BSSS News | Winter 2026

Inside

ACT Government

Cover Image

Detail from “Checkmate” by Evalina Lee

Burgmann Anglican School

Thank you, Evalina, for allowing us to use your artwork!

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

Map p. 4 from Google

Images p. 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14 from Canva

All other images from BSSS Officers.

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

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

Student Forum

Each term the BSSS student forum meets to give us the student perspective about Senior Secondary schooling.

At the most recent meeting we asked students what they wanted to know more about, what myths they had heard about the AST, and what they think would be fair assessment tasks using AI. Check out some of their responses and consider their meaning for your own practise.

Student thoughts on Fair Tasks Using AI

Tasks that are designed to incorporate AI will be fairer.

In prepared oral presentations, it is harder to detect AI, so less fair.

AI usage is so varied in type and level that no single policy change can accommodate it all.

While take home tasks are becoming less fair, people who don't do well in tests will suffer from not having take home tasks.

More application-based assessment seems fairer.

Unseen questions and personal reflections on process seem fair.

Stimulus responses, tests/exams, In-class validations, in-class essays all seem fair.

Having to do double the number tasks because of AI does not seem fair.

Teachers expect too much of the quality of responses in-class tasks these days; it still seems like the expectations for the take home task.

AST Myths for Busting

Want to get your best 00's Adam and Jamie on and do some Myth busting? Here's a few the students identified.

Myth: You really do need to have studied certain subjects recently to do well in the AST, e.g. science and maths. If you do Physics, you perform better on the AST.

Reality: You don't need to study certain subjects, but the AST tests verbal and quantitative reasoning, including reading graphs and complex, nuanced text. If you're practising quantitative analysis skills in your subjects, you are continuing to develop these skills. There are, however, students who do Science, Maths and Physics who get very low scores in the AST.

Myth: Certain areas of the AST will affect subjects' scaling differently, e.g. science questions and science subjects.

Reality: This is absolutely not the case. Scaling is about applying algorithms to datasets. The algorithm doesn't care if the dataset is Physics or Photography, just that there's data there, and it treats all scaling groups the same, using the AST as an aggregated and standardised result.

Myth: The capacity to obtain the highest scores/ATAR depends on which school you attend.

Reality: All schools in the ACT where students receive an ATAR have students with an ATARs over 95. There is no information about a school that contributes to scaling — just scaling groups, which are each treated independently.

Myth: Watching the news is super important preparation. You have to know everything going on in the world to have a chance at the writing task, because the topics are always really niche. Personal anecdotes hold more weight that stats as evidence in the writing task.

Reality: Writing task topics are not really all that niche — for example, 'cancel culture', 'tourism and travel' and 'wealth' have been recent picks. Something that teachers can do, however, is ask students to come up with arguments that explore different sides of a conundrum in the course or unit being taught — for example, in the Arts, you could look at the choices made in the Archibald prize; in sports, you could look at the issue of player safety and the integrity of the game

in contact sports; or in technologies you could look at the ethics of AI use. In the exam the trick is working out the primary topic of the paper and coming up with a good argument that deals with that topic.

Myth: If you do badly on the AST, it doesn't matter how well you did in class, you will get a low ATAR.

Not true at all! There are two things that might happen if a student does "badly" on the AST:

1. The result is treated as wholly or partially aberrant. This happens when the result is statistically so far away from where the student was placed by the school, that there is some factor interfering. The assumption is that school data collected over two years is more accurate than AST data collected over two days.

2. If the result isn't found to be aberrant, it will be used in the scaling calculation. However, within each scaling group, the student will retain the rank the school determined. Scaling is then applied to the whole group. Only the scaled course scores are used to determine a students rank.

Myth: We are supposed to write in PEEL paragraphs to do well in the AST. AST short-response answers are supposed to be in paragraph form. Using a non-essay structure for the writing task is better.

Reality: Mnemonics such as PEEL help some students to remember what should be in a paragraph and the ordering of key information, but sticking too closely to a mnemonic can lead to formulaic writing which may not score well in the writing task if the ideas included are also formulaic. Students should think of PEEL (or TEXAS, or any other mnemonic) as being like training wheels for a bicycle — these mnemonics help them to remember what should be in a paragraph and the ordering of key information, but once they are confident writers, the "training wheels" are no longer needed.

A non-essay structure is acceptable — however, the piece needs to be in argumentative, non-fiction prose. The student should strive to make a clear, supported argument and not write a narrative or a poem.

In Short Response answers it is important to make a fresh point for each mark on offer.

Myth: Some ACT Scaling Tests exams are easier than others and that is unfair.

Reality: Perhaps some ASTs may appear easier than others — in any process there will be variations in output. It doesn't actually matter for two reasons:

1. An AST result of 150 is always the middle of the group, regardless of what that looks like as a non-standardised score. So if it is easier one year, everyone will answer more questions correctly and the person in the middle will have a higher percentage of correct answers. If it is harder one year, everyone will answer fewer questions correctly and the person in the middle will have less correct answers. Each time that person still gets a score of 150, because they are in the middle.

2. The use of the AST only matters in helping to process school-based assessment data for the students in the graduating cohort who sat the AST that year. There is no comparison between years in the processing.

You might also like to see the answer about the weightings below.

Myth: The AST reuses questions from previous years.

Reality: There may be similarities to questions from previous years but there is never reuse of a test.

Myth: The weighting for the different sections is always the same.

Reality: The weighting changes every year. A regression process is used to determine the weightings of the different parts of the paper — the writing task, quantitative multiple choice, verbal multiple choice, quantitative short response and verbal short response are treated as separate for this process. Part of the philosophy of scaling in the ACT is that the school results obtained across two years are the best reflection of student achievement, so where possible, this data should be used as an anchor to help decide where to put the most weight. The weightings are determined by which weights maximise the correlation of the AST with school results. This is done on a territory-wide basis, not school-by-school.

Myth: students never find out how they went on the AST.

Reality: AST scores are included with the certificates to schools. The scores are standardised, so a 150 means a student is on the average of the group, not that they got a "mark" of 150. Generally the scores are between the high 80's and the 220's.

Curriculum Updates

Language Courses update

Curriculum officers from the Office of the Board of Senior Secondary Studies (OBSSS) have worked with Language teachers to develop draft Shape Papers for Modern Languages (Beginning, Continuing and Advanced), as well as Classical Languages (Beginning and Continuing). The Shape Papers guide the writing of the Modern and Classical Language courses.

The consultation period for these Shape Papers has now concluded, and we thank the teachers who provided valuable feedback.

This term, curriculum officers will begin working with teachers to draft the Languages courses. Further consultation opportunities are planned later this term or in Term 3.

Thank you to the course writers and our critical friends Associate Professor Angela Scarino at Adelaide University and Professor Caillan Davenport at the Australian National University for providing expert advice throughout the process.

Mathematics and English Framework update

Curriculum officers have been working with framework writers to develop draft Mathematics and English Frameworks.

We hope to release the draft Frameworks soon for public consultation. A link to the draft Frameworks and survey will be emailed to Principals and will be available on the BSSS website.

Health, Outdoor and Physical Education (HOPE) network meeting

Following the implementation of the HOPE Framework and courses this year, the OBSSS will host a network meeting on Thursday 25 June from 9.00am to 12.30pm. Teachers will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the current Framework and courses, discuss assessment tasks aligned with updated requirements and engage in a session on the Retention of Student Assessment Evidence in the HOPE context.

Other information will be shared with schools in the coming weeks. Please email BSSS Curriculum if you have any questions.

Pacific Studies

There will be a planning day for schools intending to offer *Pacific Studies* on Wednesday 24 June from 9.00am-3.00pm. A teacher from a delivering school must attend this day as this course is new to senior secondary, and it will be important to build a shared understanding of appropriate scope, rigour, and assessment.

The planning day will be held at the BSSS Offices - Level Three, 14 Childers St. Acton.

Expressions of interest can be submitted through this form.

Health, Outdoor and Physical Education

We invite teachers delivering courses under the Health Outdoor and Physical Education Framework to a network meeting to discuss with each other how they are implementing the new courses and to share ideas about implementation for Semester Two. We have space for up to two people from each school.

The network meeting will be held on Thursday 25 June from 9.00am-12.30pm at the BSSS Offices.

Expressions of interest can be submitted through this form.

Education Studies

Teachers of *Education Studies* are invited to a network meeting to reflect on the delivery of the course in Semester One and to discuss planning for Semester Two. The meeting will be held on Monday 29 June from 2.00pm-4.00pm. Please contact BSSS Curriculum (BSSSCurriculum@act.gov.au) for more information.

Rest and Movement Breaks

Schools have responsibilities under the *Disability Standards for Education*, and these responsibilities include reasonable adjustments for students who have disability as defined by the Disability Standards for Education. Rest and movement breaks and extra time fall under the umbrella of reasonable adjustments, but where rest and movement breaks are unlikely to have an effect on the inherent requirements of an assessment, extra time is another story.

The Disability Standards for Education speak to what happens when there is a qualification attached to the student's learning – which there is in Senior Secondary.

In section 3.4 section 3 (emphasis added):

> *(3) In assessing whether an adjustment to the course of the course or program in which the student is enrolled, or proposes to be enrolled, is reasonable, the provider is entitled to* ***maintain the academic requirements*** *of the course or program,* ***and other requirements or components that are inherent in or essential to its nature****.*
>
> *Note: In providing for students with disabilities, a provider may continue to* ***ensure the integrity of its courses or programs and assessment requirements and processes****, so that those on whom it confers an award can present themselves as having the appropriate* ***knowledge, experience and expertise implicit in the holding of that particular award****.*

The knowledge, experience and expertise implicit in the Senior Secondary Certificate is outlined by the Australian Qualifications Framework, the BSSS Frameworks and course documents, and the Achievement Standards. Many assessments use time as part of the construct being assessed, which can mean that having more time to complete the task can be an advantage if applied without clear and rigorous processes.

The Inherent Requirements of tests

Upholding the inherent requirements can put teachers and schools in a tricky situation where families have expectations that the school is not able to provide, because they would be certifying a student as having skills and knowledge that the student does not have. For many students, the Senior Secondary Certificate is their first encounter with having to show that they can fulfil requirements to be awarded the Certificate, as opposed to moving through the grades with their age cohort. Identifying the inherent requirements of a task – the things that cannot be changed – is important to knowing what a reasonable adjustment will be.

For example, use of spellcheck could be a reasonable adjustment in a History exam, but not a reasonable adjustment in a spelling test, because spelling is the inherent requirement.

It is important to be mindful that there is an interplay between doctors and schools in this space. Doctors will sometimes recommend a provision that it is not possible to provide as it would not allow the student to meet the inherent requirements of the task, because different tasks have different inherent requirements. Sometimes, doctors recommend provisions that are intended to be temporary, whilst giving time for interventions to work.

How this relates to rest and movement breaks

Extra time to work is a provision with limited support in the critical literature, in part because there is still ongoing research into the impacts of extra time. Some applications of extra time are better-studied than others. You may wish to explore some of the articles in the **Sidebar** on **Page 8** if you are interested in the evidence underpinning extra time.

In the AST the split between rest and movement breaks compared to extra time to work comes down to:

- **Extra time to work** is for when a student is measurably slower at completing a test than others their age, usually due to pain, injury, specific learning disorder, or slower processing that has been measured using a psychometric test.
- **Rest and movement breaks** are for when a student needs to pause in a test to manage a condition, physical feeling, or emotion, usually because they have a condition that affects attention, are likely to freeze or panic, need to take medication, or need to move to alleviate pain.

Implementing breaks and extra time

There are a range of strategies that can be used to implement breaks and extra time. Some of them are whole-group strategies, with an awareness that students may not demonstrate a clinical level of distress, but may need explicit teaching about strategies to help stay on-task and calm in a high-stakes assessment environment.

Strategies for all students

- Reading time strategies – for example, teaching how to use reading time to best advantage
- Exam organisation strategies – e.g., order of questions, eliminating distractors in multiple choice, space and mark values as indicators of how much time to put into a question
- Strategies when feeling "stuck" in an exam: e.g., skipping a question or changing which section of the exam the student is working on, and returning to it later in the test
- Refocussing strategies such as box breathing (breathing in for 4, holding for 4, breathing out for 4); body scan; identification of items that appeal to different senses
- Explicit identification when a task has been constructed using universal design principles; e.g., with long time limits, or with built-in scaffolding
- Explicit identification by all school staff that feeling some nerves, experiencing distractions, and worrying about tests are all normal experiences. The idea is not to invalidate the experiences of students who live with anxiety or ADHD, but to help identify a baseline for neurotypical students. Because stress and anxiety are private and personal, some students may not be aware that some friction is to be expected when undertaking high-stakes assessment, and that their peers feel similarly to them.
- Explicit identification by all school staff about building up tolerance for extended concentration through reading, extended work, hobbies, monotasking (e.g., not playing on your phone whilst you watch TV)

Many students who apply for rest breaks and/or extra time in the AST reflect that they do so because of stress. Some talking points for work with students:

- Self-talk strategies – before, during, and after the exam
- Acute management of stress: e.g., breathing or grounding exercises
- Education about the impact of a single test on the student's results, including the AST aberrant process
- Clinical management of stress and anxiety – accommodation is important, but intervention and learning strategies to manage stress and anxiety will allow a student to function in a range of situations and assist them in their life journey

Although students have likely encountered these ideas in junior years, for some students, it is when they reach senior secondary that exams become too difficult to just "wing it" and they must put some strategies in place. Explicitly teaching exam-taking strategies is likely to help all students.

Specific strategies: Rest and Movement Breaks

Note that these reflection questions and strategies may not fit all situations.

Reflection

- What are the triggers that the student identifies for needing rest and/or movement breaks?

- What are the triggers that you can identify? For example, does the student get restless after 20 minutes, or make careless errors after an hour? Do they begin to show signs of pain after 30 minutes?
- Is the student able to judge when they need a break?
- Is the student liable to have panic attacks in exam conditions?
- How long does the student need for a rest break?

Accommodations to trial with the student:

- Do breaks at predictable or pre-arranged intervals work better than random breaks? For example, does a break every 20 minutes help to manage postural tension before it becomes pain?
- Do breaks between "units" or "sections" in an exam work to help manage distractions?
- Does the student find an aid like a countdown clock or ADHD timer helps them to stay on track, or does it stress them out?
- Has the student tried specific rest and movement strategies in their rest and movement breaks, e.g., stretching, breathing exercises?

Extra Time

Note that these reflection questions and strategies may not fit all situations.

Reflection

- How is the student using the extra time?
- Is the student using all of the extra time?
- In what order does the student tend to complete questions ?
- Is the student fixating or getting stuck on questions? How do you know?
- How much time does the student need to produce written responses?

Accommodations to trial with the student:

- Does the student find an aid like a countdown clock helps them to stay on track, or does it stress them out?
- Does the student find that self-imposed limits – e.g., spending no more than [x] minutes on a 1-mark question – works for them?
- Does having mastery experiences in low-stakes situations – e.g., a trial AST, formative class work – help to alleviate anxiety about not having enough time? For example, if a student undertakes the task in the standard time period, but with low stakes, what happens?
- Trial rest and movement breaks in addition to extra time, but do so with variations – do not assume that a student will "know" how to use rest breaks.

You should work with your school's inclusion team to keep centralised records of what was trialled, when it was trialled, and what the result was. This can help to provide an evidence base for AST special provisions, or it might help the student to see that they are capable of improvement.

Sidebar: Articles exploring extra time and rest and movement breaks

These articles explore extra time and rest and movement breaks from different perspectives — none are precisely the situations that we find ourselves in for the senior secondary system, but may be of interest in exploring the kinds of research that's out there in this space.

Lovett BJ, Nelson JM. Systematic Review: Educational Accommodations for Children and Adolescents With Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry. 2021 Apr;60(4):448-457. doi: 10.1016/j.jaac.2020.07.891. Epub 2020 Aug 1. PMID: 32745597.

Hjärne, M. S. (2021). Just Enough Time to Level the Playing Field: Time Adaptation in a College Admission Test. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *65*(6), 941–955. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1788143

Saka, N., Malinovitch, T., & Shlepack, S. (2025). Give me a break: assessing the effectiveness of test-break with small-group testing accommodations for individuals with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *50*(8), 1188–1206. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2025.2547053

Guez, A., Ketan and M. Piacentini (2024), Mapping study for the integration of accommodations for students with Special Education Needs (SEN) in PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ed03c717-en.

Language matters

In learning support plans or documents, be aware of unintended implications that may stem from the following language and use it intentionally. Consider the power of the self-fulfilling prophecy in education; describe the functional impact and the ways in which the accommodation is expected to address the impact first and foremost, before considering using the following.

Phrase: Due to a diagnosis of [x], Student must have extra time

Why be cautious: A diagnosis is not a definition of a person, and a fixed concept of capacity according to diagnosis is unhelpful and may reinforce stereotypes depending on the condition, by shifting the functional limitations that an individual experiences into a medical label. Different people with the same diagnosis may show different functional impacts, and a specific diagnosis does not guarantee that a specific tool will meet the needs of a specific person.

It is also important to note that there are many online influencers publishing information about accommodations that "must be supplied" for various diagnoses, which is not always supported by research. Taking this information at face value may lead to inappropriate or unnecessary accommodations. This information is often framed as "if you have [x], you need [y]". If you want to investigate this phenomenon further, an article about the phenomenon of unproven accommodations being presented as evidence-based can be found here.

Current evidence shows that multi-tiered systems of support, and intervention, should be the first port of call; accommodations are necessary, but less desirable for the management of long term or lifelong conditions.

Phrase: Extra time will help Student to show their full potential

Why be cautious: Saying that an accommodation will allow a student to show their "full potential" can be problematic because it implies that, without the accommodation, the student's performance is inherently below standard. It is also problematised by the concept of "potential" – by defining a student's performance to the student in terms of a hypothetical "potential", stress and anxiety can be increased through feeling the need to live up to this potential, prioritising outcomes, and promoting perfectionism. Instead of highlighting capability, it can unintentionally suggest that the student, or their disabilities, are a liability.

Phrase: Extra time will benefit Student

Why be cautious: We try to avoid the language of "benefit" in the special provisions space, because the purpose of special provisions is to allow a student to access an assessment. Almost all students would "benefit" from extra time. The use of "benefit" implies that the student is being given an unfair advantage and can perpetuate stigma from those who believe that exam accommodations are "cheating". It implies that the student is getting help to gain a bonus, not using a tool or practice to access an assessment, and reflects a misunderstanding of the purpose of reasonable

Estimates

Estimated marks and grades are used in the ACT senior secondary system as a last resort when a student is unable to complete a task for a documented and verified reason. An estimate is exemption from a task, and there are very few situations where it is ok to use an estimate adjustment over other adjustments. These are:

Where a student has special provisions:

- If it is not possible to complete the task with condition or task modifications **and** the use of an estimate will not compromise the inherent requirements of the unit
- It is not possible to complete the task due to time constraints that result from an acute situation of special provisions

Estimates are only for response to acute situations, and not permitted to be used systematically – i.e., estimates cannot be used to systematically reduce workload by a certain percentage, or to systematically avoid a task type that is an inherent requirement of the subject, like performance tasks in Music or Drama. This is not to say that a student can't have an estimate as a provision, especially if they have a changeable condition that might cause them to not complete a task – but estimates are a response to something as it happens, not a way to systematically change a course.

If a student needs a reduced workload, we encourage them to look at the option of studying the certificate over a longer period of time, so that they can focus on fewer classes per semester.

Other situations:

- Compromised assessment. A compromised assessment is one where the assessment is no longer valid; this can be because of accidental or deliberate release of a task, or a significant and unfair change of assessment conditions for one or more students.
- Misadventure; for example, a fire in the Art storeroom destroys a student's major work, or work was in the back of a teacher's car and the car was stolen.

These estimates are still logged as estimates, but other records also need to be kept in case there is an appeal. Records always need to be kept noting the details of the situation, the reasons an estimate was deemed justified, and the process used to derive the estimated mark and grade.

How do I work out an estimate?

You have two main choices. You should make note of what you did, in case of any queries. It is possible to appeal any result including an estimate, and you will need the notes as part of the process.

In both cases, you are going to estimate based on z-scores rather than on the scores themselves. The use of a z-score to help you decide the estimate helps to stop a task with an unusually high or low mean having a disproportionate impact. Whether you get this z-score from the current markbook or from similar tasks in old markbooks, this can help make sure that the estimate fairly reflects the student's rank. See the "key information" box for more details.

Choice 1: Use the ACS estimate

ACS will give you a suggested estimate, based on the student's z-score across the tasks in the markbook. For this reason, the ACS estimate works best when all other scores are in, because the information about z-scores will be at its highest quality. This is a good option if your tasks are all similar to one another. Using z-scores means that you are not being affected by variations in the marking within a task. If you have no other information about the student (e.g., it is the student's first unit), this is an option. You may also choose to wait until the student has completed more assessment (the following semester) before providing an estimate.

Choice 2: Use other data

It may be that more granular data will give a fairer estimate. This could manifest as:

- Using the z-scores of similar items in the existing markbook to determine the estimate
- Using the z-scores of similar items in other semesters to determine the estimate

When determining an estimated mark, it is best to first determine an estimated z-score, and then calculate the raw mark that corresponds to that z-score.

If you haven't done this before, speak with your certification officer for assistance.

A big estimate: Status

Status functions practically as if you have estimated the entire unit. Status is explicitly and expressly **only** for when a student has shown that they have engaged with, and understood, the inherent requirements of the unit, but something happened that meant that they couldn't complete 50% or more of the assessment tasks for the unit. If you have never seen the student, they cannot be given status.

Some situations where status has been given include:

- A medical incident or accident has meant that the student missed two assessment items totalling more than 50% of the unit assessment, like a major work and process diary.
- A student has been working with a hospital school to complete classwork, but due to a worsening of a condition, was unable to submit assessment totalling more than 50% of the unit assessment.
- Misadventure, such as a house fire, destroyed a major work and all associated documentation.

Situations where status can't be given:

- When a student has had to do no work for a semester due to a situation or condition
- When a student has been working with a hospital school but has not completed the classwork for the unit/s proposed for status

Status should be a decision made centrally, and the BSSS certification team may request copies of the evidence the school used to determine that the student had engaged with the unit but was unable to complete sufficient assessment.

Key information: Z-score

A student's z-score for an item shows how far from the mean they are in that task. It is a measure that is not affected by the whole group having a higher or lower mean, because a z-score of 0 will always be on the mean. A z-score just "is" – it's a thing that exists because the dataset exists.

When you calculate scores using weighted z at the end of the semester, ACS calculates a z-score for the overall unit based on the weighted z scores for the items (i.e., a 30% task is weighted at 30%), not the raw scores. This activity may help you consider the difference between representing the same information using raw or z scores.

ACTIVITY: Score vs. z-score

Examine some old T markbooks in your subject, and look for the following:

1. Which task type has the highest mean?

2. Which task type has the lowest mean?

3. If a student got 80 in the answer to (1), what is their z -score? Where do they sit in the group?

4. If a student got 80 in the answer to (2), what is their z -score? Where do they sit in the group?

5. What numerical score has a z-score of 1 for each task?

It is likely that you will see differences between tasks. For example, in English, oral presentations sometimes have a much higher mean compared to in-class essays, and in the Arts, practical work often has a higher mean compared to theory. An "80" doesn't mean the same thing in every task. This is why we often use z-scores when representing student performance in tasks.

BSSS Ethical Research Guidelines

The ACT BSSS Ethical Research Principles and Guidelines sets the standard for ethical research, particularly research involving people, undertaken for assessment in the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate. These guidelines encompass tasks such as observational studies of human behaviour, creative inquiry, biographical research, and the collection of qualitative and quantitative data from people. They are a set of general principles accompanied by guidelines on implementation.

The Ethical Research Principles and Guidelines are drawn from the Australian national standards, the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023 and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018, which apply to universities and other research settings. A panel of teachers drawn from all sectors, experts in cultural matters, and an expert in research ethics from ANU worked on the Principles and Guidelines to ensure their applicability to school settings.

The full text can be found in Appendix 8 of the BSSS Policy and Procedures Manual.

If you are teaching a unit which includes any research on people, you should be aware of the following guidance on this BSSS website page. It is advisable to explicitly teach the requirements to students.

This empowers teachers and schools to insist students conduct ethical research. Students who conduct unethical research may be penalised. By including Ethics under Academic Integrity schools can use existing structures to implement the regulation of their requirements.

Principles and guidelines are needed to ensure that students, schools, and research participants are not exposed to unnecessary risks and dangers. They mitigate the risk of student as researchers, creatives, and scientists causing themselves or others harm.

These principles are also used in the tertiary sector and professional settings, so student familiarity with them will support their transition to study, life, and work beyond school. They will become accustomed to the procedural expectations around sound and ethical research.

An example of documentation included in Appendix 8 of the BSSS Policy and Procedures Manual. is shown below. The relevant forms should be included by the student with their assessment response.

Informed Consent Form for a person under 18 for a Creative Inquiry Project

A Creative Inquiry Project is a research project that culminates in a creative work of Art. In this case, the inquiry involves human participants who will be identifiable in the final creative product.

Title of Project: _____

Contact Details of School: _____

This project has been approved by _____ Signature: _____

Description of Creative Inquiry Project:

(write description here including the following)

Inquiry topic? Proposed aesthetic? Hypothesis? Artistic influences? Research Methodology?

Proposed form of artwork?

Description of data management and privacy procedures:

(write description here)

Password protected files? Date of data deletion?

I hereby consent to my child _____ 's (image/performance) being used in the creative inquiry project described above.

I reserve the right to withdraw my permission for any participation at any time. I understand that I will be shown the work prior to exhibition and can approve or withdraw permission through the signed permission form below. I understand that work I do not approve for publication/exhibition will still be used for assessment by the school.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Contact Details: _____

I have examined the artwork (Title: Date:) resulting from the Creative Inquiry Project described above and that is intended for exhibition. Tick the appropriate choice below.

☐ I **AGREE** it is consistent with the research proposal provided, and **CONSENT** to its exhibition.

☐ I **DO NOT AGREE** it is consistent with the description provided and **DO NOT CONSENT** to its public exhibition.

☐ It is consistent with the research proposal, but **DO NOT CONSENT** to its exhibition for other reasons.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Contact Details: _____

Data Transformation

The term “scaling” can seem to take on mythic proportions — what is this thing? When does it happen? Let’s dive into some different types of transformation that happen to data in the ACT senior secondary system, so that you know what is done, why it’s done, and what it’s called.

Data is generally transformed to help students and teachers directly compare different datasets. Not every transformation or change is scaling. Scaling as the term is used in the ACT senior secondary system only applies to T course scores, and as you will see below, generally the only data that’s formally transformed belongs to T students. This is because T students are aiming for an ATAR, and so they (and you!) need accurate information about comparative performance in units, courses, and scaling groups. Data transformation is generally about taking a set of data (e.g., scores) and a set of parameters (e.g., mean, standard deviation) and using the parameters to represent the data on a different scale, or way of reporting information.

Time of semester	What data is transformed	How is it transformed?	Why do I see it change?	Why is it transformed?	What name is used?
After each assessment item	Raw marks to standardised scores for each item	Markbook parameters (mean and standard deviation) are applied to the z-score as calculated from the student’s raw mark	Standardised scores reflect a student’s performance relative to the other students	To give an idea of what the student’s final unit score may be like	Standardised score
At the end of each semester	T unit scores in each markbook	Weighted z-scores are used to calculate a final z-score for each student	Markbook parameters are applied to the final z-score	It is a measure of the student’s performance relative to everybody else in the markbook	Calculation of unit scores
At the end of S1 Year 11	Scores in T scaling groups	Historical parameters are applied to raw unit scores for the entire scaling group	The historical parameters are applied across the scaling group	Makes the scaled unit scores comparable across subjects and give students a sense of how their scaled courses scores may go	Standardisation

Time of semester	What data is transformed	How is it transformed?	Why do I see it change?	Why is it transformed?	What name is used?
At the end of other assessment periods	Scores in T scaling groups	Standardised to the mean and standard deviation of the scores the same students got the previous semester	Scores are back scaled, which means they are converted back to the parameters (scale) used in the first semester	Backscaling makes sure that a score means the same thing each semester, in terms of relative performance	Backscaling
At the end of schooling	Course scores	Other Course Score scaling sets the parameters for the scaling group to transform from raw to scaled course scores	This is the step that makes the course scores comparable across schools	This step is required to be able to compare students across scaling groups and across colleges. These scaled course scores then will be used to rank the students for the ATAR	Scaling

It can help to reduce confusion for students if we keep the colloquial or shorthand use of the term “scaling” for the formal Other Course Score scaling at the end of Year 12. It is especially important not to refer to item moderation as ‘scaling’. In-school item-based moderation – before the students receive their marks or grades—might also see the numerical scores and grades awarded by a teacher change, but that is very different to scaling. It might be that the result for student or class that was not calibrated with the rest of the group has a moderation-based change from their original unmoderated results. This happens before the raw marks are entered, and the moderated marks are a direct change to the raw result, which is the number that later processes will use. None of the data transformation processes will change the rank and spacing derived from the raw, moderated marks. Good quality data in this first step is the foundation on which the whole process is built.

Glossary

Standardisation

The process of converting raw student scores into a common scale (often based on a reference group) so results can be fairly compared across different tests, classes, or cohorts. Takes away the effects of differing means and SDs on each item.

Scaling

The adjustment of scores from different versions or difficulty levels of an assessment onto a consistent reporting scale, ensuring that results are comparable from group to group.

Backscaling

The process of translating standardised or scaled scores back into the original reporting framework or familiar score range (e.g. marks or grades) for clearer interpretation by teachers and students. Makes unit scores from semester to semester comparable.

Questions from Teachers

As always, we have collated some of the questions teachers have asked for broader sharing.

Why do people often say that the AST is as important as the VCE or HSC, but it's a different type of test?

When we say the AST is as important as the VCE or HSC, we don't mean that it has the same kind of direct influence on the ATAR as the VCE or HSC. This framing of the AST is a shorthand to say that the AST is very important in the validity of the scaling process. It is not to say that students need to memorise information for the AST (as they do for subject-based exams), or that students need to train for specific questions in the AST.

The role of the AST in the scaling process is to be a constant – something that anchors the scaling process and helps to determine the parameters that will be applied to each scaling group which make that scaling group directly comparable to every other scaling group. The AST's effect on the ATAR is important, but it is important in that it helps to provide evidence for where a scaling group of students performs in comparison to other scaling groups in the ACT.

When are the times at which a student's results leading to an ATAR can be queried or contested?

We have had a few questions in late 2025/early 2026 about the querying of ATARs. Unfortunately, by the time it comes to the ATAR calculation, the avenues of individual appeal have been exhausted, because these all happen at the school. Once we get the data for scaling and ATAR calculations, these data are dealt with by applying specific, verified mathematical processes to the data from all schools, not any one school, or one student.

The time when a result that may lead to an ATAR can be queried is through the school and Board appeals process – for an individual item or for a unit. This is the time when professional judgement is exercised and standards are applied to produce the results that the scaling algorithm will be applied to. This is why principals have to sign off at the end of year that the results for a school are correct – once the school-based results are certified correct, they will be subject to processes rather than to judgements.

Why does it matter that a mark is wrong in ACS when it was right in my school's Learning Management System?

This came up more than once in notes on moderation folios from the submitting teacher. Essentially, it matters because the official record that goes toward the student's certificate is ACS (the ACT Certification System). So what students get on any official transcripts, how their scores are calculated and scaled, data confirmation for at-school offers all happens in ACS, and entries into your school's learning management system will not and cannot change that.

If you notice a recording error in ACS, the important thing is to get onto it as soon as you see it. Talk with your school's certification officer for help and they can help you fix recording and transcription errors, particularly if the error is only noticed after the assessment period is over. You will, however, need to talk with the student to let them know what's going on, so that when they see the mark or grade change in SPO, they understand why.

Why doesn't the ACT get a 99.95 ATAR for each school?

No state or territory gets a 99.95 ATAR for each school, because the 99.95 ATAR represents people in the top 0.05% of their age cohort in the whole country. The Tertiary Admissions Centres (e.g., UAC, VTAC) use standardised methods that are agreed to by all jurisdictions to work out how many people that is in a given cohort.

The ACT is small compared to the other states and territories, so we are placed with NSW in the allocation of ATARs. Being small means that the top 0.05% is, well, a small number of people. There are usually get two student with an ATAR of 99.95 ATARs in the whole territory, in approx. 3000 students seeking an ATAR.

Some years there are three students, depending on a range of factors including the year, the results, and the calculations undertaken by the TACs. For comparison, Queensland had 37 x 99.95 ATARs in 2025, but their eligible population was 30,167 students. NSW had 53 x 99.95 ATARs in 2025, in an ATAR-eligible population of 60,443. Tasmania, who have similar numbers to the ACT, was allocated the same number of 99.95 ATARs as the ACT last year in 3.

If you have questions about this from parents, it is best to link them to UAC's website, which has lots of information, including some excellent videos about the ATAR.

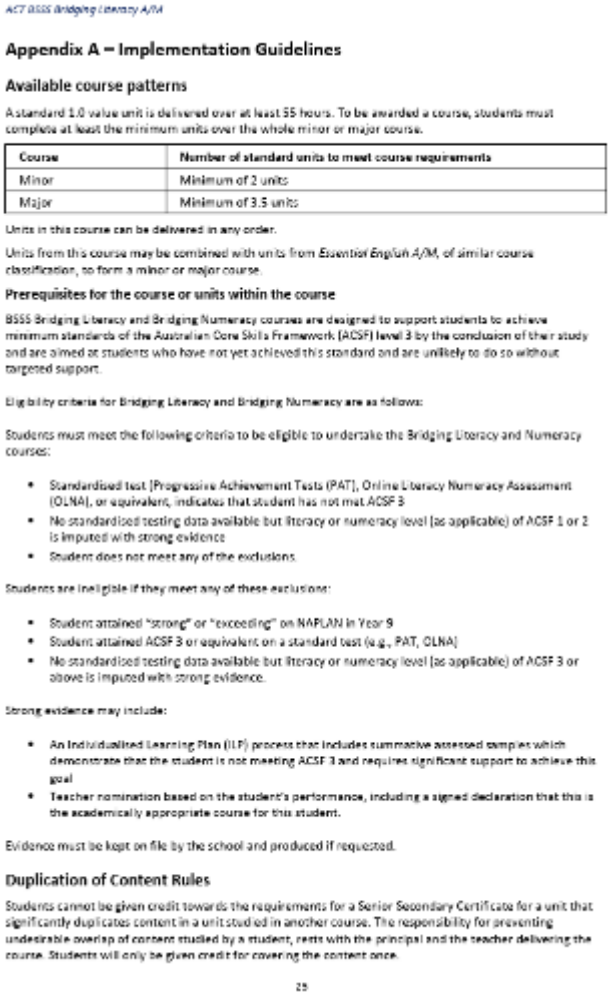
Which units can be combined, and what are the courses called when you combine them?

Check the table on the following page for this information. If you're ever combining a unit, or unsure about how a course can be implemented, check the Implementation Guidance that is found at the back of each course.

Generally, a T unit can be combined into the corresponding A course as part of making an A major or minor.

Bridging Literacy and Numeracy can be combined into Essential English and Mathematics as per the course documentation. Check the course under Implementation Guidelines and Policy and Procedure (4.2.11 Courses) if unsure.

Combining units for transferring students? Check policy, particularly 8.9.2.1, 8.9.2.2 and check in with your Certification Officer.



ACT BSSS Bridging Literacy A/M

Appendix A – Implementation Guidelines

Available course patterns

A standard 1.0 value unit is delivered over at least 55 hours. To be awarded a course, students must complete at least the minimum units over the whole minor or major course.

Course	Number of standard units to meet course requirements
Minor	Minimum of 2 units
Major	Minimum of 3.5 units

Units in this course can be delivered in any order.

Units from this course may be combined with units from *Essential English A/M*, of similar course classification, to form a minor or major course.

Prerequisites for the course or units within the course

BSSS Bridging Literacy and Bridging Numeracy courses are designed to support students to achieve minimum standards of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) level 3 by the conclusion of their study and are aimed at students who have not yet achieved this standard and are unlikely to do so without targeted support.

Eligibility criteria for Bridging Literacy and Bridging Numeracy are as follows:

Students must meet the following criteria to be eligible to undertake the Bridging Literacy and Numeracy courses:

- Standardised test (Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT), Online Literacy Numeracy Assessment (OLNA), or equivalent, indicates that student has not met ACSF 3
- No standardised testing data available but literacy or numeracy level (as applicable) of ACSF 1 or 2 is imputed with strong evidence
- Student does not meet any of the exclusions

Students are ineligible if they meet any of these exclusions:

- Student attained "strong" or "exceeding" on NAPLAN in Year 9
- Student attained ACSF 3 or equivalent on a standard test (e.g., PAT, OLNA)
- No standardised testing data available but literacy or numeracy level (as applicable) of ACSF 3 or above is imputed with strong evidence.

Strong evidence may include:

- An Individualised Learning Plan (ILP) process that includes summative assessed samples which demonstrate that the student is not meeting ACSF 3 and requires significant support to achieve this goal
- Teacher nomination based on the student's performance, including a signed declaration that this is the academically appropriate course for this student.

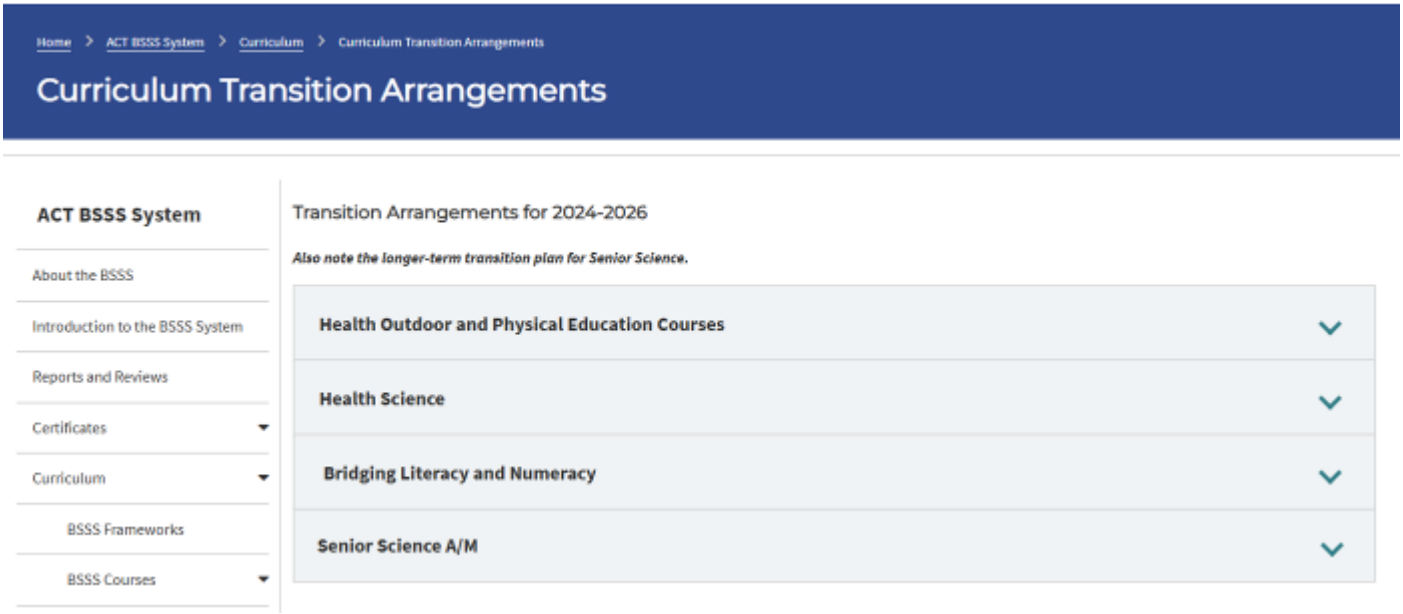
Evidence must be kept on file by the school and produced if requested.

Duplication of Content Rules

Students cannot be given credit towards the requirements for a Senior Secondary Certificate for a unit that significantly duplicates content in a unit studied in another course. The responsibility for preventing undesirable overlap of content studied by a student, rests with the principal and the teacher delivering the course. Students will only be given credit for covering the content once.

25

Use the implementation guidelines in the courses for existing courses, and transition arrangements on the website for new courses, to help make combination decisions easier.



Integrated Course Name	What it combines	Any extra requirements (in addition to overarching policy including transfer, scaling group, duplication of content)
English/Literature Integrated T	English T Literature T	Nil
Commerce Integrated A/T/M	Accounting A/T Business A/T/M Economics A/T/M	Only one independent study unit, and prerequisites must be met.
Design and Technology Integrated A/T/M	Design and Emerging Technologies A/T/M Design and Graphics A/T/M Designed Environments A/T/M Design and Textiles A/T/M/V Engineering Studies T	Only one independent study unit, and prerequisites must be met. VET competencies will need to be mapped if teaching VET and combining units from the VET courses.
Further Mathematics T	Mathematical Applications T In combination with units from: Mathematical Methods T Specialist Mathematics T Specialist Methods T	Nil
History Integrated A/T/M	Ancient History A/T/M Modern History A/T/M Premodern History A/T/M	Nil
Information Technology Integrated A/T/M	Data Science A/T/V Networking and Security A/T/V Robotics and Mechatronics A/T/M/V Digital Technologies A/T/M/V Digital Products A/V	Only one independent study unit, and prerequisites must be met. VET competencies will need to be mapped if teaching VET and combining units from the two courses.
Studies of Dance A/T/M	Dance A/T/M Specialised Dance A/T/M	Only one independent study unit, and prerequisites must be met.
Studies of Drama A/T/M	Drama A/T/M Specialised Drama A/T/M	Only one independent study unit, and prerequisites must be met.
Studies of Media A/T/M/V	Media A/T/M/V Specialised Media A/T/M/V	Only one independent study unit, and prerequisites must be met. VET competencies will need to be mapped if teaching VET and combining units from the two courses.
Studies of Music A/T/M/V	Music A/T/M/V Specialised Music A/T/M/V	Only one independent study unit, and prerequisites must be met. VET competencies will need to be mapped if teaching VET and combining units from the two courses.
Studies of Photography A/T/M	Photography A/T/M Specialised Photography A/T/M	Only one independent study unit, and prerequisites must be met.
Studies of Religion A/T/M	Religious Studies A/T/M World Religions A/T/M	Only one independent study unit, and prerequisites must be met.
Studies of Visual Arts A/T/M	Visual Art A/T/M	Only one independent study unit, and prerequisites must be met.
EAL/English A/T/M	English T Literature T	One unit from EAL in an English course, OR one unit from English in an EAL course at relevant accreditation. Check the course document for specific patterns and further information.