

Subject: Submission - BOSTES Review

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Background:

In the last three years, we have been actively involved in a number of high school evaluations instigated by principals. All three of us are retired high school principals who worked for the then Board of Studies as Regional Field Officers and BOSLOs.

Since 2014, in the process of undertaking 15 evaluations, most of which are curriculum and assessment based, we have identified a number of issues that, being recurrent across a range of metropolitan and country high schools, we believe are relevant to the BOSTES Review.

Issues:

1. Criterion Referenced versus Normative Assessment

Since 2001 BOSTES has based HSC marking and assessment on criterion referencing rather than norm referencing and has supplied Performance Descriptors for all courses to assist and guide teachers

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/english-std-adv-pbd.html

as well as reporting annually how many students were placed in each band:

https://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/ebos/static/BDHSC_2015_12.html

It is our view that in many schools teachers are basing marking on the now defunct norm referenced model. This is in evidence when looking at raw assessment marks in both Board Determined Courses and Board Approved Courses and is to the detriment of students. Teachers manifest a lack of understanding of what we are talking about when we raise this matter.

2. Performance Descriptors

A similar lack of understanding is frequently manifest if we ask about use of performance descriptors when we observe the number of students with marks under 50 and find that teachers are not using Band Descriptors as the basis for Faculty Assessment marking. In fact many do not know what we are referring to. The allocation of grades for the RoSA is similarly poorly understood

This indicates a mismatch between marking standards applied by the school and by the BOSTES. It indicates lack of understanding of HSC Bands and Performance Descriptors where the lowest with a description at elementary level is Band 2 and where a mark under 50 is in a band that has no description.

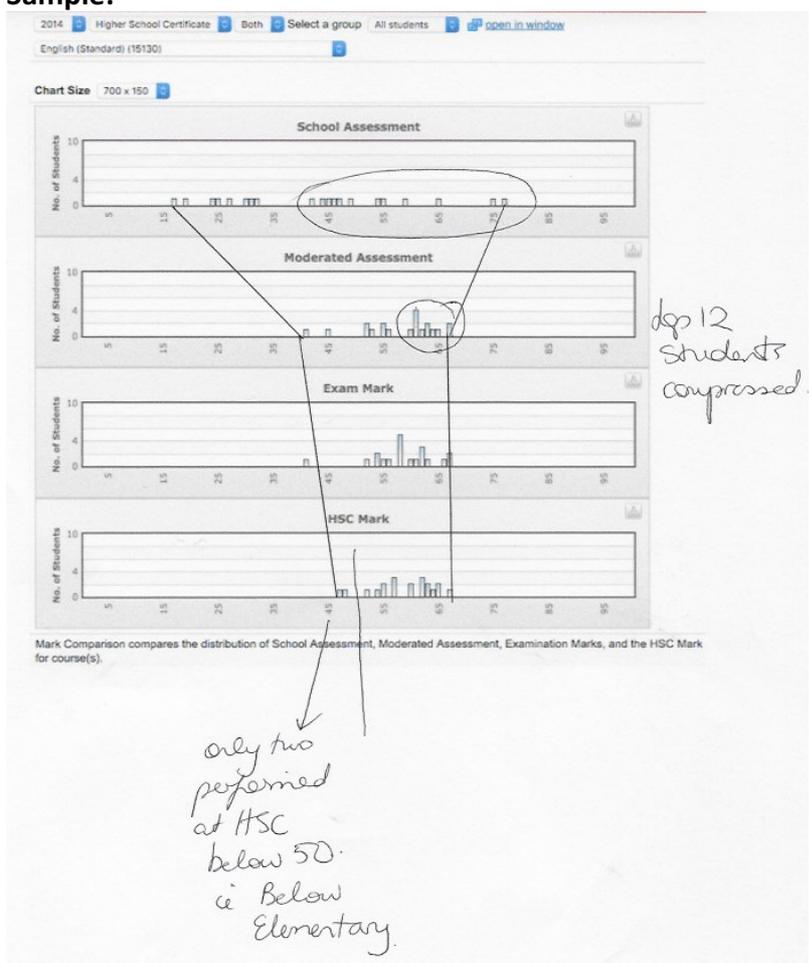
Extract from Performance Band Descriptions – English Advanced and Standard

Band 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates elementary knowledge and understanding of the ways meanings are shaped and changed. • displays ability to recognise and comment on basic language forms, features and structures of texts. • presents an undeveloped response showing recognition of the main ideas in texts. • exhibits an ability to compose with some awareness of audience, purpose and context in order to explore and communicate ideas and information.
Band 1	

3. Understanding of moderation processes

Both the above and a widely observed lack of understanding of moderation processes appear to skew HSC results in some faculties. Where there are a significant number of students placed well below 50, yet the whole cohort performs better at examination, moderation can end up compressing the difference between the best students and the next group of the cohort and in effect disadvantaging the best and brightest in the course.

Sample:



A significant number of teachers and head teachers and even principals appear to be unaware of the moderation process as explained fully in the BOSTES document Explanation of Aligning and Moderating procedures for the HSC.

<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc-results/moderation.html>

and also unaware of advice such as:

Students and parents need to understand that the final assessment marks reported to the Board will be statistically moderated, and then reported on a scale where the majority of marks will lie between 50 and 100 marks. Hence, the school-based marks below 50 submitted to the Board can be aligned to a mark of 50 and above, provided the achievement demonstrated is above the minimum standard expected.

HSC Assessment: A Standards-Referenced Approach:

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/manuals/pdf_doc/HSC_assess_booklet.pdf

4. In-school statistical standardising procedures

It is possible to use in-school statistical standardising procedures as the above BOSTES document continues:

Final school-based assessment marks for a course may be reached by the aggregation of marks awarded for each assessment task or through statistical standardising procedures. Either method, if applied with care, should ensure that the final rank order and relative differences accurately reflect the achievements of the students... Although schools are not required to use statistical procedures in producing assessment marks, such procedures may help ensure that the weightings for each task are as intended. There are computer programs, such as the Board's Motorised Markbook, which can assist in calculating and storing assessment marks.

However once again we are more often than not met with blank faces when this is suggested as a way to address some of these issues especially where some of those with marks under 50 are there because they did not hand in assessment tasks.

5. Assessment Components

It has been noted that in some faculties, and in one recent case across all faculties in a school, Assessment Schedules are based on components that reflect the course topics being taught at the school rather than BOSTES Assessment components. This means that neither syllabus requirements nor assessment weightings are being met within faculty assessment processes. It also means that there is no checking process that student skills are being developed and assessed nor are tasks assessing more than one component.

It is also noted that while syllabuses are adhered to in programming, little notice appears to be paid to Assessment booklets *Assessment and Reporting in (name of course)* supplied on the BOSTES website under each syllabus e.g.

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/english-std-adv.html.

Thus we observe in many assessment schemes, the over-use of exam style assessment tasks in defiance of the subject assessment requirements (up to 100% in one recent case) and this is so even in courses where advice is provided in these booklets on the maximum percentage of exam/test type tasks e.g. Business Studies. The knowledge appears to be lost that school based Assessment enables assessment of course components that cannot be assessed in the HSC exams, and in fact this was one of the reasons for its inception.

Such assessment schedules do not meet the requirement that:

- *'The assessment strategies used should be appropriate to the outcomes and components of the course being assessed, for example tasks could include assignments, fieldwork studies and reports, model making, oral reports, research projects, practical tests and open-ended investigations, viva voce, improvisations, arrangements, original compositions, portfolios and presentations of performance. Syllabuses provide advice on the appropriateness of tasks for each subject.'*
- *'The syllabus provides guidance in relation to the types of tasks that are suitable.'*
- *'Final assessment should be based on a range and balance of assessment instruments.'*
- *'Ensure a range of assessment strategies is used and that meaningful feedback in a variety of forms can be communicated to students.'*
- *'A major requirement of the internal assessment program is to provide a summative measure of a student's achievement in each course based on a wider range of syllabus outcomes than may be measured by ... examination alone'.*
- *'Students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their level of achievement of the outcomes in a range of different task types.'*
- *'enable students to demonstrate their learning in a range of different contexts'*

Other Assessment schedules show:

- Tasks with multiple submission dates and continuous tasks
 - *'An assessment task has been defined as an activity designed to measure student achievement and thus can be clearly identified on an assessment schedule as a single event.'*
- Excessive number of tasks
 - *'A balance is required between obtaining sufficient information and not over-assessing. Three to five tasks, including the exam, are considered sufficient to adequately assess the components of most courses.'*

- Tasks with an excessive marks weighting or a number of small tasks worth 5%
 - *‘An individual task should not normally be worth less than 10%, nor more than 40%, of the total assessment marks. One task may address several course outcomes. In general, later tasks should carry more weight than earlier tasks.’*
 - *‘marks earned on individual tasks are expressed on a scale sufficiently wide to reflect adequately the relative differences in student performances.’*
 - *‘use marking schemes that discriminate and avoid compacting the differences between the best students should result in a good spread of marks. This will assist in ensuring that tasks carry the correct weightings and that the final assessment marks accurately reflect the relative achievements of the students.’*
- Group tasks where all students get the same mark
 - *‘When group tasks are required for internal assessment, the school should ensure that:*
 - *they are designed to assess the contribution of individual group members*
 - *they allow each student's understanding of the process to be demonstrated*
 - *the group agrees on procedures for how the task will be developed.’*

6. Organisational Memory

All the above issues create inequity across schools in the final assessment marks that are submitted to BOSTES and in our view disadvantage the students in the schools where assessment practices have drifted from the original intention and requirements. In our view this is the result of ignorance due to the loss in schools of **the accumulated body of data, information, and knowledge in that formed the organisational memory** of the then Board of Studies.

Reflecting on our past roles as BOSLOs, we knew that these issues were understood by schools as this was our responsibility, either by running individual school staff sessions or a series of workshops across our regions with schools expected to send a curriculum leader. Hard copy booklets were also supplied to schools summarising Assessment requirements, checklists and moderation processes. It is also our understanding that schools that repeatedly submitted assessment marks that had potential problems, were contacted.

It appears that this knowledge has been lost in schools due to:

- The changing role of the BOSLO.
- Retirement and promotion of those in schools who understood the above matters and hence principals being unaware that Assessment is not being done properly
- New young head teachers responsible for implementing BOSTES requirements that have never been trained in any of them.

We submit these concerns for your consideration.

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<http://www.spiceevaluations.com.au/>