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The BSSS acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, the traditional Custodians of the land on which our department is located and where we live, learn and work, and all others who have familiar or ongoing connections to this land.

We pay our respects to Ancestors and Elders, past and present.



Acknowledgements

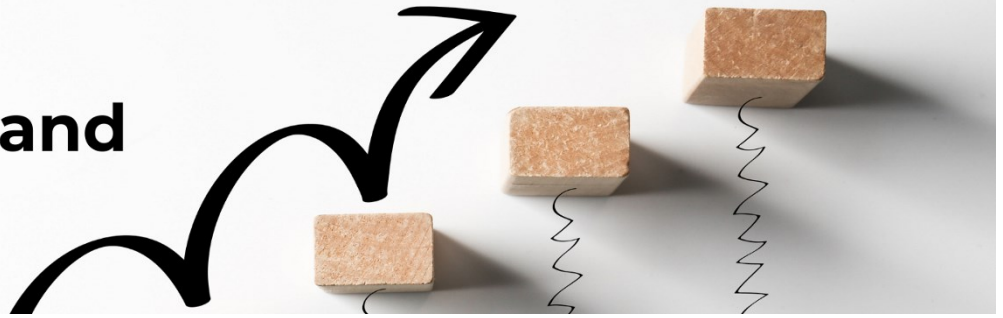
Images pp. 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18 sourced from Canva for Education

Photos of Meg and Bree were provided.

All other images from BSSS Officers.

If you are interested in seeing your images or content in this newsletter, contact bsssenquiries@act.gov.au

Vocational Education and Training



VET stands for “Vocational Education and Training”, and describes courses in which students learn skills, knowledge and attitudes related to a specific *vocation*; i.e., a trade, profession, job or occupation. VET courses are regulated and accredited through the Australian Qualifications Framework. (AQF)

In [2014, Polidano and Tabasso](#) found “...that taking an upper-secondary VET subject improves the chances of school completion and the chance of successful transition from school to work.”

VET can be studied as part of the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate in three ways:

1. As part of an A/T/M/V or A/M/V course
2. As part of an Australian School-based Apprenticeship (ASbA)
3. As external VET study

VET gives students amazing opportunities to develop their skills in communication, critical and creative thinking, and technical skills specific to a discipline that they love. [Lamb et al \(2017\)](#) note that the somewhat amorphously defined “21st Century Skills” are used by systems and governments as an “economic imperative” as they are so strongly identified as preparing students for an uncertain future (p.8).

Some of these skills include:

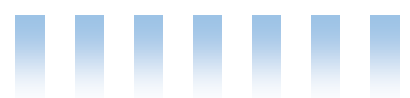
- The practical and interdisciplinary nature of the courses show students how theoretical concepts such as quantitative reasoning can be applied practically
- VET offers significant opportunity for students to learn skills in communication and collaboration

- VET offers significant opportunities for students to learn and practice problem-solving skills. Many occupations offer novel problems such as fitting a garment to a person, repairing an item without destroying its integrity, or determining how best to decorate a cake for a fussy customer.
- VET requires operating in contexts conducive to students building their personal and social responsibility – whether that is managing an early start for an ASbA, working with customers or to a client brief, or even ensuring that they get their required study hours in alongside their workplace hours.
- Visual/spatial or practical skills with applications across life.

What is the AQF?

The Australian Qualifications Framework is the national policy that regulates qualifications in Australia. The ACT Senior Secondary Certificate, VET Certificates, and university degrees are all described and regulated by the AQF. Universities, Registered Training Organisations, and Senior Secondary Curriculum Authorities all have to play by the rules of the AQF, because the certificates they award are formally and legally counted as qualifications in Australia.

Skills developed through VET are valuable no matter a student’s intended pathway. Next time a student says to you “I want to keep my options open”, perhaps one of the options they haven’t considered (and should!) is VET. VET easily fits into a T package as a minor. VET also appears to be more “AI-proof” than other career options, although looking too far into the future isn’t quite possible (...yet).



When we interviewed an experienced VET teacher and chef, Megan Lennard, she explained it for us:

“In VET courses, the skills aren’t just subject specific; they are transferrable among many industries. Some of the competencies I teach are Business competencies like “Work effectively with others”. There are examples like this across all of VET. A VET certificate is an awesome thing to have; you have a dual qualification that shows what workload you can manage, and you can get two qualifications in two years, showing potential employers what you can do. VET shows that transferability; not just course skills, but life skills.”

Courses including VET

These are regular T, A and M courses that also include the option for competencies to be included. Schools who want to offer these competencies must have teachers with the relevant VET qualifications, and the competencies are taught alongside the regular BSSS course.

ASbAs

An ASbA is an Australian School-based Apprenticeship. This is when a student undertakes an VET learning and work placement at the same time as attending school; usually, they will drop a subject and attend school for part of the week, and their workplace or RTO for the other part of the week. Students get paid for an ASbA, and there will be someone at your school organising ABbAs (often the Careers staff).

Please note that students can’t count VET study done in Year 10 toward their Senior Secondary Certificate.

External VET Credit (E) Units

From 2024, and for the first time in the ACT, students will be able to receive direct credit on their senior secondary certificate for the verified learning outcomes (nationally accredited competencies) they have been awarded by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) for their Vocational Education and Training (VET), that is not integrated into a BSSS course, such as through an ASbA. All nationally accredited VET competencies have corresponding nominal hours listed against them.

The Magic of Vocational Education

There is a theory that J.K Rowling’s Hogwarts is a vocational college. Students learn subjects practically, in application, that will lead on to their future careers. They brew potions, care for magical creatures, and divine futures for themselves and others. These practical opportunities lead directly to careers for many of the students, and help them to solve problems they encounter throughout the series.

The BSSS now gives E Unit credit for completed competencies.

The basic calculation for E Unit credit is:

100 nominal hours = 1.0 unit.

Nominal hours are not the same as face-to-face hours.

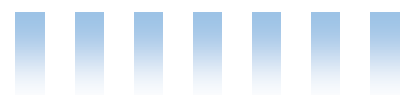
Nominal hours count everything a student might do completing a competency - in class, in the workplace, and in their own time. These hours are an estimation of the time that is reasonable for a student to achieve a given competency; e.g., learning a skill, practicing a skill, and perfecting the skill. You can find nominal hours in the [Victorian Purchasing Guides](#).

It is important to note that schools that are also RTOs can choose to offer VET courses that aren’t integrated into a BSSS course. For example, a school might have the trained staff, the facilities, and the students to offer a Certificate III in Makeup.

There is information on the BSSS website about this exciting development and with the flow of completion data coming up that will hopefully mean that data from Skills Canberra will be shared so that the paperwork regarding competencies attained elsewhere is reduced.

W Units

W units are like Registered (R) units, but specifically for external VET like ASbAs. They cover the time that students spend on the job, when they have not been able to demonstrate and attain competencies. W units recognise the time spent and can count towards the Senior Secondary Certificate. W units like R units are not courses.



Helping kids take care of themselves

If a student mentions something to do with VET that sounds incorrect or surprising and you are not sure about it, please talk a VET specialist at your school.

Examples include:

- not being awarded any competencies across the space of an entire year
- signing up for an unlikely online course (e.g., one that requires physical competencies that cannot be assessed online)
- being pressured by a part-time job to undertake an ASbA, particularly if the student wants to take on an ASbA in a different field.

A student should talk with their parents/carers and ASbA Coordinator before signing on to an apprenticeship through a part-time job, particularly if it's in an industry that the student is not interested in. Some part-time jobs claim to offer an ASbA but when looked at critically, offer very little and may lead to lower pay for a student; you might want to help the student to look up the prospective employer and consider the pros and cons.

It is exceptionally rare for a student to be permitted to sign up for two ASbAs at the same time, so if a student is planning on an ASbA in a further industry, they should consult the appropriate school staff member.

Teaching VET

Do you have colleagues who run these courses? Ask them about the qualifications and updates that are needed to stay current.

In addition to their teacher training, VET teachers also need to hold VET training and industry qualifications relating to the area that they'll be training students in. VET qualifications require time spent in industry to maintain currency of skills and knowledge, and often require further study when training packages are updated.

VET teachers are great at keeping track of student evidence for competencies achieved. These are entered into ACS, with VET teachers recording evidence throughout the semester. Every lesson can be a mini assessment as the teacher takes photos, makes notes, and checks against competencies; this allows students

and teachers to have a clear understanding of their progress with frequent feedback to support their learning.

If you're looking to plan some collaborative or group work, check in with VET teachers at your school — they often need to assess these skills, and many will have the strategies and ideas to spark your pedagogical imagination.



Meet some VET Staff

Meg

The café at Erindale College has a warm, friendly vibe to it; sun-dappled, with broad glass doors opening out to the spring air — on a warm Canberra day, the music students come in and play live, and students come in to chill and eat. When class is in session, students collaborate, reflect, and even vie to be top voted by their peers for the food they make. This is all possible because of Meg Lennard, a chef and teacher who teaches VET courses in Hospitality.

Getting into VET

Meg took Hospitality at high school in NSW, as a part of the HSC, and then stepped into a chef's apprenticeship that led her to work in Canberra and Thredbo. It was a friend wanting to become a teacher that sparked her interest in looking into VET and teaching. While retraining, Meg was working cheffing at night and at university during the day.

Does she miss anything about cheffing? The adrenaline rush that can happen in busy service periods; however, a classroom can be similar when everyone is working together to get things done. Time in a restaurant is like a school timetable, and you can't let things run over as a chef or a teacher.

Challenges and rewards

Coming into teaching VET necessitated getting different competencies, and these have needed to be kept up with additional qualifications – two Certificate III upgrades with another this year. Equally, competencies in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment change; there have been three different additions in the fourteen years Meg has held this qualification.

VET training is not a “set and forget” proposition; there’s a continuous need to keep connections going, including time spent in industry.

One of the rewards of teaching VET in the senior years is the ability to maintain contact with students who have gone into the local industry and also become chefs at local restaurants.

“It’s great to see the students using their knowledge and reflecting once they are out in industry; remembering what they were taught. Seeing them use what I’ve put all this effort into staying current with in their lives, futures, and job choices.”

Keeping organised: flow

There’s a lot of admin in VET; basically, every lesson is assessable and the teacher is checking that students have done even the smallest component. Meg has every student keep a Google Drive folder where they put their finished products, and she photographs them achieving the competency. Her aim is to reach every student, every lesson with every prac assessed for competencies and photos taken so that the rest can be filled in after the lesson.

Meg emphasises the importance of flow to her students and in her own work; building student skills



from organisation to end product, using healthy competition, and encouraging a growth mindset when things aren’t perhaps as edible as one would like. This is all part of the learning that the students attain – working out why something went wrong, what happened, and transferring those skills to new contexts.

Bree

Bree Binskin was a student when she first encountered VET – she was pulled into a classroom to sit in on a lesson of Production for Live Theatre at Gungahlin College. Having seen what the course entailed, she quickly enrolled. She didn’t even know what VET was back then – but now she knows and it changed her life. Having been at Gungahlin College for some years, she’s recently moved to the ACTIVE Tuggeranong RTO, using her expertise in VET and business administration to help schools manage the merger between them.

Bree’s story shows how VET can enhance opportunities for people studying a T package; when she left school, she didn’t only have a good ATAR, but a Certificate III in Production for Live Theatre. This led to a stable job managing the Gungahlin Theatre while studying her Bachelor of Business Administration. After university, she spent a year abroad in the USA working at Disney World in Florida; an amazing experience that Bree puts down to her background in safety and problem solving, skills she learned and had evidence of through her VET studies. On her return to Australia, she worked in K-Mart managing the customer service desk, where her workplace safety, problem solving, and client interaction skills once again came to the fore. She returned to education at Gungahlin College as a Careers and VET assistant, and is now at the ACTIVE Tuggeranong RTO.

Industry and Practical Skills

The best thing in her VET journey? The exposure to industry. This exposure was so valuable; Bree reflects that when she was at university, classes focussed on theory – learning the steps, but without the practical experience. Getting practical experience in industry rounded out her skills and knowledge – learning the skills to practically and successfully do things, rather than just the theory behind it. The skills Bree learned to use in the real world are highly transferrable – teamwork, work health and safety, sustainability. The good news? These skills are common to most senior secondary based VET.

Teachers teaching VET go above and beyond for their work and students. As someone who has worked alongside VET teachers for many years, when asked for what she wants teachers to know about VET, Bree said, “VET teachers are usually so passionate about the subject they’re teaching, and they bring that passion into their teaching.”

Opportunity

It can take just one opportunity to change someone’s life, whether that’s being convinced to sit in on a lesson and finding a subject that brings you joy, or building from a work placement into a scholarship and strong career. Bree’s most memorable student received an extraordinary seven certificates across Business, Tourism, and Hospitality, netting her a scholarship to prestigious Kenvale College, and job opportunities overseas. Helping her to go on the work placements and with the application was rewarding – particularly seeing how one work placement can lead to so many other opportunities.



Want to read some student interviews? [Check out the S2 student newsletter](#), which has interviews from a number of students explaining their VET experiences.

We’re on the move...

Sad news for lovers of our brutalist spaceship office building — we will be moving in 2024. We will keep you updated as we find new digs, although the flair of our current building will be difficult to match.

Designed by John Andrews AO, Callam Offices are a unique building. We have loved being here and would stay if we could, but that is not to be.

You can find out more about the history of Callam Offices [here](#).

We are hoping to move at a time that minimises any disruption to our services — and into a location that is easy to access. Unfortunately, moving may have some impact while we pack and unpack, and we thank you in advance for your understanding. When we know more, we’ll let you know!



Changes to Estimates in 2024



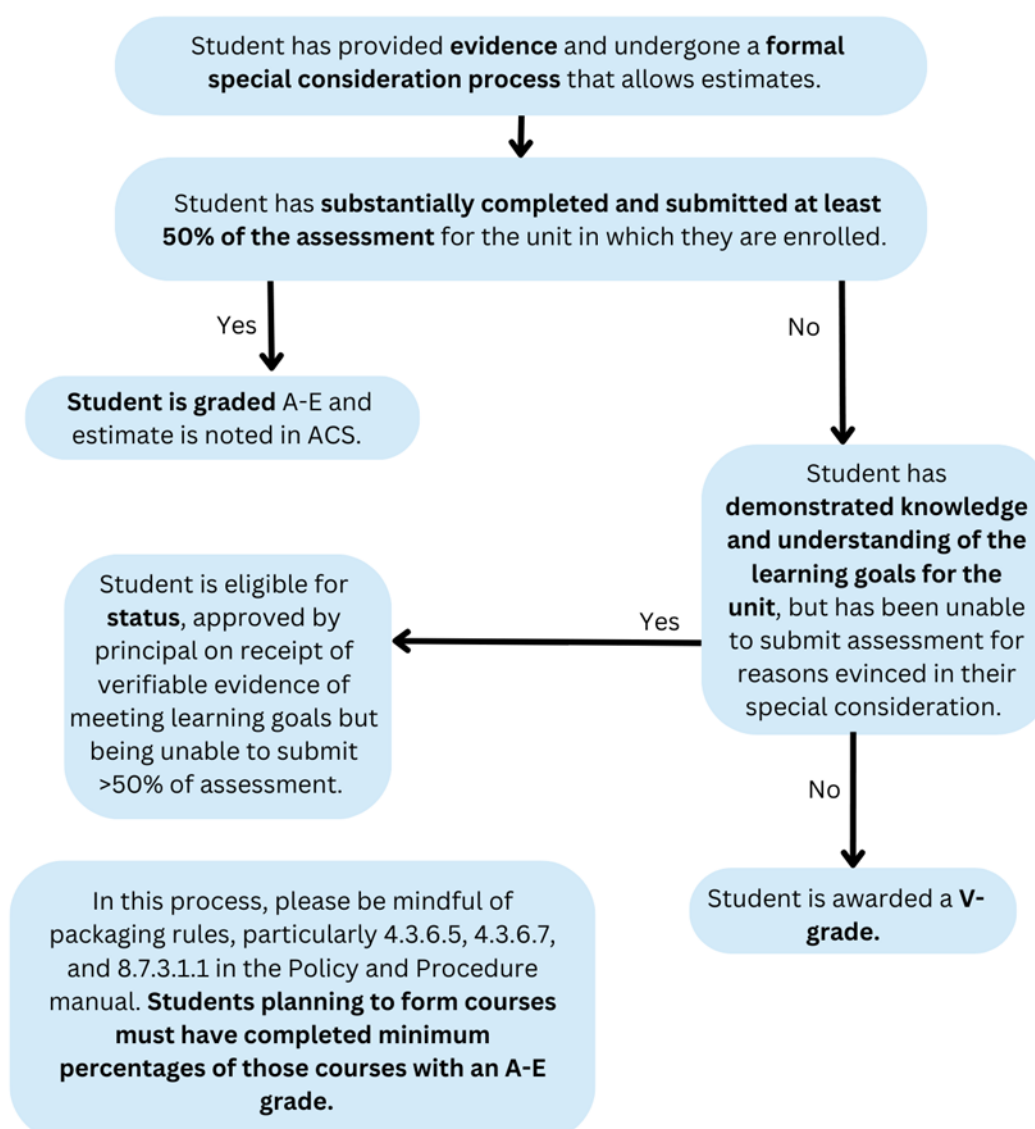
In June, the Board passed a change to Policy and Procedure to begin from 2024. **This change only applies to students receiving estimates.**

From 2024, for a student to receive an A-E grade for a unit, they need to substantially complete and submit at least 50% of the assessment for a unit.

This is to remedy the situation where, for example, a student substantially completes 20% of assessment, does not submit 30%, and then receives estimates for 50% of their assessment. Under current rules the student could still be awarded an A-E grade, even though they have completed only 20% of the assessment for the unit. A student in this situation will now receive a V-grade.

In the case where the student cannot hand in 50% of assessment but meets the requirements for Status, they may be awarded a Status grade. If they do not meet the requirements for Status, then a V-grade would be awarded.

The flowchart below summarises the change.





Curriculum Updates

Introduction to the Bridging Literacy and Numeracy Shape Papers

In late 2022, the Board approved the redevelopment of the existing Contemporary English and Contemporary Maths courses as Bridging Literacy and Bridging Numeracy. These courses are designed for students who have reached Year 11 but have not yet demonstrated that they have achieved the Australian Core Skill Framework (ACSF) level 3 in their literacy and/or numeracy.

We are excited about these courses because part of the redevelopment involves new achievement standards for Bridging Literacy and Bridging Numeracy, which will be tailored to assess the achievement of students who are not yet meeting ACSF 3. Unlike the old courses, these new courses are structured around *skills* rather than *themed content*, allowing teachers to use, adapt and create programs of learning that suit the needs and interests of their students.

Bridging Literacy

This course takes an approach of disciplinary literacy, i.e., linking literacy events to texts of significance to students, including in their academic packages and texts of social, personal or cultural importance. The aim is to build students' understanding of how literacy applies to their lives. To support these links, there are some new assessment task types proposed in this course, such as a polished draft or portfolio of work.

Proposed unit titles:

- **Communicating with Purpose:** Students will develop their ability to communicate meaning through text and writing.
- **Reading and Researching:** Students develop their ability to read increasingly complex, authentic texts for meaning.

- **Reporting Research:** Students develop their ability to understand increasingly complex, authentic texts for meaning with increasing independence, and to support and represent their own points of view, including through oral communication.
- **Transferring Literacy to Life:** Students develop their ability to transfer skills from their academic or vocational study to texts with social, cultural, or personal significance.

Bridging Numeracy

This course leans into a facet of the Contemporary Mathematics course that teachers have indicated they value – the ability to offer applied mathematical problems and work on solutions that will aid students in their practical use of mathematics.

Proposed unit titles:

- **Practical Numeracy:** Students learn about the versatility and practical applications of mathematics in personal, workplace and social contexts.
- **Techno-mathematical Skills:** Students learn use and manipulate quantitative information with a focus on data literacy and technical software skills.
- **Making Informed Numeracy Decisions:** Students learn how to interpret quantitative information to inform decision-making in personal and societal contexts.
- **Interdisciplinary Mathematics:** Students use numeracy skills required for one or more interdisciplinary contexts, such as maintaining personal and supporting others' health, sports, the built environment, or personal areas of interest such as volunteering, community work, or gaming.

Shape papers are the work done prior to writing a full course, and they are the point at which the majority of suggests can be made.

Senior Science A/M

The BSSS *Senior Science A/M* course will be phased out by December 2025, with students being transitioned into *Interdisciplinary Science A/T/M*. Details on transition arrangements will be published on the BSSS Website under [Curriculum Transition Arrangements](#). The reason for this change is twofold:

- *Senior Science A/M* significantly duplicates content found in other science courses in terms of topic knowledge, understanding, and skills.
- *Senior Science A/M* inauthentically divides interdisciplinary topics into disciplinary units.

The BSSS *Senior Science A/M* course was intended to interest students in science by engaging them with authentic problem solving and it suggests doing so with a number of elective topics that are inherently interdisciplinary. The change was made in light of expert feedback that *Senior Science A/M* attempts to break authentic interdisciplinary problems back into disciplinary components before studying them. This erodes the intention of offering students real topics with which to engage and as such is inadvertently deceptive about the nature and scope of scientific endeavour in the topic area.

It is more informative and genuine for students when topics are investigated as they are; as a whole complex interdisciplinary system rather than an arbitrary part of it. As such, *Interdisciplinary Science* carries out the intention of Senior Science more authentically and rigorously. Interesting material from a range of scientific disciplines might be accessed through *Interdisciplinary Science* through well-developed programs of learning, e.g., Flight, or Oceanography.

Students are also able to undertake A and M accredited courses in *Human Biology*, *Agriculture*, and *Food Science and Nutrition* which cover many of the popular electives in *Senior Science* and offer opportunities to engage with concepts and models from Chemistry and Physics, as well as Biology and others.

Human Biology Redevelopment

In August, the Board resolved that the current Human Biology course would be redeveloped as Health Sciences. The redevelopment of the BSSS Human Biology course as a Health Science course in name and con-

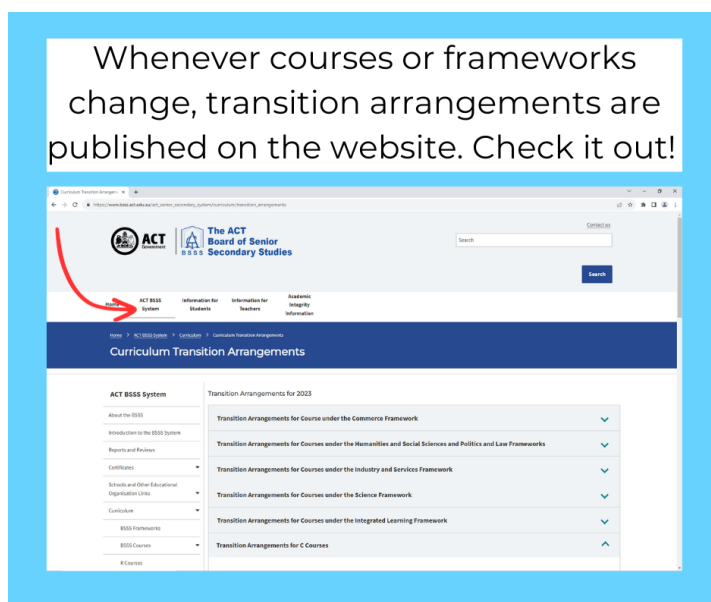
tent emphasis reflects current nomenclature used in tertiary institutions and aligns with pathways to health, medical, and paramedical programs of study.

This change will clarify the study pathways and leverage student interest in health, medical, and paramedical sciences. This is not a quick change, however; there will be a full redevelopment process, so don't expect to see the new course until next year, for implementation in 2025. As always, there will be a transition period so that students can continue courses started in the meantime!

Reminder: Transition Arrangements in 2024 for Outdoor Recreation and Education

Students who completed units in Outdoor Recreation C prior to 2024 may combine these with units from Outdoor Recreation A/M/V completed in 2024 to form a course, provided there is no significant duplication of content.

Students who studied units in Outdoor and Environmental Education A/T/M 2019 - 2023 may combine units completed prior to 2024 with units from Outdoor and Outdoor and Environmental Education 2024 completed in 2024 to form a course in Outdoor and Environmental Education A/T/M, provided there is no significant duplication of content.



Acknowledgements

Photos of Meg and Bree provided

Photos in headers from Canva

Other photos by the Office of the BSSS



Small Group Moderation



Small Group Moderation is not the same as peer moderation; in fact, a better name for it might be “small group scaling”. Why is it important when you have a tiny T cohort, and what can you do to prepare?

Who is it for?

Small Group processes are an important part of scaling when one of your school’s T scaling groups has less than 10 students who have completed a course (i.e., a minor or more) by the end of Year 12. This is because the statistical processes used to scale scores rely on correlations that can break down with small groups.

What happens?

An experienced teacher who is currently teaching that course assesses all the work the students in the small group have done and ranks the students from the small group against their own students. They do not change the rank the school has given, but they do rank the students with their own to make the ranking list cohesive.

This is the main part of the process. Once the large group is scaled, the small group is scaled to these parameters. It is not the only data looked at—the AST scores and scores in other courses are also analysed.

Small group processes aren’t about the grade, or even the number; they’re about ranking a small group of students in with a much larger group *across the whole course*.

I’d like to be a small group moderator. Who should I contact?

Contact BSSSCertification@ed.act.edu.au and someone will get in touch! We may not have a group for you now, but we almost certainly will in the future.

Why have I been asked to hand in work this year for Year 11s?

You’ve been asked to hand in work because there is a probability your small scaling group will drop below 10.

We are tightening the quality control process in 2023 to make sure that the work needed is available to the small group moderators. There have been several instances in the recent past where schools had not kept work due to teacher changes and movement between schools. This has the potential to disadvantage students because they may not be meshed as accurately as they could be.

But I thought I had a ton of students?

We are finding that some small groups are showing up because the “T” flags have not been set correctly in ACS for Year 11 students. The T flags are the information that the school gives to the Office to tell us whether a student intends a T package or is doing T units/courses as part of an A package. If T flags are accurate and you have a lots of students, your group won’t be flagged. Good news if you do have lots of students and you get a small group request: you can update the flags on ACS instead of providing the work.

Any hints on speeding up the process of copying the work?

Many Virtual Learning Environments will store all assessment work in folders that can be copied without needing to copy individual assignments one by one. Ask your school’s IT Officer or a colleague to show you what is possible on your system.

Your school may also wish to task an appropriate staff member to make any copies/scans of hand-written tasks.



AST Provisions:

Help us get the message to everyone

Coordinating the AST can be significant and complex job logistically; what may seem like a tiny change to a student can snowball quickly into something challenging to manage when dealt with at scale, and when using physical papers that need to be checked both upon arrival and after the test is completed. The following information is to help you when students ask for advice about special provisions and second sitting; this will help students to feel more secure in their requests, and it will help minimise any surprises or problems on the day.

AST Special Provisions
are about keeping
things fair for
everyone.



Please make sure your
students have put the
AST dates into their
diaries for 2024: 3 and
4 of September 2024.



Second sitting will not be
granted for scheduled
travel, including scheduled
travel to see relatives
overseas. Please help get
this message to your
school community.

Second Sitting

The second sitting is organised for a very small proportion of the ~3000 students who will sit the AST. It is for students who are unexpectedly and seriously sick, who have unexpected and serious accidents or misadventure, or who have an extremely important, once-in-a-lifetime, unrepeatable commitment (think “representing Australia in the Olympics” level of unrepeatable commitment).

What kinds of requests for the second sitting won't be approved?

- Travel that can be rescheduled. This includes overseas trips and scheduled trips to visit family (including a grandparent or other elderly relative).
- Pre-emptive requests (see below).
- Local sporting competitions or similar events.

Travel

Please speak with students in your classes and pastoral care groups to make sure that they have the AST dates in their diaries, and that they have told their parents or carers that there is no scheduled travel on those dates. Could the student put the trip off for work, sport, cost, or convenience? If the answer is yes, it's a scheduled trip and thus not eligible for AST special provisions or second sitting.



Visits to Overseas Relatives

No one wants to stop students going to see relatives overseas, but if the student intends to get an ATAR they need to organise to go during school holidays and return prior to the AST or leave after the AST dates.

There are exceptions if sudden, unscheduled travel is needed due to an emergency such as a close relative having a sudden heart attack or other serious medical event meaning that the student needs to go immediately to make their final goodbyes. We very much hope that this is something that does not happen, and in that case, the student would be eligible to apply for second sitting. Speak your AST Coordinator about the documentation required.

Pre-emptive requests

This is when a student who has an unpredictable chronic condition asserts, often months in advance, that their condition will be “playing up” on the day of the AST. These students will *absolutely* be able to access second sitting if the condition affects them on the day of the AST, but they need to go to the doctor and get the evidence for the day of the AST once that day has occurred and fill in the normal second sitting forms. Pre-emptive requests, especially when a condition is unpredictable, are not supportable. Note that this doesn’t apply to conditions where it’s possible to know that the student will be unable to complete the AST (e.g., a broken hand). Please submit a request ASAP for these ones!

AST Special Provisions

Students can apply for AST special provisions. They may not get every provision that they request. The OBSSS will also email the school with the provisions granted, so that staff can check in with students and make sure that they understand the provisions that they have been granted.

Please check in with your AST special provisions students! You know them as individuals and are far better placed than anyone in the Office to offer empathetic, helpful guidance to students who may be confused by a provision awarded, or who may need to gather more information to appeal the provisions.

The OBSSS does not hold parent contact details or copies of any students’ ILPs or other learning plans. If

you are concerned about the ability of a student to discuss their provisions with their parent or carer, it may be appropriate to assist the student in passing information on.

There are also some provisions that will not be granted. Any provision that would make the test easier (e.g., re-wording questions, sentence starters, a scribe re-wording answers that the student wrote) will not be approved. Extra working time will only be granted where there is evidence of a specific learning disorder or other specific disability requiring *working time*.

While this may be a difficult conversation at the beginning of Year 11 or after a new diagnosis, it’s important that for school-based assessment:

- Medical evidence is provided to justify the provision. Imputing a disability is perfectly fine while waiting for a formal diagnosis to occur. Medical evidence may include evidence from the school psychologist.
- Provisions that would lower the difficulty of the assessment are not provided to a student.
- Doctors do not make educational decisions on behalf of the school.

A note on that last point: Most doctors are not educators, and do not work within the regulatory requirements of the Australian Qualifications Framework and BSSS Act. In the AST medical forms, we specifically ask that doctors do not provide suggested accommodations for this reason, as families may get an unrealistic idea of accommodations that are reasonable for senior secondary students whose assessment work will lead to the award of a qualification (the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate). These are often different to accommodations that are given to students in junior years.

Unfortunately, there also is often incomplete information in the public domain about the efficacy of certain exam accommodations. For example, in the area of ADHD accommodations [Lovett and Nelson \(2020\)](#) note:

Part of the high popularity of accommodations for ADHD may stem from government guidance documents (e.g., from state departments of education), position papers from advocacy groups, and educational resource manuals, all of which tend to provide lengthy lists of accommodations

for students with ADHD, without mentioning evidence that the accommodations are effective or appropriate. Similarly, articles and books in the professional literature for teachers often provide such lists.

When reading the literature, a pattern emerges that ADHD accommodations involving extra time have not been shown to be effective, and in some cases may be counterproductive. In all, *interventions* are generally a preferred strategy to help students demonstrate their knowledge and carry skills into life.

There can also be distinct gaps between student perception of the efficacy of an accommodation, and the actual efficacy of an accommodation. Equally, it can be helpful to refer concerned students back to the Disability Standards for Education, which note that the lowering of the course difficulty is not a reasonable adjustment.

To make the forms clearer for students, parents, and schools, we have revised the AST Special Provisions forms for 2024. These have been given to AST Coordinators and will be discussed in AST Coordinators' meetings. If you have questions re: AST special provisions, please contact the Office at BSSSAST@act.gov.au.

End of year dates



November 17 Final day for student assessment

November 22 Final day for return of student assessment

November 24 Final day for students to be notified of unit and course scores

November 28 Final day for college-based appeals

December 1 Final day for Board appeals

These timelines are important because they let the end of year processes like printing certificates and scaling scores for ATARs happen.



December 11 Recognition of Excellence Ceremony
This is for people who are nominated by their school as excelling in subjects, VET, and community service.

More information about our most commonly queried provisions

Rest and Movement breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offered for anxiety, ADHD, physical disability where there is no evidence provided of an accompanying specific learning disorder. Works by allowing the student to rest and refocus, e.g., if an anxiety attack or low blood sugar occurs, a break with the clock stopped is taken to resolve the situation. Student gets the stopped clock time back but does not get extra working time. Usually used when adding extra <i>working</i> time may confer an unfair advantage to the student.
Use of an orange (exam) C-pen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offered when a student needs the paper read aloud (e.g., dyslexia). Allows the student to read and re-read parts of the paper on their own terms without needing to ask an adult to read it for them. Must be in use as soon as you know the student needs a reader (e.g., start of Y11) so that the student can get used to it. Responsibility of the school to purchase or borrow, as it is something a student should have access to in normal lessons as well as exams.

ACS Changes in 2024



The BSSS ACS database is going to have some changes in 2024, including some long-awaited improvements to Moderation presentation upload; by the end of 2024, teachers will have the ability to upload student work for moderation into ACS (rather than Dropbox), and the removal of the need for Individual Student Profiles.

This will involve some changes to existing practices, and undoubtedly there will be some hiccups as it progresses. In the end, the update aims to have a positive impact through:

- Reducing double handling (e.g., no more downloading items from ACS to upload into Dropbox)
- Heightened control and security for sensitive data
- Improving automation of Moderation tasks (e.g., teachers will no longer need to complete an ISP)
- Improving automation of administrative tasks (e.g., teachers will no longer need to look up unit codes or check weightings or dates – these will automatically populate into assessment cover sheets from the unit outline)
- Automating the provision of key information to reduce the number of issues in Moderation portfolios
- Improving the consistency of the information that is provided to students across schools and sectors; something the student forum has been particularly interested in.

What do I need to do in Semester 1, 2024?

Classroom teachers

- Create Unit Outlines in ACS. See [here](#) for detailed help.
- Use the Assessment Item function to create coversheets, upload and publish to Profiles Online. You can either cut-and-paste directions into the coversheet, or upload one or more documents that contain assignment directions. Please be sure to note the instructions for tests.

- At the end of the semester, upload student work into ACS instead of Dropbox. ACS will automatically suggest students; you can make changes if needed. We will provide support documents closer to the time.

Moderation Co-ordinators

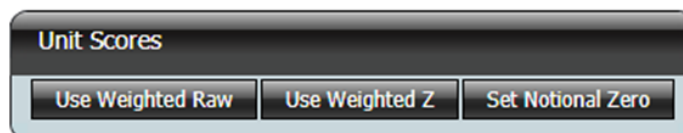
- Monitor the creation of Unit Outlines and Assessment Items through the “Unit Outlines and Assessment Items” page.
- Apply for presentation exemptions through the “School Moderation Presentations” page.
- Check Unit Outlines, Assessment Items, and upload of student work on the “School Moderation Presentations” page.
- Submit Moderation presentations to BSSS when they are ready or send them back to teachers if something is missing. Please follow up with teachers via email as ACS currently doesn’t have an alert function.

School leaders

- Ensure that markbooks and classes are created at the commencement of Semester 1 so that teachers can use the automatic features of ACS.
- Ensure your school logo and any specific school policies have been saved in ACS.
- Ensure any relevant Common Course Information has been saved for any information that needs to be displayed on unit outlines for a group of courses.
- Support staff to undertake new processes. Consider where non-teaching staff may be able to help – for example, in digitising handwritten assessments.
- Revisit in-school procedures where possible to reduce duplication (e.g., unit outlines and assessment task sheets being available on Profiles Online fulfils all BSSS requirements).



ACS Tips and Tricks



As assessment periods come to an end, you will be finalising the scores and grades that students get in ACS.

Negative TID

A negative TID will show up in **bright pink**. This is where a student has been moved out of a markbook (e.g., to an R unit) but still has data entered against their name. The data “sticks” the student to the markbook. Remove all of the data and the student should sweep out.

Scores and Grades

Getting scores and grades together in your markbook happens after you have entered all student data, including any penalties, notional zeros, or special provisions.

The process then is:

Set Notional Zero

This will set the NZ for the whole markbook. If you are missing data, it will flag that data is missing so you can fix it up. The markbook will not calculate unless all data is in there.

Calculate Scores

You have two options for calculating scores: Weighted Raw, and Weighted Z.

When to use Weighted Raw

ONLY use weighted raw for A and M units, or for small group markbooks.

When to use Weighted Z

All T markbooks over 10 students should be using weighted Z. Why?

- This method allows for statistical meshing into a scaling group
- This method standardises assessment items with different means and spreads
- This method uses historical data to give students an idea of how they are performing across their subjects in terms of their **rank** and **distance from the mean**, which are more accurate than scores in comparing performance

- This method allows transparency and quality assurance through making the processes used transparent to the regulator (the BSSS) as well as schools

If you're doing meshing in your own school-based spreadsheets and then entering adjusted marks into ACS, please shift this process into ACS. A school-based spreadsheet might form part of a meshing plan, but adjustments need to happen ACS so that the processes are explainable and quality assured.

Why does it seem like my students' results dropped using weighted z?

To be blunt... the results given to the students in school assessment had a higher mean than the historical data said is likely for students from your school, in your scaling group. You know whether the group is extraordinary compared to other groups, or whether it's likely that marks are inflated in your scaling group.

Using weighted raw doesn't “fix” this – it just masks it so that students are less aware of their relative position in your subject compared to others. The whole point of scaling is bringing all of the results onto the same scale, so if they really are an extraordinary group, they will move up from the historical parameters; otherwise, they may end up conforming to those parameters.

Set grade cutoffs

Grade cutoffs can be determined and then set. There is no “official” set of grade cutoffs. You can put them where you want them, but we suggest being reasonable with your marking scheme – i.e., if you're using a 100 point scale, a 79 shouldn't really be an E.



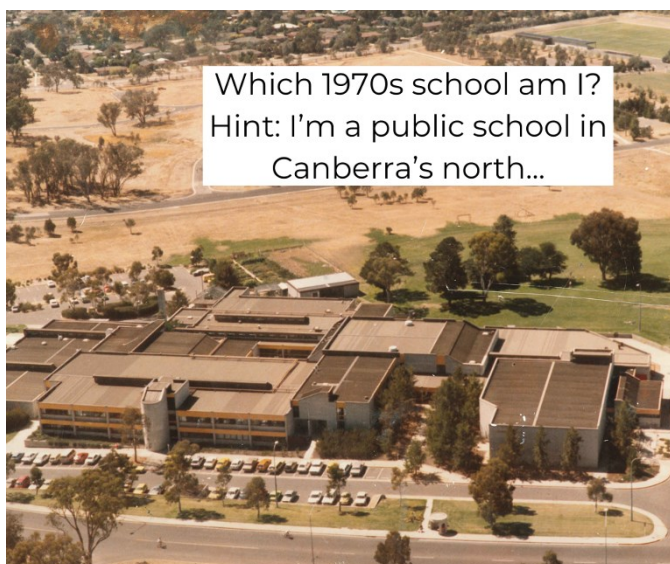
Can you clarify that?

For more clarifications, ask us at one of our meetings, or email bsssenquiries@acct.gov.au

Why is the ACT System different to other states and territories?

In the 1970s, parents, teachers and members of the community came together because they wanted to create a senior secondary system where the autonomy and maturity of students was valued. Some of the key ideas were that students should be treated like young adults, and that they shouldn't have to do a high-stakes, subject-based set of exams. They decided to base the system around courses that were established with schools, for their individual students, and these courses were accredited by the Board of Senior Secondary Studies. People who have been around for a while will remember these as "Type 1" courses.

In the 2000s, the introduction of the Australian curriculum and other expectations at a national and government level meant that the courses in the ACT were standardised and all schools started teaching from the same course documents. To maintain the ability of schools and teachers to tailor content directly to students, the course documents outline what skills and essential knowledge the students need to know in that course. The choice of the majority of the content (e.g., which texts are studied in English, or which Artists in Visual Arts) is up to the teacher and the school.



For students who want to go to university, a way of comparing these different courses and different schools needed to be found. It was decided in the 1980s that a "scaling test" would be used to help mathematicians at the Office of the BSSS to fairly compare the work of students in different subjects and different schools. This test has developed over the years, and it is what we now call the AST.

Why did the Office cancel or postpone a Professional Learning Session?

Unfortunately, if there aren't enough sign-ups for a PL, we must re-evaluate. Where possible, we will direct people from the PL to an online version of the same content. Please, if you need to cancel your involvement in a PL, let us know as soon as possible.

I got feedback on my Moderation Portfolio that will go toward the longitudinal tracking. Am I doomed?

System Moderation Quality Assurance and finalised Presentation Review Reports from Moderation Day 2 have been provided to schools. Whilst there have been recent changes to the way reviewer feedback is reported to schools, their continued purpose is to reaffirm great practice and identify aspects for possible future improvement.

Moderation Day reviews are a point-in-time qualitative judgement that may vary depending on the reviewers and with this in mind could have slightly different feedback from previous submission and to that which they might receive future ones. Yes, the longitudinal tracking of presentation ratings now incorporates a timeframe for school actions, however, the actual application of action rests with schools in determining when and how to proceed. Schools need to implement strategies for continued improvement to ensure that they are meeting the Quality Assessment Guidelines. Should a similar issue or concern be flagged by reviewers in the same course at the next Moderation Day, further attention and action would be warranted.

In summary, don't stress just yet if your presentation has a concern identified; your professional judgement and consideration of areas for future improvement where moderation feedback can be applied across your course area is likely all that is needed.



Farewell to Board Chair Roberta McRae OAM

Roberta McRae OAM has led the Board of Senior Secondary Studies through some of the most significant changes seen in recent memory; particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, review of Moderation, review of C and E courses, and the 40th Anniversary of the ACT Senior Secondary System. Thank you for your compassionate and student-focussed leadership.



OBSSS Executive Director's thanks to the departing Board Chair

This is the final semester for our dear friend Roberta McRae OAM. During her tenure, Roberta has successfully guided the Board and the senior secondary sector through a period of significant challenge and change in senior secondary education.

Roberta, founded her career as a teacher, and with her extensive experience at the highest levels of government and the law, brought a fresh and perceptive perspective to the role of Chair. Her willingness to listen and nurture different ideas and approaches has fostered a collaborative and collegial culture.

I thank you, Roberta, for your substantial contribution to senior secondary education and unwavering commitment to the Board - and for your support of my leadership and the OBSSS team. I am confident that I speak for all when I say that your presence and participation have been invaluable, and that you will be greatly and most assuredly missed.

On behalf of all, I wish you the very best.

Martin Watson