

# BSSS News | Spring 2024



## Inside

Appeals: What are they? What to do?  
Recognition of Excellence  
Curriculum Update  
AST Update  
Professional Learning  
Clarifications  
Certification timelines 2024

*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.*



*This month's image shows the Aurora Australis above Albury, NSW, taken with an ordinary phone camera and no special processing. We encourage you to keep an eye on the space weather forecast as the sun reaches solar maximum, because you too may have the chance to see and appreciate this rare phenomenon here in Canberra and the surrounding area with the naked eye. Check the Bureau of Meteorology, NOAA and other websites, and celebrate how time and place converge to make meaningful, beautiful experiences on Country.*

## Acknowledgements

Cover image: Alexandra Spiller

Images pp. sourced from Canva for Education

All other images from BSSS Officers.

If you are interested in seeing your images or content in this newsletter, contact [bsssenquiries@act.gov.au](mailto:bsssenquiries@act.gov.au)

We are very keen to have student-created images and content in the newsletter. Please consider it!

# Deep Dive: Appeals

Almost everyone has had this experience; you return a marked assignment, and a student hangs back.

“Hi, I was just wondering if...” The realisation sets in as to what’s coming next, as the student builds up the courage and says, “I want to appeal this result.”

You’re now going to have to go back and have another look at the piece; perhaps get a colleague to moderate it and decide whether you feel that the result should change... and all the flow-on effects of making that change. But what happens if it goes beyond the classroom query stage? How can you deal with appeals and queries? We’ve put together some ideas that could help you – or a new educator you mentor – work through the appeals process.

As the year comes to a close, please be mindful that Year 12 appeals have some very strict deadlines – while we can be a little more flexible with Year 11 students, Year 12 appeals are constrained by certification.

## The Conversation

The appeals process begins with a conversation between you and the student. At this stage it’s technically a query, but students will often call it an “appeal”. This conversation may flow more easily if you pay attention to the following:

**Keep it time-bound:** organise a set time for the conversation to happen, with a clear end time.

**Keep it specific:** focus on specific elements of the task that help to explain why the student received the mark that they did. For example, instead of “you needed to analyse more”, point out a place in their work where the analysis was lacking, and explain what might have been included.

**Keep it to the task:** You are discussing that student’s work, not anyone else’s work. If the student compares their work to another student’s, remind them that the query is about their work, not the work of others.

If the student compares their result or conditions to other scaling groups, including those in other schools, remind them of the role of scaling in the system. There is no expectation that unscaled scores will be directly comparable.

**Keep it neutral:** Avoid labouring the point of the mark being able to go up or down if appealed/queried. By all means mention it so they know; however, feedback from students has indicated that if this point is laboured, students interpret this as a threat that their result will be lowered for having the temerity to appeal.

**Keep a record:** Make a record for yourself of when the conversation occurred, and the main points including your decision.

**Keep it certain:** Make sure that there is a clear statement made to the student about what your decision is.

**Keep it fair:** If you need to, check other students’ work to make sure that the matter that was queried isn’t also affecting them.

### Step One

MY ESSAY RUBRIC SAYS I LOST MARKS FOR NOT PROVIDING A REFERENCE LIST. I’VE REALISED I DOUBLE-SIDED IT ON THE BACK PAGE, SO IT MIGHT HAVE GOT MISSED.



I DID SEE YOUR REFERENCE LIST, BUT YOU DIDN’T USE ANY IN-TEXT REFERENCES IN THE BODY OF THE ESSAY AND THERE WERE SOME OBVIOUS PARAPHRASES. THAT’S WHY YOU LOST THE MARKS FOR REFERENCING.

## Having the conversation: some sentence starters

|   | Possible sentence starters  | Action  |
|---|---|---|
| <b>The student queries</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you tell me what you would like me to look at again?</li> <li>• What elements of this response do you think put it in a higher band?</li> <li>• Do you have evidence that supports me overturning the late penalty on this piece?</li> <li>• Do you have evidence that supports your genuine authorship of the piece?</li> <li>• Help me understand why you were unable to bring this evidence when we spoke about the plagiarised content.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at the work again and decide about whether the query is warranted.</li> <li>• Clearly tell the student what your decision is.</li> <li>• Do not say anything that could be interpreted as pressure such as “if you don’t take it further, I’ll add three marks” or “you know it could go DOWN if you question me”</li> <li>• You are not required to put the decision in writing, but it’s a good idea to do so.</li> </ul> |
| <b>The student is dissatisfied with your response</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That’s ok – you’ve heard my response. The next step is to book in with XX who is the head of faculty. You can do that by email/going to their office hours/process for your school.</li> <li>• I’m going to email you to confirm my response to this query, and I’ll include a link to the process should you wish to speak with the head of faculty.</li> <li>• I understand that you may feel frustrated; however, I have explained the reasoning behind my decision, and there is a process if you wish to query further. Have a chat with your pastoral care teacher or the teacher librarian and they will help you out.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the student becomes belligerent or threatening, close the conversation and use your school’s management processes to work through the behaviour.</li> <li>• Make sure that you have clearly communicated your decision to the student.</li> <li>• Tell the student that they can take the matter to the faculty head – there is an appeals process and that the student can access it.</li> </ul>                             |

### The Faculty Appeal

If the student is still dissatisfied, the next step is that the student needs to see the faculty head. If the teacher is also the faculty head, they can go to someone from a different faculty. Your head of faculty might ask you some questions about the marking and/ or any processes undertaken in the assessment. Answer these questions. If the head of faculty comes to a different decision, they will explain why, and you will usually get some support from the faculty or a mentor teacher if you need to review and possibly recalibrate your assessment practices.

### The School Appeal

If the student is dissatisfied with the faculty head’s response, they will go to the principal or delegate (usually a deputy – ask at your school) and present a written formal appeal. The student needs to explain why they think the item should have been marked differently, penalty applied differently, or other change.

The principal or delegate would then contact the Office of the BSSS and the Office will nominate a teacher from another school, who will work with two others from your school to listen to everyone involved in the case and decide what the outcome will be. You will need to supply documentation (see below) that supports your decisions in the process.



## Step Three

TWO STAFF MEMBERS  
FROM YOUR SCHOOL

ONE EXTERNAL  
PERSON APPOINTED  
BY THE BSSS



Everyone involved in the panel will be people who haven't been closely involved in the process thus far – i.e., you, and the head of faculty, will not be on the panel. The panel will communicate a decision to you, and again, if it's different to your decision, you will usually receive support from people within your school to review and possibly recalibrate your practice.

## The Board appeal

A board appeal happens when a student writes to the board asking for an appeal on a specific application of policy and procedure. A board appeal cannot happen until the previous stages have taken place – i.e., the student needs to have gone through the process within the school before taking the appeal to the board. Any application for a board appeal must be judged by the appeals committee chair and the executive director to have merit before proceeding. Request for an appeal will not necessarily make it to the board appeal stage.

If a board appeal happens, then the teacher/s involved and the principal will attend the appeal committee hearing. Often the classroom teacher isn't involved by this stage, as board appeals are usually about a bigger issue than that of a single class mark (e.g., they might be about the application of a penalty in a school, a meshing process, or the appeal process itself).

### What will happen

- You will come to the Office at a set date and time. There will be an appeal committee made up of a member of the Board, plus two experienced school leaders from different sectors – usually a different sector to your school.

- You will need to provide documentation supporting your decisions
- The proceedings will be audio recorded, and a member of the office will be there to construct a report for the Board
- The Board appeal committee will be fair and impartial. The Chair will be experienced in assessment and assessment discipline.
- If relevant, you will explain why you made the decision you made.
- The Chair will not allow parties involved to insult or threaten each other.
- The Chair will deal kindly and fairly with all people involved.

### What won't happen

- The student won't be allowed to directly question you, nor you the student.
- There will be no official announcement to the community that the appeal took place. No one will know unless you tell them.
- You will not be in trouble from the Board, even if the student's appeal is upheld.

## Preventing appeals

Preventing appeals generally hinges on four main things:

- consistency
- fairness
- documentation
- the discussion

## Consistency and fairness

Appeals can be minimised in the first instance by being consistent and fair. This is part of normal teaching practise – of course we strive to be consistent and fair – but it can also be part of the performative aspects of teaching practice, such as overtly stating why you are undertaking some actions, to help students feel confident that their work will be dealt with fairly.

### Important school-wide consistencies

- Special considerations: this includes extensions. A consistent, publicised process, with a central register of all provisions is not only policy, but it's good practice!
- Every teacher consistently applies plagiarism, late, insubstantial, and other penalties.
- The school has an academic integrity program that all students attend; this may be through a class, through pastoral care, orientation programs, or other means that are suitable for your school.

### Consistency in the classroom, faculty, or teacher

- The mark that is put on the task is the same mark that goes into ACS
- There are consistent and communicated policies in the faculty (or school) about drafts, sheets of notes brought into exams, use of AI, whether quotes count in the word count, what happens if a performance or presentation goes over time, and so on.
- There is a clear, understood process for moderation in the faculty that is communicated as part of normal practice.
- Any change or bespoke instructions need to be in writing, and if the task is a multi-class task, communicated to all classes.
- Due dates, word counts, 'out of 'numbers, etc. do not change arbitrarily or seem arbitrary.
- Validation tasks are predictable and fair; i.e., not different for different classes in the markbook, and don't happen months after hand-in.

## Documentation

If an appeal is raised, documentation can be the difference between the appeal being upheld or challenged. The following outlines some of the documentation you might want to consider. Some of this documentation can be proactively created, and much of it should be easy to review and reuse between tasks, classes, and semesters.

### Important documentation school-wide

- Student handbooks that clearly explain procedures, rules and processes.
- Records of student attendance at seminars such as plagiarism information seminars run in pastoral care/study hall time.
- A central record of special provisions, including extensions.
- A central record of plagiarism, and a published workflow for the plagiarism letters.
- Penalties recorded **on ACS**. Make sure marks are adjusted in ACS for any penalties; this has impacts on the notional zero.

### Important documentation in the classroom, faculty or teacher

#### Written on the task

- Clear guidance about the acceptable use of AI.
- Clear guidance about anything you intend to add or remove marks for – e.g., word count (do quotes count?), essential inclusions, what makes a nonserious attempt.
- Clear guidance about academic integrity – whether that's specifying a referencing style, linking to a document, or explaining how academic integrity works in your subject.
- Clear information about any validation tasks or processes
- Rubric/s or marking guide
- Correct metadata – e.g., unit name, percentage weighting of the task
- Links to the school's policies, particularly if there's a policy that might affect the marking of the task.
- If you need to amend the task, do so in writing

## Other documentation

- The meshing plan for the subject, if it is a T course
- The marking guide or benchmarking for the task that shows how numbers were assigned to the responses – e.g., a test marking guide; or the information about how the pieces were ranked if, for example, the task was marked out of 100 on an unnumbered rubric

## Any documentation related to the appeal or query

- Emails or letters sent to the student
- Drafts, feedback and notes given to the student
- Notes from meetings with the student
- Notes from panel meetings (e.g., for a school appeal)
- Copies of information used to make decisions in the appeal or query

## Appeals and emotions

Teacher emotions are a part of teaching, and it is normal to experience negative as well as positive emotions – although the former, untreated, have higher links to burnout (Chang, 2009, Beltman and Poulton, 2019).

Teachers may find themselves needing to project emotions that aren't the same as what they're feeling, either to control a specific situation, or to avoid breaking down the teacher-student relationship (Chang, 2009). This can be challenging if you need to do it a lot. When a student queries a result, it might provoke feelings of frustration, anger, or even guilt. While we do not pretend to have all the answers, we did want to put forward some strategies that some people may find useful.

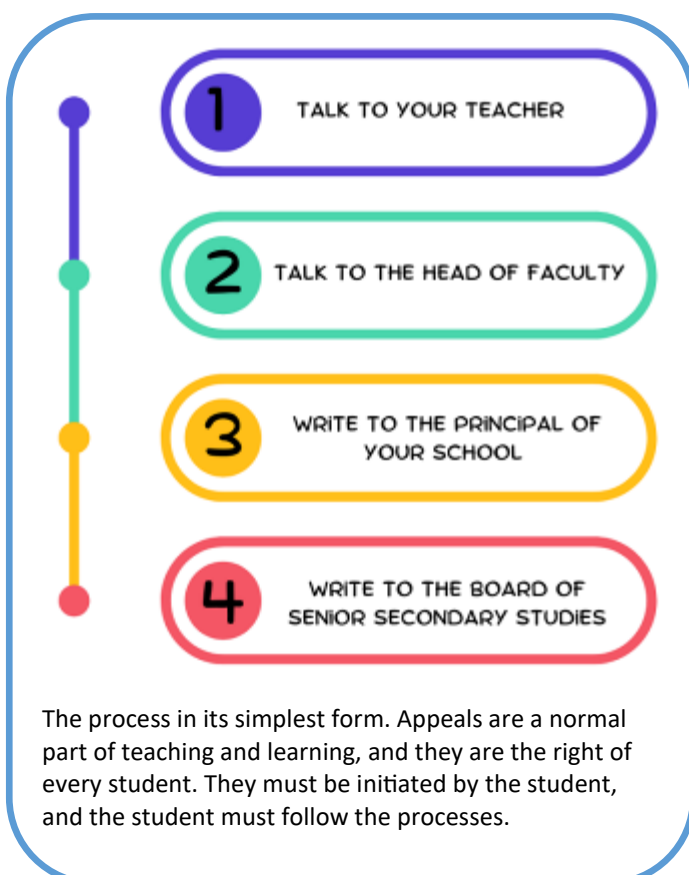
## Proactive strategies

### Teachers

- Recognise that appeals and queries are normal practice. Most appeals don't make it past the school level, and if the appeal is truly spurious or on unappealable grounds, it won't be accepted by the Board, either.
- Use the prevention and mitigation strategies above so that you know you've done what you can do.
- Reflect on your own emotions and emotional regulation strategies to understand why you react the way you do. ([Beltman and Poulton, 2019](#)) discusses that a literature review of studies focussed on teachers' emotional management shows that this kind of awareness may be beneficial to teachers.
- Speak to leadership or mentors within your school to ask how you can be supported if you need it. For example, your faculty leader may assist you by helping you review your response to the student.

### School leaders

- Ensure that your school community knows that coercive strategies are **unacceptable** when communicating with teachers, the school, or the Board. Coercive strategies may be things like threats, or a statement that [x] action by the school could cause [y] action by the student.
- Ensure that the processes and procedures for an appeal are clearly communicated to your community, including acknowledging that appeals are a normal part of teaching and learning, appropriate behaviour and speech in making an appeal, and the role of the student in making an appeal. This might be in school or student meetings, or parent communication.



- Ensure that teachers are aware that they are not alone if there is a query or appeal, and the channels for assistance are clear. Structural support for teachers, including from school management, is important for decreasing teacher stress and burnout (Beltman and Poulton, 2019).

## In-the-moment strategies

### Teachers

- Use a temporary strategy for emotional regulation (e.g., taking a break or rescheduling the meeting with the student) so that you can come back to the problem with a more objective point of view (Beltman and Poulton, 2019).
- Ask your school leader or mentor to assist you with your response to the query.
- If you are distressed, contact your school's employee assistance program.

### School leaders

- If a student queries a result, ensure that the teacher understands their role, and then continue the process. If you make a decision that contradicts the teacher's decision, have an open conversation to explain why, and make use of mentors within your school to assist the teacher.
- Ensure that the teacher feels supported in any discussion with the student. This might mean talking through the main points that the teacher could cover in the appeal conversation with the student. Be especially mindful with new educators and people teaching out of area that this conversation is supportive of their skills and recognises their expertise.
- Be mindful that a query must come from the student. A reminder from a school leader may be effective if a third party is pushing boundaries.

## Board Appeals: What might they be about?

Please note that these are not based on any specific real life events.

### Example: Appeal that would not proceed – no grounds

The student's assessment task sheet clearly stated that students needed to be prepared to provide drafts and notes to support their authorship of their essay if there was any query that AI may have been used. The student's work was judged by the teacher to be probably constructed using AI. In the academic integrity interview, the student refused to provide any evidence to support their authorship of the essay, instead stating repeatedly "I didn't plagiarise and you can't prove it". The teacher and head of faculty decided that it was most appropriate to mark the piece with the suspected AI content removed. This decision was upheld by the school appeal.

This would not progress to a board appeal because the assessment sheet clearly stated that a condition of the assessment was that the student needed to retain and provide notes and drafts to demonstrate their authorship.

**There is no merit to the appeal as the student did not follow the stated validation/quality assurance requirement of the assessment task, and there is strong evidence through the publication of the assessment task to students on ACS that the requirement was clearly communicated to the student.**

It is most likely that the Executive Director and the Appeals Chair would reject the appeal.

### Example: Appeal that would proceed

The student's assessment task sheet did not mention AI; however, AI was mentioned in the whole-school academic integrity assembly. The student's work was judged by the teacher to be probably constructed using AI. When the item was handed back, the student was told by the teacher that the teacher and head of faculty had decided that the student would not get any marks for that item because they had cheated using AI. The student raised a school appeal stating that they had paid for the AI, so the product was legally theirs. The decision to award a notional zero for plagiarism in this task was upheld by the school appeal panel.

**This situation has grounds to progress to a board appeal, because the teacher and head of faculty did not follow published BSSS Policy and Procedure when they determined the penalty for the alleged plagiarism without a meeting occurring, and without the student being permitted to put forward their side of the story.**

This was also missed by the school appeal committee.

The Board appeal committee would determine what the outcome was for the student, but a possible outcome is that the plagiarism meeting occurs, the student puts forward their case, and the penalty or action is then decided.

The student's erroneous belief about AI is not relevant to the breach of policy in assigning the plagiarism penalty – but to be clear, it is an erroneous belief and if the policy was followed, then it may very well be reasonable to give the penalty of not counting the item. Equally, after speaking with the student, resubmission may be a reasonable penalty given the magnitude of the misunderstanding of AI and assessment.

Ideally, though, this situation would have been picked up and remedied by the School Appeal committee, because it's a clear breach of policy.

**Example: Appeal that would not proceed in its entirety -- contains elements that cannot be dealt with by BSSS**

This essay was a common task across a year group, and the task sheet clearly stated that some use of AI was permitted, and students needed to append any conversations with AI to their essay. The student did so. When the piece was handed back, the teacher berated them, saying "You have cheated. You should be ashamed of yourself for using AI. You and everyone else that used AI have lost marks, I don't care what the faculty head said."

**The loss of marks is appealable, because AI was permitted in the task.**

However, the BSSS process *cannot* deal with misconduct issues of this nature. These issues need to be dealt with by the school, sector, or system, through complaints processes. So, the student could appeal the loss of marks – and would probably be successful – but would need to complain about the teacher's unprofessional behaviour through different channels.

**Example: Appeal that would not proceed – misunderstanding of the system**

A student from Bottlebrush Creek College appeals their mathematics results on the basis that their friend at Lake Burley Griffin was allowed to use a more advanced calculator. They contend that their friend was able to get better marks because of the calculator and will be advantaged by this in their ATAR.

**It is most likely that the Executive Director and Board Appeals Chair would reject the appeal because it's based on a misunderstanding of the ACT senior secondary system.**

It is also likely that we would support the school to explain to the student why it is okay to have these different conditions in the different schools and scaling groups.

**Further reference:**

[BSSS Policy and Procedure](#), particularly Chapter 7 (p.63)

BSSS [Teacher](#) and [Student](#) News

**Works cited:**

Beltman, S. and Poulton, E. 2019. "Take a step back": teacher strategies for managing heightened emotions. Australian Educational Researcher. 46 (4): pp. 661-679

Chang, Mei-Lin. (2009). An Appraisal Perspective of Teacher Burnout: Examining the Emotional Work of Teachers. Educational Psychology Review. 21. 193-218. 10.1007/s10648-009-9106-y.

In the event of an appeal, contact your school's appeals coordinator or principal's delegate for advice.

Preventing appeals generally hinges on:

- consistency
- fairness
- documentation
- the discussion



# Recognition of Excellence



## Key Information

- Recognition of Excellence categories have changed and will mainly be determined by data already held by the BSSS
- A new award, the Aunty Agnes Shea Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership and Community Service Award will be awarded based on application
- The ceremony is on 13 December, 2024

The BSSS Recognition of Excellence Awards will take place on Friday 13 December at Albert Hall. This year, the awards have been expanded and restructured to better acknowledge the diversity of learners and highlight the variety of educational pathways offered by the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies.

In a shift from previous years, schools will no longer need to submit nominations for the Excellence Awards, Vocational Studies Awards, or System Leadership Awards. Instead, the BSSS will use end-of-year certification data to inform schools of eligible candidates for these awards.

This year's BSSS Recognition of Excellence Awards will feature six categories:

### ACT Senior Secondary Certificate Excellence Award (non-TES)

- A minimum of 17 T/A/M/E units.
- The highest weighted Grade Point Average (GPA) from the school graduating cohort calculated from the best twelve units (T, H, A, M).
- In the event of a tie, the largest number of weighted A grades, B grades, etc. by unit.
- In the further event of a tie, the school will be required to select the awardee.

### ACT Senior Secondary Certificate Excellence Award (TES)

- The highest Aggregate Score in the school from the graduating cohort

### Vocational Studies Award – School-based

The completion of a Major in a BSSS accredited course integrating a VET qualification.

Achievement of all required VET competencies in the identified VET qualification.

The highest GPA in the identified Major.

In the event of a tie, the school will be required to select the awardee.

### Vocational Studies Award – External

The highest number of E Units (a program of study with an external Registered Training Organisation (RTO) or through an Australian School based Apprenticeship (ASbA)), achieved with a minimum of four units from the school graduating cohort.

In the event of a tie, the school will be required to select the awardee.

### BSSS System Leadership Award

- Member of the BSSS Student Forum from the graduating cohort.
- Demonstrated a strong commitment and participation in forum activities.

### Aunty Agnes Shea Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership and Community Service Award

Aunty Agnes Shea was a highly respected senior Ngunnawal Elder and leader who tirelessly advocated for reconciliation, equality, and the revitalisation of language and education.

Schools will assist students and families in nominating for the Aunty Agnes Shea Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership and Community Service Award.

The criteria for this award are as follows:

- The student must be currently completing the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate and graduating in the year of nomination.
- The student must identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person and demonstrate involvement with their local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.
- The student must have sustained high achievement across all courses studied in years 11 and 12. They may also demonstrate excellence in one or more academic, cultural, or sporting areas or show significant contributions to their school and/or the broader community.

Applications can be made in a range of ways, such as a one-page personal statement, a three-minute (maximum) video or another negotiated form of presentation.

This award will be decided by a committee including Indigenous representatives. More than one student from a school may nominate, and more than one student from a school may be awarded in any given year. This award is open to students from any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander nations, family groups, or identities. Please contact the Office of the Board for more information at:

## Recognition of Excellence 2024

### Where is it?

The 2024 Recognition of Excellence will be at Albert Hall.

### When is it?


13th December

### What do I need to do?

Most awards will be calculated from information already held by the office. You might be called upon in the case of a tie between students.

In the case of the Aunty Agnes Shea Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership award, it is appropriate for school staff to support students in gathering documents and making an application for this award. Something to note here is that much of the documentation that would support an application for this award is the same kind of documentation that students will need if they wish to go on to apply for various community grants, so they'll be at least halfway there!





# Curriculum Updates

## Health Science

Health Science will replace Human Biology from 2026. The course developers have created a significant document with elaborations and ideas for teaching the new course once accredited; have a look at it here. As always, transition arrangements for the courses can be found here.

## Interdisciplinary Science

Stuck for ideas for interdisciplinary units? Want to shake things up a bit in 2025? Just published to the website, we have a range of ideas and resources to inform your programs of learning, or to spark your imagination for new programs of learning and topics of study. Check them out here.

## Representing courses to the community

Taking a particular lens to explore a course or unit, if you maintain the course integrity and standards, is not only permissible in the ACT senior secondary system, but also encouraged!

What's not ok, though, is calling the course something different in your prospectus, on your website, or in your timetable. In the September Board Meeting, policy around this was clarified. Courses and units need to be presented using their official names – e.g., Interdisciplinary Science, or the names of English units like “Comprehending and Responding” or “Comparative Texts”.

Please check your website/prospectus to ensure that courses and units offered by the school are called their official name instead of names like “American Gothic Fiction” or “Blood and Lust in the Animal Kingdom”.

## Education Studies

The Board has approved the development of a new course with the provisional title “Education Studies”. Working with advice from The University of Canberra, The Australian Catholic University, and Federation University, this T-only course is intended to be a pathway course for students who are interested in education careers. We had an overwhelming response to the EOI for course developers; 63 applicants! Thank you to all who applied – it was an extremely difficult selection process, and we intend to organise other ways for people to contribute in 2025.

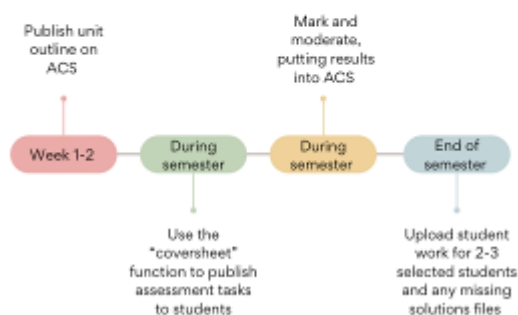
The first meeting of the course writing team happened in October, and the shape paper has been drafted. We warmly invite people to read the shape paper and respond to the survey here.

We also surveyed the Student Forum about their appetite for a course in Education Studies, and the students were very keen! They identified a range of uses for the course in addition to a traditional teaching pathway — for example, sports coaching, mentorship in religious contexts, and management responsibilities.

## Moderation Preparation: Automatic import

We suggest using ACS functions during the semester so that you are only handling assessment tasks and unit outlines once.

Information entered into unit outline, coversheet and mark books is automatically added to the moderation portfolio.





## AST Date Change 2025 and 2026

The AST will be held in the last week in August 2025 and 2026. Please ensure this is communicated multiple times to your school community, and that students are reminded that travel, even to see elderly relatives, is not a valid reason to be granted second sitting.



Could you 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.**

## AST dialogue

Please consider how you're speaking with students about the AST and avoid repeating statements like "getting a bad AST result will mean you get a bad ATAR". This is unequivocally untrue; however, several student pieces in the writing task, and student members of the forum, repeated this as something that the students had been told. See our earlier teacher newsletters here for more information about how the AST works, or for the full mathematical explanation, see the Hyndman report here.

Equally, it appears some schools have been telling students that the AST questions are drawn from English, Maths and Science. This is also untrue. The AST short response and multiple choice are both approximately 50/50 verbal reasoning and quantitative reasoning and can be drawn from any subject area.

## Provision of data to UAC

The BSSS has determined to cease provision of identified or deidentified academic data of Year 11 students through UAC from 2025 onwards.

The provision of Year 11 data was one of the measures taken during the covid period to help students represent their learning despite the disruptions and disconnections of lockdowns; with this period of territory-wide lockdowns and remote schooling now over, concerns about student privacy and the validity of the data are salient.

The Board's rationale for this determination includes:

Maintaining the integrity of the current certification process and the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate (ACT SSC) as year 11 data has not been certified;

Concerns regarding the individual privacy of students including the application of non-certified academic data of students who are not applying for early offers; and

An equitable approach to student educational development and wellbeing through promoting learning and development throughout years 11 and 12.

There is nothing preventing students from supplying this data themselves as part of the application process. Students are able to download a PDF from Student Profiles Online. This is part of the process for several universities.

## AST Special Provisions Smartforms

The AST Special Provisions forms are moving to ACT Government Smartforms. We anticipate this change being live early in the new year.

These Smartforms will be held on the ACT Government's secure servers, like the forms used for things like renewing a WWVP card, or drivers licence. The student's nominated doctor will automatically be emailed and invited to fill in the form. Please remind students that any appointment booked for AST special provisions should be a "long" appointment.



## Sessions at the Office of the BSSS

Essential PL sessions will run at the Office of the BSSS, including introductory workshops for teachers, curriculum and certification coordinators, and leaders. Please enrol for these sessions and RSVP, otherwise we don't know you're coming and can't tell you if anything changes.

To enrol for a PL session, click on the hyperlink in the BSSS calendar. This will take you to a form where you can enrol. The 2025 calendar will be out very soon!

## New: Sponsor a Session

We want to make it easier for teachers to get to PL, and for schools to offer whole-school PL. To that end, schools will be able to "sponsor" professional learning in 2025. Generally, we need 12 attendees at a minimum to run a PL.

What does this involve?

- Schools can apply to have BSSS Officers come to their site to deliver one of the PL opportunities offered by the office
- The school will provide a presentation space and parking for the Office staff
- The school will let the Office know if there are any extra spaces – we will advertise so that casual teachers and teachers from other schools can also attend
- There is no cost attached to BSSS Professional Learning, but there are minimum numbers needed for a PL to run.
- If you need a more bespoke session, email [bsssenquiries@act.gov.au](mailto:bsssenquiries@act.gov.au) to discuss options.

Great! What should I do?

- Decide on a PL that at least 20 people are willing to attend
- Talk with your school's management/leadership to get permission and dates
- Fill in the form and we'll get back to you
- On the PL date, make a room with technology support available

## Asynchronous PL

We have an ever-expanding list of asynchronous professional learning on our website. Some of these asynchronous courses are TQI accredited, and others can be counted as teacher-identified professional learning.

The current suite of asynchronous PL includes:

### TQI Accredited

Assessing Group Work

Artificial Intelligence in ACT Senior Secondary Schools

Creative inquiry and Interdisciplinary Inquiry in the Arts

Feedback on Student Learning

Introduction to the BSSS Workshop

Introduction to BSSS Ethical Research Principles and Guidelines

Introduction to the ACT BSSS The Arts Framework

Introduction to the ACT BSSS Commerce Framework

Introduction to the ACT BSSS English Framework

Introduction to the ACT BSSS Health, Outdoor and Physical Education Framework

Introduction to the ACT BSSS Humanities and Social Sciences Framework

Introduction to the ACT BSSS Industry and Services Framework

Introduction to the ACT BSSS Languages Framework

Introduction to the ACT BSSS Mathematics Framework

Introduction to the ACT BSSS Science Framework

Introduction to the ACT BSSS Technologies Framework

Programs of Learning in the ACT Senior Secondary System

Quality Assessment Guidelines

Writing Great Rubrics

### Teacher Identified PL

Differentiating in Assessment

Teaching Problem Solving

# Can you clarify that?

## What should I put into an EOI to participate in Course or Framework development?

The EOI process can be quite competitive for some courses, so it is a good idea to write about your relevant experience and what you bring to the table. We are expecting some highly competitive EOI processes in 2025 – particularly, courses under the HOPE Framework, English, and Mathematics. For example, including mention of your qualifications and relevant experience can be helpful in differentiating between a strong field of applicants. We are looking to revise our forms to make this clearer for applicants. Stay tuned for these Frameworks and courses in 2025-2026.

## Why do I need to put the original mark and the late penalty into ACS?

We have seen lately some courses where people are manually calculating their late penalties, and then treating the penalised score as if it were the original when entering marks into ACS. Please don't do this! There are several reasons why we need you to enter the original numerical mark and then use ACS to apply the penalty:

- ACS is the “one true record” and can be used to ascertain if there is a pattern of behaviour such as lateness or non-submission.
- If there has been a communication breakdown – e.g., the student had a medical certificate that the teacher was unaware of, and the special provisions team belatedly informed the teacher of an extension – then the penalty is easily removed, and the original mark reinstated.
- ACS treats penalised marks differently for the purposes of assigning the notional zero. This is very important in T subjects, and when students' penalties drop them below the maximum notional zero. Putting the original mark in and then applying the penalty means that you don't end up with a statistically problematic notional zero on that one student who handed a somewhat precarious response six days late.

If you're not sure how to enter penalties, check out the ACS help file [here](#).

## What happens when there's a non-serious attempt in the AST?

A nonserious attempt on the AST is cause for concern for people in the office, people in schools, and the markers at ACER. When a suspected nonserious attempt is found, the ACER team contact the Office of the BSSS with a copy of the task. The task is then examined against the criteria on the paper – e.g., in multiple choice, is there an obvious pattern? In the writing task, is it on topic? Sometimes the office contacts schools for a welfare check when a student has written something concerning, or something that indicates that the student may need extra support, even if the response is not ultimately judged to be nonserious.

If the response is deemed by the AST team and Executive Director to be nonserious, a letter is sent to the student and to the school, with the school responsible for following up with the student to ensure that the student is aware that one or more parts of their AST response have been counted as nonserious – something that means the student is no longer eligible for an ATAR or TES.

The student may appeal the decision by writing to the Board Chair; generally, with evidence that helps to explain why the response should be counted as serious. The Board Chair then makes the final decision. Because the student is the one who needs to write, sometimes students will elect not to, as their decision not to complete the AST seriously was a deliberate choice. Parents, carers and schools can help the student write, but the letter must come from the student.

You can help students write responses that by emphasising the rules of the AST. Be open with them that the test is marked by professional markers, not by the BSSS or the Office, and that if they want to complain or effect change, help them to find the right channels. If your school uses external markers for AST trials, make sure that these people are working from current guidelines (e.g., students should never be encouraged to write narratives or poems in the writing task). Make sure students are aware of the rules printed on the front of the paper, such as what word count is needed, and that making a pattern of any kind in the multiple choice may be counted as nonserious.

### What should I write on the AST Special Provisions Forms?

As a teacher, you might be asked to help a student demonstrate their need for special provisions.

For questions that ask the IMPACT of the condition, we are not asking you to list the provisions given to the student. There is a space later in the form to detail provisions.

The impact questions are asking you to list the impact of the condition on a specific type of thinking (verbal or quantitative), or the student’s general test performance. Answers might be statements like:

- Has difficulty reading complex text silently
- Often accidentally switches numbers
- Cannot read font size below 40pt
- N/A: reasoning not affected, diabetes provisions needed for equity
- Student has panic attacks during exams and needs time to mitigate so that they can complete the exam.

When we ask about current provisions, we need the school to let us know what is already being done, what the student is used to, and importantly, if anything has been tried that did not work. AST should never be the first time a student encounters equitable assessment. The expectation is that the student uses the same or similar conditions in all in-class assessment. Need more information? Ask your AST coordinator.

### Are there people in the Office over the summer?

Yes! Like other ACT government departments, we have a shutdown period between Christmas and New Year, but we’ll be back after that. We anticipate moving in mid-January, which may affect response times, but we will be here.

**Do you have a question? Send it on to BSSS Enquiries, or ask one of the Office staff in person at PL.**

## Last Days for...

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| Student assessment                                | 22 November |
| Entry of assessment data into ACS                 | 26 November |
| Handback of student assessment                    | 27 November |
| Students to be notified of unit and course scores | 29 November |
| Lodgement of college appeals                      | 3 December  |
| Finalisation of college appeals                   | 4 December  |
| Lodgement of Board appeals by final year students | 6 December  |
| Finalisation of Board appeals                     | 10 December |
| Term ☺  | 17 December |



# Certification 2024

## 4 December: Perfect Data Day

What is Perfect Data Day? Well, it's pretty much what it sounds like – the day when all the data in ACS needs to be complete. VET data, classes, all of it. Perfect Data Day is the day that we begin processing so that students can be certificated – whether that certificate is a VET certificate, a Senior Secondary Certificate, or a Senior Secondary Certificate with a TES.

## Making changes after Perfect Data Day

Any change made must be done on 6 December when the database opens briefly for fixes. It's not possible to do a sneaky change after then, because scaling and printing have begun. If there is a dire emergency edit needed, this will happen on December 11 between 9-10am; your certification coordinator will come in to the Office to do these edits. Please keep these edits to a minimum, because we've started printing VET certificates by this stage, AND the main scale for students receiving a TES has occurred (there will be a final scale to capture any edits).

## Other key dates

Please note – your school may run different timelines, particularly if you are in a school that ends in early December. This is the prerogative of the school. The dates in the Certification calendar (see the previous page) are the *last possible*, do not pass go, do not collect \$200, you will literally be holding up all the ATARs kind of last possible. And you don't want to be the person holding up all the ATARs. Trust us on that one.

You may also want to ensure that the non-student related parts of Moderation – such as coversheets and unit outlines – are done now, so that when you are putting together your moderation portfolios in late November, all you need to do is upload the student work.

## ACS is closed on...

5 December 2024 until 12 December 2024. The database will open briefly on 6 December for any last-minute emergency edits.

When ACS reopens on 12 December you can:

- Finalise moderation, print things out that you previously hadn't been able to

After the brief re-opening on December 6, you must not:

- Change data, including VET data, because it will either need to be re-entered in 2025, or it will not have an impact on 2024 certification.

## Keep your phone on...

5, 9 and 11 December, especially if you lead a faculty. These are days when particularly important parts of the scaling process occur, and they're the key dates for the certification team at the Office picking up missing scores, scores that seem aberrant, scores with problems, and similar. The Office may need to get hold of you fairly urgently to confirm data so that your students are not disadvantaged.

## When will my students receive their ATAR?

Students will be able to access their ATAR from 9.00am on Monday 16 December through Profiles Online.

Students will be able to access their ATAR through UAC from Wednesday 18 December.

Please remind your final-year students to download copies of their academic record and any other information they would like to keep from Student Profiles Online before the new school year. We will roll the database over in mid January, and at that point previous final year students will lose access.

