS?

BOSTES will keep parents, students, teachers and the broader community informed of progress via the website www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/stronger-hsc-standards

BOSTES will continue to use existing communication channels and committee structures, including the BOSTES Board, to monitor these reforms and update the community as required.