

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

We often hear questions about the recommendations of the review or features of a system based on the recommendations of the review. Answers to some of those questions will be posted to this site. The answers will be chatty not formal. Please note that government decisions about the report's recommendations may have made some of the questions and answers redundant.

FAQ 1: Subject Results are reported on a 60-point scale? Why 60?

Short answer: Based on theory and past practices

Long answer: Four different perspectives below

1. The process for arriving at a Subject Result

The answer to this question starts with the two-stage marking process for School Assessments. Teachers assign marks to each School Assessment in a two-stage marking process. They use a marking scheme consisting of five levels and descriptions of performance on up to five of those levels. (It might be the case that not all five levels require description; not relevant to answering FAQ 1. The important thing here is that there are five levels.) An ideal response accompanies the marking scheme. The descriptions are specific to the assessment activity – that is, the words for describing levels are not the same for all three School Assessments.

Stage 1: Teachers judge student's performance (1–5) based on the described and illustrated performance levels. Why 5? Experience in Queensland has shown that teachers are able to use their assessment evidence to assign student work to one of five levels of performance.

Stage 2: Teachers decide whether the student's performance is in the upper or lower part of that level. (Why 2? It could just as well been 3 – there is no theoretical argument either way. Experience in Queensland has shown that teachers are able to “go inside” levels to assign +, 0, or – (i.e. 3, as in the case of marking a writing task). Assigning SAls (input to the OP) is another example. Two suffice for this marking model: Upper and Lower, which expands the five achievement levels presently used to 10 levels.

Thus the marking scheme gives a mark (or point value) of 1 to 10 for each School Assessment. There are three School Assessments. The simple sum of the marks gives a range of 1 to 30 for School Assessment. (A total mark of zero is possible.) The External Assessment is 50% of the Subject Result (This may not be the case in all subjects; not relevant to answering FAQ 1). If there are 30 marks for School Assessments as illustrated above there are 30 marks for the External Assessment, giving a total of 60. A 60-point scale is appropriate.

2. Coarseness of scale

The five-point scale for Levels of Achievement is a coarse scale. The 2000-point scale used for an ATAR is a very fine scale. One of the principles that guided the review was that assessments of student attainment upon completion of Year 12 should be recorded on certificates in a form that is meaningful to students and their parents and useful to universities and employers. An implication of this principle is that the current five Levels of Achievement are too coarse to capture the rich information that has been provided by assessments over a course of study in a subject. The 2000-point ATAR scale (a ranking of students on the basis of overall achievement) meets the requirement for being useful – to universities – but is makes distinctions between students that cannot be supported in statistical terms. (The choice of reporting the results of

senior assessments is not between levels of achievement and an ATAR; the two measures are compared here only to illustrate the coarseness of scales.) The challenge in reporting Subject Results is to have a scale that is meaningful and useful but that is not compromised by “errors of measurement”. A 60-point scale is appropriate.

3. Input to an ATAR

Universities have signalled that they wish to use an ATAR. (The review report describes the weaknesses of the ATAR; not relevant to answering FAQ 1.) Subject Results are the input to the calculation of an ATAR, which is a ranking not unlike the OP but on a much finer scale and common to all jurisdictions in Australia. The technical details for arriving at an ATAR are not discussed here but there is a minimum for the amount of information carried by each Subject Result into the calculation of an ATAR. Experts in this field have confirmed that results on a 60-point scale provide sufficient information. And so there is no reason to have finer scale. A 60-point scale is appropriate.

4. Percentages have no absolute meaning

There are problems with a scale that has 100 as its maximum value because results on a 100-point scale are often interpreted as percentages. The use of percentages entrenches the (mistaken) belief that 80% on an assessment set by one teacher is directly comparable with 80% on an assessment set by another teacher, or that 80% on different assessments of performance in one subjects the same. The assessments may not be of the same difficulty or they might be assessing different dimensions of learning. A mark out of 100 has no absolute meaning. A 60-point scale is appropriate.

In summary

The proposed redesigned system *does not demand* a scale with 60 points.

The proposed redesigned system requires the following:

- Bringing together marks on four different assessments
- Use of teacher judgment in marking school assessments
- A 50:50 weighting of school assessment and external assessment (in general)
- A scale that is not so coarse that it is not meaningful to students, parents and employers – that is, does not capture the richness of information about student achievement
- A scale that is not so coarse that it is not useful to universities or other tertiary providers as input into calculations of rankings should they choose to use such indicators for selection
- A scale that is not so fine that it is makes artificial distinctions
- A scale that does not promote misunderstandings about the use of percentages in assessment

A 60-point scale fulfils all of these requirements.

Note

A scale with a different number of points could be used as long as it fulfils the requirements above.