



# HSC Public Reporting Reform

*Exploring aspects of the current system for reporting HSC results, and alternative options.*



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# Executive Summary

- ▶ There is a long history to the public reporting of HSC results in NSW. The approach in NSW, which differs from other states and territories, is shaped via a combination of legislation, media analysis, and school disclosures.
- ▶ This paper acknowledges that there is considerable educational and social benefit from allowing a wider perspective on HSC performance and reporting – to better acknowledge the efforts of all students and schools, and to give parents access to more meaningful information on school outcomes.
- ▶ Currently, the HSC performance of NSW schools is reported in two ways: NESA Merit Lists and media outlet rankings based on an estimation of schools' Success Rates.
- ▶ Media outlets such as *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph* generate unofficial school rankings using a *Success Rate* measure (number of high scores, *Band 6s* or *E4s*, as a percentage of all courses taken). These rankings generate considerable media coverage and are often used by schools in their promotional materials.
- ▶ The *Success Rate* measure is a limited and imperfect proxy for HSC performance. It is limited in that it only focuses on top-scoring students (thus ignoring the rest of the Year 12 cohort) and does not take into account the impact of course selection (high bands are easier to achieve in some subjects than others).
- ▶ The publishing of HSC results in the newspapers has not changed substantially in 20 years, and is restricted by legislation. Any changes would require amendments to *NSW Education Act 1990 – Section 18A*.
- ▶ It is timely to consider the development of new measures that provide a more accurate and holistic picture of school performance in the senior years of schooling.
- ▶ Several possible alternative measures are considered in this paper. These include:
  - ▷ Non-HSC data, such as *VET completion rates* and *post-school outcomes* (as published in Victoria and elsewhere), which would better capture student attainment and outcomes.
  - ▷ *Median ATAR* (or a suitable proxy for scaled marks), which is similar to the approach adopted in Victoria and Western Australia.
  - ▷ *Growth measures*, which focus on the progress students have made when compared to their results in earlier assessments (similar to the 'value-add' models used internally by CSNSW and NSW Department of Education).
  - ▷ *Band distributions*, which better show the range of achievements within schools, and any shifts over time.
- ▶ Publishing a wider range of measures would give parents a richer set of information on school outcomes, better reflect the variety of schools and models of success, and help schools avoid any distorted focus on any single, narrow measure of success.

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# Purpose

In December 2020, *The Sydney Morning Herald* published an article<sup>1</sup> and editorial<sup>2</sup> criticising the current methods by which HSC results are analysed in the public domain. Catholic Schools NSW was extensively quoted in the article supporting this critique.

In January 2022, *The Daily Telegraph* published a story criticising restrictions on the reporting of HSC results.<sup>3</sup> Other newspaper articles have also focused on the limitations of current HSC reporting arrangements.<sup>4 5</sup>

This is an internal paper for CSNSW which aims to explore the issue in more detail. The paper analyses aspects of the current system of public reporting of HSC results, and identifies several alternative options for consideration.

Note this analysis assumes the NSW Government will remain committed to:

1. Retaining the HSC, and
2. Retaining some form of public reporting of HSC results.

The paper explores initial options for incremental changes within these constraints.

It does not address the broader questions of:

1. Whether the HSC is fit for purpose as an end of school credential; and
2. Whether public reporting of HSC results is desirable.

These questions are important, particularly given the changing and dynamic policy landscape for senior secondary schooling<sup>6, 7</sup> but are generally beyond the direct scope of this paper, which is focused on the proximate issues of HSC public reporting.

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1. Baker, J. (2020), 'Focus on HSC band six results creating a 'perverse incentive', experts say', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/focus-on-hsc-band-six-results-creating-a-perverse-incentive-experts-say-20201219-p56owq.html>
  2. Editorial (2020), 'Beyond band 6, which schools really excelled', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/hsc-results-mask-the-true-power-of-education-20201218-p56otr.html>
  3. Editorial (2022), 'Why we tell you how schools perform in the HSC', *The Daily Telegraph*, <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/daily-telegraph-editorial-novak-djokovic-deported-but-debate-goes-on/news-story/33c65f8d2b83db04b40669a30f32d1ea>
  4. Baker, J. & Gladstone, N. (2022), 'HSC 2021: The schools that punch above their weight', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/hsc-2021-the-schools-that-punch-above-their-weight-20220118-p59p3i.html>
  5. Baker, J. & Gladstone, N. (2022), 'The low-fee schools that beat their expensive counterparts in the HSC', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-low-fee-schools-that-beat-their-expensive-counterparts-in-the-hsc-20220121-p59q8x.html>
  6. Shergold, P. (2020), 'Review of Senior Secondary Pathways', COAG Education Council, <https://www.pathwaysreview.edu.au/>
  7. Masters, G. (2020), 'NSW Curriculum Review', NESA, <https://nswcurriculumreform.nesa.nsw.edu.au/home/siteAreaContent/524abec1-f0f9-4ffd-9e01-2cc89432ad52>



# What is ‘Success’ in the HSC?

In the context of the HSC, there is no single measure of success for schools. What constitutes success will vary by school and by student.

Some of these goals are measurable (Band 6s, ATARs, VET qualifications, etc.) and some are so less so (wellbeing, friendships, character development, faith and spiritual formation for Catholic schools, etc.).

Different schools will have different goals and consequently different measures of what they consider success.

For a school with a largely university-bound cohort, success may mean ensuring their students have the ATARs necessary to attain entry into their preferred course, as well as the broader knowledge to succeed in that field.

For a school with a cohort more focused on vocational routes, success may mean ensuring their students have the relevant VET qualifications and industry connections to succeed in that pathway.

Many schools seek to maximise both university-bound and VET success, deliberately promoting a wide range of post-school student pathways.

Even within a school, what constitutes success will vary by student.

For some students, nothing short of a Band 6 would represent fulfilled potential within the HSC.

For other students, a Band 4 might represent high growth, and instill great confidence for future efforts.

No single measure (or even collection of measures) can comprehensively summarise a school’s or student’s senior secondary performance.

So how can a narrow focus on a single measure (such as a school’s Band 6 rate) be avoided?

One route is to release no information at all on school outcomes. Such a change would be imprudent and infeasible, given parents’ and other stakeholders’ strong interest in, and longstanding access to, information on HSC results.

A better route is to release *a wider range of measures* of school outcomes, both academic and non-academic. Schools that score low on one measure may score highly on another, and will have more opportunities to highlight their particular target areas for success. A wider range of measures would reflect NSW’s variety of schools and models of success, more so than the status quo which favours towards high-SES and selective schools.

If a wider range of measures are published, there will be less focus on any single measure. Such an approach has been taken in other states, such as Victoria and Western Australia.

Thus, a ‘win-win’ change is possible, where parents can access a richer set of information, and schools can avoid a distorted focus on any single, narrow measure of success.

This paper acknowledges the importance of these wider conversations as to the nature of success in a school context, it seeks only to provide alternative views and solutions on discussions of success in the context of the HSC.

# History

The framework of public reporting of HSC results has not changed substantially in over 20 years, though its coverage and awareness has increased dramatically. The current approach can be traced back to three events which took place in 1997:

- The McGaw Review of the HSC (*'Shaping their future'*)<sup>1</sup>, authored by Professor Barry McGaw, was released. Commissioned by the Carr government, it recommended widespread reform of the HSC. However, it made no recommendations regarding public reporting of HSC results.
- *The Daily Telegraph* published a controversial story "*The class we failed*" on the HSC performance of the Mount Druitt High School Year 12 Cohort of 1996<sup>2</sup>, prompting a public backlash and a defamation lawsuit.
- As part of the backlash to this story, NSW Parliament passed legislation (the *NSW Education Act 1990 – Section 18A*)<sup>3</sup> prohibiting media from identifying any schools as being below the 90th percentile of school performance.

Since 2001, NESA (and its predecessor) has made available information and data on high achievers through its Merit Lists.

Together, these events can be seen as leading to the current practice, where the only publicly available data on school HSC performance are the NESA HSC Merit Lists, and the key measure of performance is a school's *Success Rate* (Band 6/E4 rate) – which is used by news outlets to rank schools.

These events have taken place in the broader context of a constantly evolving HSC. Seminal reports in this evolution include:

- *'Their future: options for reform of the Higher School Certificate'* (1996)<sup>4</sup>
- *'Shaping Their Future: Recommendations for reform of the Higher School Certificate'* (1997)<sup>5</sup>
- *'Fair and meaningful measures? A review of examination procedures in the NSW Higher School Certificate'* (2002)<sup>6</sup>
- *'Stronger HSC Standards - Blueprint'* (2007)<sup>7</sup>
- *'NSW Curriculum Review'* (2020)<sup>8</sup>

Thus, while the design of the HSC has constantly evolved, the reporting arrangements have been more static.

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1. McGaw, B. (1997), 'Shaping their future: recommendations for reform of the Higher School Certificate', <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A8251>
  2. Mahar, J. (2010), 'Painful memories of Mount Druitt's maligned class of '96', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, <https://www.smh.com.au/education/painful-memories-of-mount-druitts-maligned-class-of-96-20100128-n1sd.html>
  3. NSW EDUCATION ACT 1990 - SECT 18A, [http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol\\_act/ea1990104/s18a.html#school\\_results](http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/ea1990104/s18a.html#school_results)
  4. McGaw, B. (1996), 'Their future: options for reform of the Higher School Certificate', <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A4936>
  5. McGaw, B. (1997), 'Shaping Their Future: Recommendations for reform of the Higher School Certificate', <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A8251>
  6. Masters, G. (2002), 'Fair and meaningful measures? A review of examination procedures in the NSW Higher School Certificate', [https://works.bepress.com/geoff\\_masters/63/](https://works.bepress.com/geoff_masters/63/)
  7. Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) NSW (2007), 'Stronger HSC Standards - Blueprint', <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/wcm/connect/d210fd41-8c61-4754-aa45-7476b9305b1d/stronger-hsc-standards-bostes-blueprint.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID>
  8. Masters, G. (2020), 'NSW Curriculum Review', NESA, <https://nswcurriculumreform.nesa.nsw.edu.au/home/siteAreaContent/524abec1-f0f9-4ffd-9e01-2cc89432ad52>

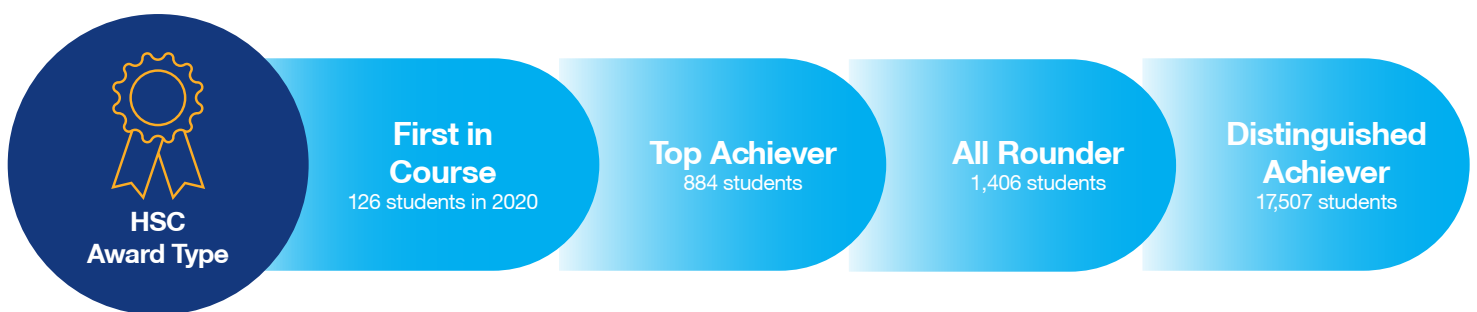


# Status Quo

## NESA HSC Merit Lists and Showcases

In NSW, the *Higher School Certificate* (HSC) is awarded to secondary school students who successfully complete Years 11 & 12 studies or equivalent, and meet the HSC minimum standard in online tests for Reading, Writing, and Numeracy.<sup>1</sup> Typically, around 66,000 students sit the HSC exams in October and November every year, with results released in December.

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) recognises high-achieving students in the HSC via four publicly available Merit Lists:<sup>2</sup> 'First in Course', 'Top Achiever', 'All Rounder' and 'Distinguished Achiever'.



NESA also runs a series of showcases presenting exemplary performances and projects submitted by HSC students in courses such as Visual Arts (*ArtExpress*), Technology (*InTech and Shape*), Music (*Encore*), Dance (*Callback*) and Drama (*OnStage*).

1. NESA (2022), 'HSC Minimum Standard', <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/hsc-minimum-standard>  
2. NESA (2022), 'HSC Merit Lists', <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/about/events/merit-lists>

**Table 1: Definitions of Key Terms**

Term	Description
<i>First in Course</i>	Students who achieve the highest HSC result in each course. Only awarded if the result is in the highest band possible for that course.
<i>Top Achiever</i>	Students who have achieved one of the top places and a result in the highest band possible in one or more HSC courses. The number of top places depends on the number of students taking the course.
<i>All Rounder</i>	Students who achieved a result in the highest band possible (Band 6 or Band E4) in 10 or more units of courses in their current pattern of study.
<i>Distinguished Achiever</i>	Achieved a result in the highest band (Band 6 or Band E4) for one or more courses.
<i>Band 6</i>	The highest band possible in a non-extension HSC course. For extension courses, the highest band possible is Band E4.
<i>Success Rate</i>	A numerical measure of a school's HSC performance. Calculated as high scores (Band 6 or Band E4) expressed as a percentage of Entries (exams sat).
<i>Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)</i>	<p>A numerical measure of a student's overall academic achievement in the HSC in relation to that of other students.</p> <p>For example, a student who receives an ATAR of 80, has performed well enough in the HSC to place them 20% from the top if every HSC-aged person in the state had been ATAR-eligible. Thus, the ATAR is a rank, not a mark.<sup>1</sup></p> <p>The average ATAR is usually around 70.</p>
<i>Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)</i>	<p>A numerical measure of the socio-educational background of a school's students. It is calculated using parents' occupation and education, student indigeneity, and the school's level of geographical remoteness.</p> <p>The lower a school's ICSEA score, the more disadvantaged the students at that school. Typically, a school's ICSEA score correlates significantly with its academic results.</p>

1. UAC (2022), 'Australian Tertiary Admission Rank', <https://www.uac.edu.au/future-applicants/atar>



## Media Rankings Based on ‘Success Rates’

Currently, the HSC performance (and ranking) of schools is reported by media outlets such as *The Sydney Morning Herald*<sup>1</sup> and *The Daily Telegraph*<sup>2</sup> using a *Success Rate* measure.

Using their methodology, a school’s Success Rate is the number of high scores (Band 6s and E4s) expressed as a percentage of all courses taken. It is calculated using the *Distinguished Achievers* Merit List, which lists all students achieving the highest band possible (Band 6 or Band E4) for one or more courses, and the names of those courses.

### A Note on HSC Bands

HSC performance is judged against descriptors of standards. Standards in a course are described in terms of the content, skills, concepts, and principles relevant to the course and represent the range of achievement expected of students completing the course. The proportion of students awarded a Band 6 varies significantly between courses. NESA has processes in place to monitor and review inconsistencies over time (band creep).

It was never intended that descriptors and band allocations align or can be compared between courses, and it is for that reason that the University Admissions Centre (UAC) scales marks to produce an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR), which allows the overall achievement of students who have completed different combinations of HSC courses to be compared.

In summary, Band 6s and the Success Rate are essentially unscaled, whereas the ATAR is scaled.

1. The Sydney Morning Herald (2022), ‘HSC 2021: How your school ranked’, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/see-where-your-school-ranked-in-the-2021-hsc-20220117-p59oto.html>
2. The Daily Telegraph (2022), ‘HSC results 2021: Full list of NSW schools revealed’, <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/education-new-south-wales/hsc-results-2021-full-list-of-nsw-school-rankings-revealed/news-story/22dcca200d2bd398b64e9a749bd0a08b>





# Limitations of Current Approaches

## Limitations of Merit Lists and the ‘Success Rate’ Measure

*Merit Lists* and the *Success Rate* measure are limited and imperfect proxies for HSC performance. Limitations include that they:

- *only focus on NESA-defined ‘top-performing students’* (i.e. the measure has only partial coverage of the student cohort);
- do not take into account *course selection* (high bands are easier to achieve in some courses than others, see **Figure 1** overleaf); and
- do not take into account *student background* (SES, gender, etc.) or *prior academic performance* (Year 9 NAPLAN), and consequently do not provide any measure of learning growth.

Notably, the following scenarios are possible within the current approach:

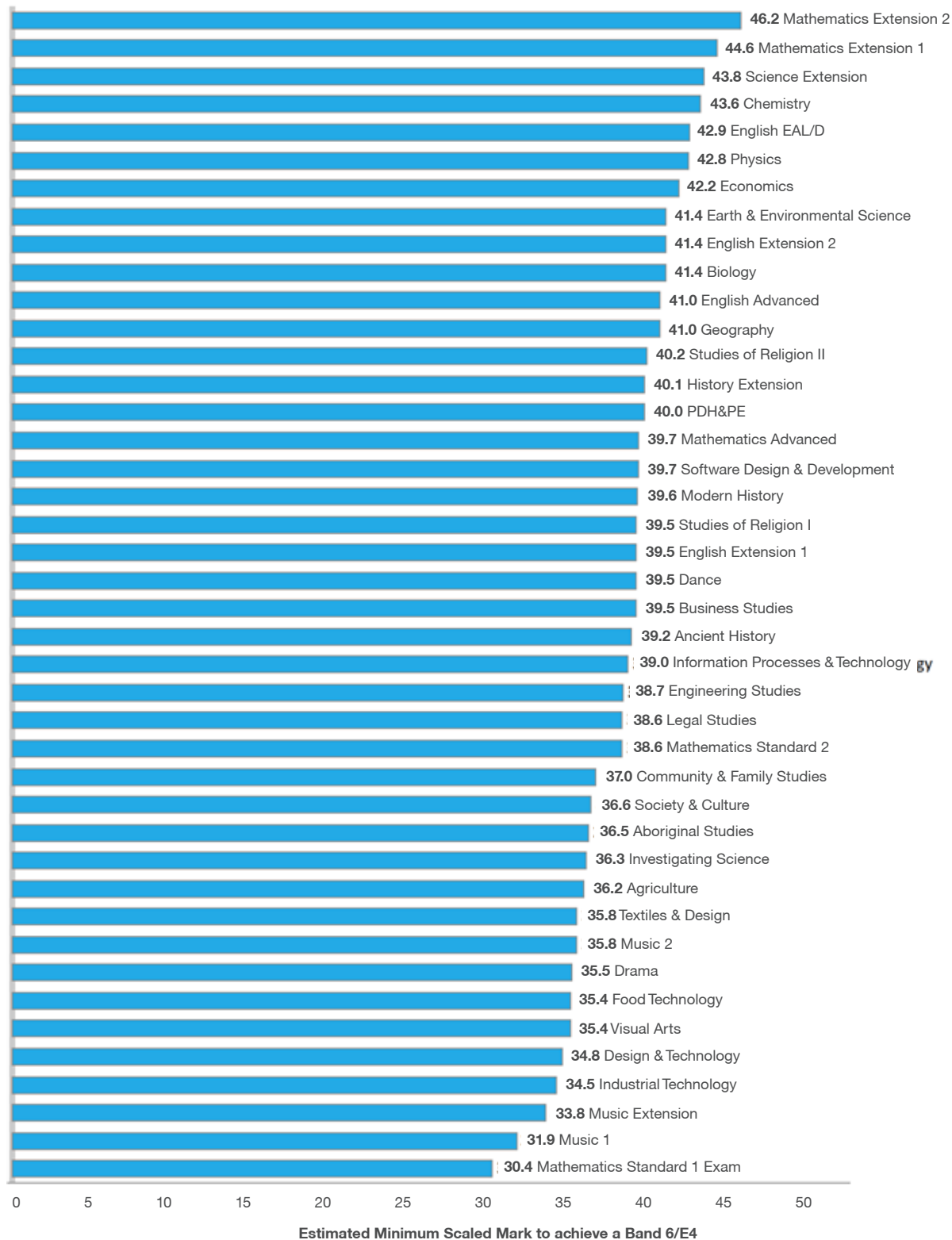
- It is possible for high performing students to attain an ATAR over 95 and not receive a single Band 6/ E4. This means that such a student would not be recognised in NESA’s Merit Lists. Given that ATARs and scaled marks are not made available to schools (nor CSNSW) it is also possible that a high achieving student is not recognised by their school. Currently, schools rely on students voluntarily sharing their ATAR ranking.
- It is also possible to be an *All Rounder* (10 units at Band 6/E4) and yet have an ATAR of only 85. Anecdotal evidence suggests that failure to recognise high performing students in subjects that “scale well” is influencing student choice and impacting on enrolments in the sciences, economics, and other subjects.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Baker, J. (2020), ‘Focus on HSC band six results creating a ‘perverse incentive’, experts say’, The Sydney Morning Herald, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/focus-on-hsc-band-six-results-creating-a-perverse-incentive-experts-say-20201219-p56owq.html>

**Figure 1: Course Ranked by minimum scaled marked required to achieve Band 6/E4<sup>1</sup>**

**HSC 2021 courses ranked by Estimated Minimum Scaled Mark required to achieve a Band 6 / E4 (excludes VET, Language).**



1. Estimates calculated using linear interpolations on Table A3 in: UAC (2022), 'ATAR 2021: Preliminary report on the Scaling of the 2021 NSW Higher School Certificate', <https://www.uac.edu.au/assets/documents/scaling-reports/preliminary-report-on-scaling-2021.pdf>

## Limitations of Media Rankings

A broader limitation of the status quo is that parents and stakeholders are, to some extent, driven to source information on HSC results from media outlets rather than NESAs or other government education entities. This greatly reduces the influence NESAs have over how the data is used and interpreted, and can lead to misleading analysis and insights being drawn. Families and students are also missing out on more meaningful and comprehensive information on HSC performance.

## Equity in Access to School Information

Schools with high Success Rates are predominantly high-SES, so the results are usually not surprising given enrolment processes in these schools and the characteristics of the student population.

As seen in **Figure 2** overleaf, 61% of the variation between schools in HSC **Success Rate** can be explained by student background (specifically, school **ICSEA** scores as found by Inga Ting<sup>1</sup>).

Significantly, the *Success Rate* for low-SES schools tends to be lower making meaningful insights and useful comparisons much more difficult. Legislation prevents further public reporting of their performance.

While there can be good reasons not to publish performance data for these schools, the effect is that the publicly reported highest performing schools (top 150) are mostly selective, high-fee or socio-economically advantaged schools.

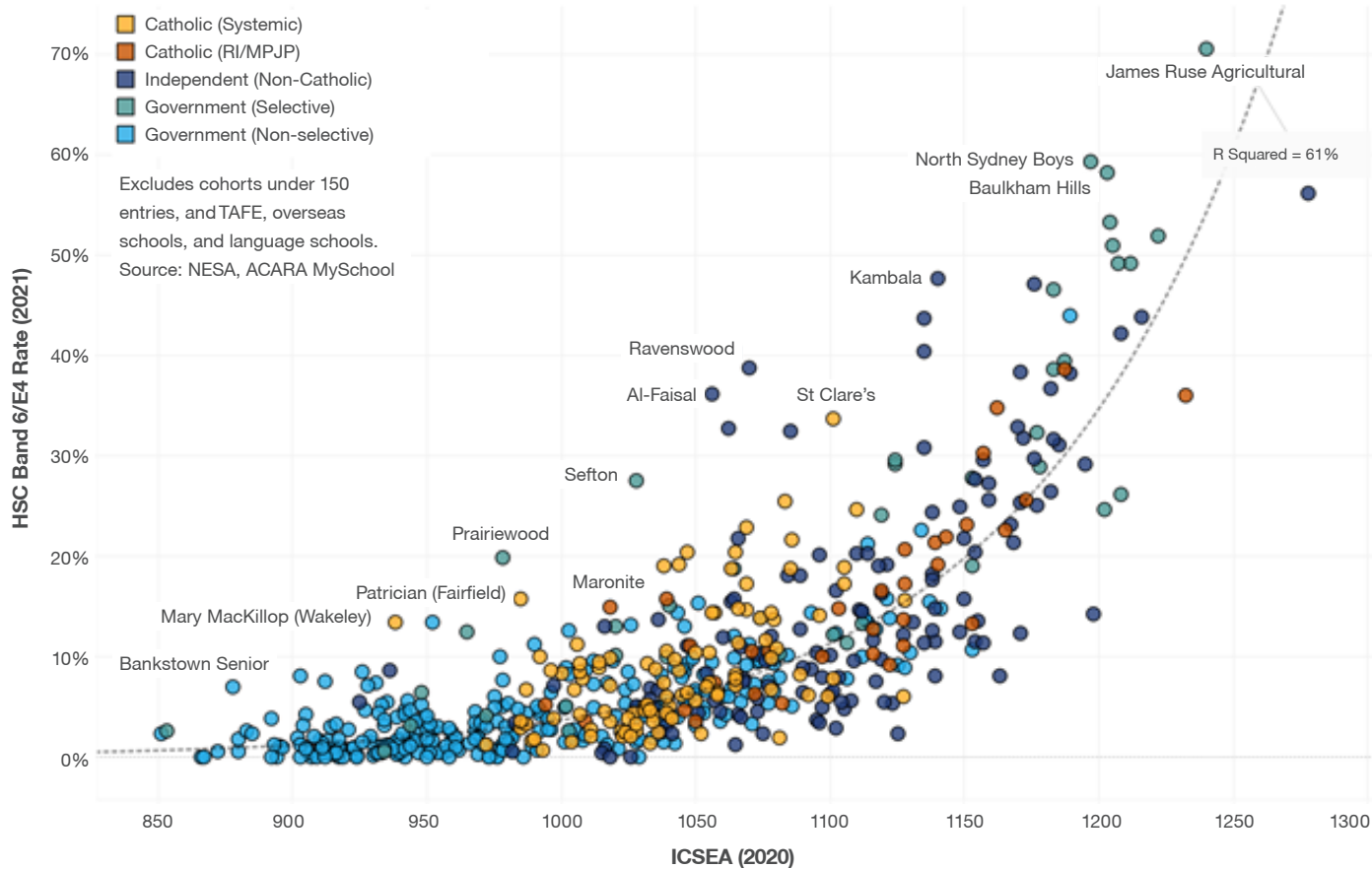
This creates an incomplete picture of the achievements not just of schools and students but of the education system as a whole. It also means that parents and the community only get a narrow picture of some schools and some students. Compared to parents of students at high-ICSEA schools, parents of students at low-ICSEA schools get little comparative information on their schools.

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1. Ting, I. (2015), 'HSC Results 2015: The real star performers of this year's HSC', The Sydney Morning Herald, <https://www.smh.com.au/education/hsc-results-2015-the-real-star-performers-of-this-years-hsc-20151218-qlr1wn.html>

Figure 2: HSC 'Success Rate' vs School ICSEA (student background)

HSC 2021 Band 6 Rate vs ICSEA



# Approaches in Other States

Australia's states and territories vary markedly in the level of data the respective curriculum and assessment authorities publicly release or report on regarding Year 12 results for individual schools. In NSW, NESA publicly releases significantly less data than Victoria and Western Australia, as detailed below.

**Table 2:** Public reporting of School Year 12 results by State/Territory

State/Territory	Median Score	High Scores	Post-school	VET Participation
New South Wales	✗	✓	✗ <sup>+</sup>	✓ <sup>++</sup>
Victoria	✓	✓	✓	✓
Queensland	✗	✗	✓	✓
Western Australia	✓	✗	✓ <sup>+++</sup>	✓
South Australia	✗	✓	✗	✓
Tasmania	✗	✗	✗	✓
Australian Capital Territory	✗	✗	✓ <sup>+++</sup>	✓
Northern Territory	✗	✗	✗	✓

<sup>+</sup> Post School Destination and Experiences Survey data collected and reported publicly at the state rather than school level.

<sup>++</sup> VET Participation published on MySchool website, showing each school's number of enrolments and qualifications by industry area. However, there are some issues with data reliability and completeness in NSW and other states.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>+++</sup> Surveyed and reported for government schools only.

1. ACARA (2020), '2014-2019 VET caveats', [https://www.myschool.edu.au/media/1849/2014-2019\\_vet\\_caveats.pdf](https://www.myschool.edu.au/media/1849/2014-2019_vet_caveats.pdf)



## Victoria

Victoria's Year 12 certificate is the *Victorian Certificate of Education* (VCE). For each school, the 'Median VCE Score' is published, as are the number of 'Scores of 40+' (high scores).<sup>1 2</sup>

The size of the Year 12 cohort is also published, which enables the school's high scores to be calculated as a cohort percentage.

Finally, also published are the results of the survey of post-school destinations of former Year 12 students one year out of school (share by category, e.g. 'Bachelor Enrolled', 'TAFE/VET Enrolled', 'Employed', etc.).<sup>3 4</sup>

## Queensland

Until 2020, for each Queensland school, the number of students within each of five intervals of the *Overall Position* (OP) score was published (e.g. 'OP 1-5', 'OP 6-10', etc.), along with the cohort size.<sup>5 6</sup>

In 2020, Queensland changed their Year 12 certification program so that students receive an ATAR instead of an OP.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, Queensland ceased publishing Year 12 results by school, with the education minister arguing it "...reflects the principle agreed to by all education ministers that reporting should involve balancing the community's right to know with the need to avoid the misinterpretation and misuse of the information."

The move was criticised by the opposition Education spokesperson, who argued "*Openness and transparency of educational outcomes of Queensland students is critically important, and ensures vital accountability of our state's education system. Parents, teachers and students across Queensland have a right to know this important information.*"<sup>8</sup>

The move had supporters, such as the Queensland Teachers' Union<sup>9</sup>, and critics, such as *The Courier Mail* in an editorial 'Parents being failed by secrecy over education results'.<sup>10</sup>

Survey results of post-school destinations for former Year 12 students six months out of school are published on the *MySchool* website.<sup>11</sup>

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1. Carey, A. & Butt, C. (2021), 'VCE results 2021: Girls college top of the class', *The Age*, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/vce-results-2021-girls-college-top-of-the-class-20211220-p59iwr.html>
  2. Better Education (2021), 'VCE Rankings 2021', <https://bettereducation.com.au/results/vce.aspx>
  3. VIC Department of Education and Training (2021), '2020 On Track Survey - Year 12 or equivalent completers post school destinations, Victoria', <https://discover.data.vic.gov.au/dataset/2020-on-track-survey-year-12-or-equivalent-completers-post-school-destinations-victoria>
  4. VCAA (2021), 'Senior Secondary Completion and Achievement Information', <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/research-and-statistics/Pages/SeniorSecondaryCompletion.aspx>
  5. Better Education (2019), 'OBD/IPD School Rankings 2019', [https://bettereducation.com.au/Results/QCE\\_OP.aspx](https://bettereducation.com.au/Results/QCE_OP.aspx)
  6. News.com.au (2019), 'QLD's top schools for OP scores', <https://media.news.com.au/couriermail/qld-op-school-ranking.html>
  7. QLD Department of Education (2020), 'New Queensland Certificate of Education System', <https://qed.qld.gov.au/programs-initiatives/departments/new-qce-system>
  8. Bennett, S. (2021), 'State refuses to reverse move to keep school ATAR information secret', *The Courier Mail*, <https://www.couriermail.com.au/education-queensland/state-refuses-to-reverse-move-to-keep-school-atar-information-secret/news-story/224018bf61167901cc00007d20de87d4>
  9. Bennett, S. (2021), 'Why our school information has become a state secret', *The Courier Mail*, <https://www.couriermail.com.au/education-queensland/why-our-school-information-has-become-a-state-secret/news-story/6b82c6f77b43c5ead33cea7c7b5bb60f>
  10. Staff Writers (2021), 'Parents being failed by secrecy over education results', *The Courier Mail*, <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/parents-being-failed-by-secrecy-over-education-results/news-story/debbb6f4871c9fc3e1313a3912ce76fb>
  11. ACARA (2020), '2019 Post-school destinations caveats', [https://www.myschool.edu.au/media/1848/2019\\_-post-school\\_destinations\\_caveats.pdf](https://www.myschool.edu.au/media/1848/2019_-post-school_destinations_caveats.pdf)

## Western Australia

Western Australia's Year 12 certificate is the *Western Australian Certificate of Education* (WACE).

For each school, the 'Median ATAR' is published, along with cohort size and the share receiving an ATAR.<sup>1 2</sup> Additionally, survey results of post-school destinations are published on the *MySchool* website, but only for public schools.

## South Australia

South Australia's Year 12 certificate is the *South Australian Certificate of Education* (SACE).

Published each year are the names of the 20-30 students receiving a *Governor of South Australia Commendation* based on their SACE results, with a maximum of one student per school receiving such an award.<sup>3</sup>

Also published are Subject Merits awarded to students who score an overall A+ grade and demonstrate exceptional achievement in that subject (around 1,000 students in 2021).<sup>4 5</sup>

## Tasmania

Tasmania's Year 12 certificate is the *Tasmanian Certificate of Education* (TCE). Published each year are the names of the top 100 students, based on their ATARs.<sup>6</sup>

## Australian Capital Territory

ACT's Year 12 certificate is the *ACT Senior Secondary Certificate*.<sup>7</sup>

Up until 2019, the ACT Government published each school's 'Median ATAR', as well as the percentage of the Year 12 cohort receiving an ATAR over 65.<sup>8</sup>

These arrangements ceased as part of a decision by the government to "remove the 'winners' and 'losers' interpretation from the scores."

Additionally, survey results of post-school destinations are published on the *MySchool* website, but only for government schools.

## Northern Territory

Northern Territory's Year 12 certificate is the *Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training* (NTCET). Published each year are the names of the top 20 students, based on their ATARs.<sup>9</sup>

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1. Better Education (2021), 'WA School Rankings', <https://bettereducation.com.au/results/wa/wace.aspx>
  2. SCSA (2021), '2021 Student Achievement Data', <https://senior-secondary.scsa.wa.edu.au/certification/student-achievement-data-by-school>
  3. SACE (2021), 'Commendations and awards in the SACE', <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/events/merit-ceremony/awards-prizes#Governor-of-South-Australia-Commendations>
  4. Russell, C. (2022), 'SACE merits and commendations 2021 – and young people tell us what's next', *The Advertiser*, <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/education-south-australia/sace-merits-and-commendations-2021-and-young-people-tell-us-whats-next/news-story/2814c529aeb00f27a469165df57660>
  5. Villani, C. & Russell, C. (2021), 'SACE bragging rights: Almost 100 SA schools applaud their top pupils', *The Advertiser*, <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/education-south-australia/sace-bragging-rights-85-sa-schools-applaud-their-top-pupils/news-story/7d7a62dd2c75143d11189259bbc7cbb3>
  6. Rockliff, J. (2019), 'Tasmania's TCE achievers recognised', [http://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/tasmanias\\_tce\\_achievers\\_recognised2](http://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/tasmanias_tce_achievers_recognised2)
  7. ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies, 'ACT Qualifications', [http://www.bsas.act.edu.au/information\\_for\\_students/act\\_qualifications#TES](http://www.bsas.act.edu.au/information_for_students/act_qualifications#TES)
  8. Brown, Al. (2019), 'Canberra school ATAR league tables no longer publicly released', *The Canberra Times*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6550174/school-scores-not-released-due-to-concerns-for-student-welfare/>
  9. NT Dept. of Education (2019), 'NTCET statistics', <https://education.nt.gov.au/statistics-research-and-strategies/ntcet-statistics>





# Alternative Approaches in Public Reporting

The publication of HSC results is regulated in NSW, and changes to the level and type of reporting may require amendments to *NSW Education Act 1990 – Section 18A* (see *Appendix I*).

## Measures Beyond HSC Results

Beyond direct HSC results, there are a number of measures related to senior secondary outcomes which are informative and could be published at the school level without the need for amending current legislation.

- Expand the annual post-school destinations survey such that there is a minimum sample size to enable results to be reported for each individual school (as in Victoria and Queensland). Such post-school outcomes, specifically the “*share of recent school leavers participating in higher education, training or work*”, are already targets under the ‘*Schools Success Model*’ for NSW public schools.<sup>1</sup>
- Publish more complete VET participation datasets<sup>2</sup>, and report on the number and share of VET students awarded a *full certificate* (where available), as well as the number and share awarded all units (where a full certificate is not available).
- Greater recognition of students who excel in the creative and performing arts and technology and design, currently showcased through *ARTEXPRESS*, *Callback*, *ENCORE*, *InTech*, *OnSTAGE*, *Texstyle*, and *Young Writers Showcase*.

Such measures can increase awareness of achievements outside of direct HSC results.

For example, in NSW the systemic Catholic school sector has the lowest post-school unemployment rate<sup>3</sup> and the highest VET completion rates, and this is not reflected in a purely-HSC focused dataset.

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1. NSW Department of Education (2022), ‘School Success Model: the targets’, <https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/school-success-model/school-success-model-explained#/asset6>

2. ACARA (2020), ‘2014-2019 VET caveats’, [https://www.myschool.edu.au/media/1849/2014-2019\\_vet\\_caveats.pdf](https://www.myschool.edu.au/media/1849/2014-2019_vet_caveats.pdf)

3. CESE (2021), ‘2020 NSW Post-School Destinations and Experiences Survey’, <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/cese/publications/research-reports/nsw-post-school-destinations-and-experiences-survey/nsw-post-school-destinations-and-experiences-survey-2020>, Table 8, p18

# Possible Alternative HSC-Related Measures

There are number of possible alternatives to the *Success Rate* measure which would avoid many of its limitations (noting these may require amendments to *Section 18A*).

## Median Score

- A simple and commonly used measure would be to publish the *Median ATAR*, or a suitable proxy. For example, the *Median Tertiary Entrance Score* (TES) also measures scaled HSC marks.
- The advantage of using a median measure, is that it is calculated using *all* of the Year 12 cohort, and is less affected by *outliers* (for example, a particularly gifted student achieving many Band 6s).
- This would be similar to arrangements in Victoria, where each school's *Median VCE Score* is published, in addition to 'Scores of 40+' (high scores).<sup>1</sup> Western Australia also publish a median score (*Median ATAR*).
- Using such a measure would affect the relative positions of schools in any comparisons. For example, some school's cohorts enroll in high-scaling HSC subjects, where Band 6s are more difficult to attain, yet scaled marks are typically high. Such schools would rank much higher on a *scaled marks* measure (e.g. *Median ATAR*) than the *Success Rate* measure.

## Growth Measures

- Growth measures focus on the *gain* or *progress* students have made when compared to their results in earlier assessments. Such measures can better recognise the 'value added' by the school.
- Internally, the Catholic sector analyses HSC results using a 'value-add' model (similarly to the NSW Department of Education), which takes into account prior performance (e.g. Year 9 NAPLAN) and also student background. The model looks at overall school performance, as well as by course and student. This is the most complex but also the most advanced method of measuring HSC performance.

## Band Distributions

- The distribution of bands within each school can show the range of achievement, and progress over time, and better allow each school to 'tell their story'. For example, large shifts from Band 4s to Band 5s over time would be visible under this measure, yet remain unseen when using the *Success Rate* measure. It would also be useful to view band distributions against a state average, or comparable schools, as well as trend data over time.

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1. Carey, A. & Butt, C. (2021), 'VCE results 2021: Girls college top of the class', *The Age*, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/vce-results-2021-girls-college-top-of-the-class-20211220-p59iwr.html>

# Appendix I: Section 18A

## Education Act 1990 - SECT 18A<sup>1</sup>

**Publication of school results:** 18A Publication of [school results](#).

(1) In this section--

“**relevant national agreement**” means an agreement between the State and the Commonwealth that gives effect to a national protocol or arrangement for the provision and publication of [school results](#).

“**school results**” means the following results (whether they are the results of individuals or of [schools](#) or any other results)--

- (a) results of national basic skills testing (including testing under [section 18](#)),
- (b) results of [recognised certificate](#) examinations and related assessments,
- (c) results of annual or other periodic assessments of the academic performance of students contained in reports to [parents](#) on [student](#) achievement.

The regulations may determine whether particular results are or are not results referred to in paragraphs (a)-(c).

(2) [School results](#) may, in accordance with a [relevant national agreement](#), be provided by the State to the Commonwealth or to an [authority](#) established by the Commonwealth.

(3) [School results](#) must not be publicly revealed in a way that ranks or otherwise compares the results of particular [schools](#), except as authorised by or under a [relevant national agreement](#).

(4) A person must not, in a newspaper or other document that is publicly available in this State--

- (a) publish any ranking or other comparison of particular [schools](#) according to [school results](#), except with the permission of the [principals](#) of the [schools](#) involved, or
- (b) identify a [school](#) as being in a percentile of less than 90 per cent in relation to [school results](#), except with the permission of the [principals](#) of the [school](#).

Maximum penalty--50 penalty units in the case of an individual and 500 penalty units in any other case.

(5) Nothing in subsection (4) prohibits--

- (a) anything authorised to be done by or under a [relevant national agreement](#), or
- (b) the publication of the ranking of the [schools](#) in the top 10 per cent in relation to the results of Higher [School](#) Certificate examinations and related assessments so long as the information used to determine that ranking is information as to the results of [students](#) that may be publicly revealed under subsection (6) (c).

(6) [School results](#) must not be publicly revealed if the results of an identified student are revealed, except as follows--

- (a) to the [student](#) or to the [student's](#) [parents](#), or to anyone with the [student's](#) or [parents's](#) consent,
- (b) to the [principal](#) of a [school](#) (including a [school](#) in another State or Territory) at which the [student](#) is enrolling, is enrolled or was previously enrolled,
- (c) in the case of results of [recognised certificate](#) examinations and related assessments--by or with the approval of the [Authority](#), by way of the publication of the results of [students](#) who the [Authority](#) considers have achieved outstanding results.

(7) The functions of the State under this section may be exercised by the [Secretary](#) or, if authorised by a [relevant national agreement](#), by a State educational [authority](#) that arranges the testing, examinations or assessments concerned.

(8) This section has effect despite any other Act or law or the decision of any [tribunal](#).

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1. NSW EDUCATION ACT 1990 - SECT 18A, [http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol\\_act/ea1990104/s18a.html#school\\_results](http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/ea1990104/s18a.html#school_results)

# Appendix II: Amendments to Section 18A

## Education Further Amendment (Publication of School Results) Bill 2009<sup>1</sup>

### SCHEDULE 1 AMENDMENT OF EDUCATION ACT 1990 NO 8

#### [1] Section 18A

Omit the section. Insert instead:

#### 18A Publication of school results

(1) In this section:

**relevant national agreement** means an agreement between the State and the Commonwealth that gives effect to a national protocol or arrangement for the provision and publication of school results.

**school results** means the following results (whether they are the results of individuals or of schools or any other results):

- (a) results of national basic skills testing (including testing under section 18),
- (b) results of School Certificate and Higher School Certificate examinations and related assessments,
- (c) results of annual or other periodic assessments of the academic performance of students contained in reports to parents on student achievement.

The regulations may determine whether particular results are or are not results referred to in paragraphs (a)–(c).

- (2) School results may, in accordance with a relevant national agreement, be provided by the State to the Commonwealth or to an authority established by the Commonwealth.
- (3) School results must not be publicly revealed in a way that ranks or otherwise compares the results of particular schools, except as authorised by or under a relevant national agreement.
- (4) A person must not, in a newspaper or other document that is publicly available in this State:
  - (a) publish any ranking or other comparison of particular schools according to school results, except with the permission of the principals of the schools involved, or
  - (b) identify a school as being in a percentile of less than 90 per cent in relation to school results, except with the permission of the principal of the school.

Maximum penalty: 50 penalty units in the case of an individual and 500 penalty units in any other case.

(5) (5) Nothing in subsection (4) prohibits:

- (a) anything authorised to be done by or under a relevant national agreement, or
- (b) the publication of the ranking of the schools in the top 10 per cent in relation to the results of Higher School Certificate examinations and related assessments so long as the information used to determine that ranking is information as to the results of students that may be publicly revealed under subsection (6) (c).

(6) School results must not be publicly revealed if the results of an identified student are revealed, except as follows:

- (a) to the student or to the student's parents, or to anyone with the student's or parent's consent,
- (b) to the principal of a school (including a school in another State or Territory) at which the student is enrolling, is enrolled or was previously enrolled,
- (c) in the case of results of School Certificate or Higher School Certificate examinations and related assessments—by or with the approval of the Board, by way of the publication of the results of students who the Board considers have achieved outstanding results.

(7) The functions of the State under this section may be exercised by the Director-General or, if authorised by a relevant national agreement, by a State educational authority that arranges the testing, examinations or assessments concerned.

(8) This section has effect despite any other Act or law or the decision of any tribunal.

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1. NSW Government (2009), 'Schedule 1 Amendment of Education Act 1990 No 8', <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/repealed/current/act/2009-057#sch.1>



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