

The 2019 Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) System – assessment implications.

With the introduction of the new QCAA Queensland Certificate of Education system in 2019, the implications for assessment in relation to the accurate use and interpretation of cognitive verbs and in providing quality formative student feedback is significant.

There are 75 cognitive verbs embedded in the new and redeveloped 2019 Queensland syllabuses. They are not new. Teachers are well acquainted with them, just maybe under different names; *task verbs*, *Common Curriculum Elements (CCEs)* or *thinking skills*.

While cognitive verbs such as *argue*, *analyse* and *compare* are not new per se, there are several assessment implications due to the new structural changes to the senior assessment system.

Senior Assessment Facts

- There will be three (3) internal assessment items and one (1) external examination, for every subject.
- In most subjects, all four (4) assessment items will be weighted equally; 25%. For Mathematics and Science subjects, the external examination will be generally be worth 50%.
- The external examination will be fully facilitated externally, and internal assessment items must be endorsed by the QCAA.

1. The External Examination

Key Points:

- The external examination will be designed and marked by an external party
- Students will need to be fully conversant with the meaning of cognitive verbs used in external examinations.
- Students should ideally be versed in how to apply the language of the cognitive verbs in their external examination responses.

What does this mean for your school?

- **Know thy cognitive verb!** Students must fully understand the cognitive verbs. They are used explicitly throughout each and every syllabus document, and within each syllabus document there is an extensive glossary. Be assured, the cognitive verbs will be there to greet the students in their external examinations and they will be expected to know what they mean.

Take, for example, the cognitive verb *Compare*. When this verb is used, both the similarities and the differences must be addressed. If students enter an examination without fully understanding this meaning, a common interpretation is to, '*describe*', instead, each of the items for the task at hand; possibly severely limiting potential marks for the question.

It starts by knowing the cognitive verbs!

- **Know how to tackle the task.** It is not not enough for a student just to know the definition of the cognitive verbs. It is important they also know how to tackle the task. This means students should be conversant with the use of thinking tools in terms of and how to best organise their data and thoughts. This then leads to an awareness of what language to use for their response. This requires explicit teaching and it begins well before Years 11 and 12. For greater success in the senior years, a whole-school approach is imperative.

2. The Internal Assessment

Key Points:

- For most senior classes, there will be fewer summative assessment items under the new senior assessment system.

- The external examination will NOT be used to scale the internal assessment.
- Each internal assessment item will have a strong impact (up to 25%) on the students' final ATAR result.

What does this mean for your school?

- **The importance of formative assessment.** Whilst there has been much discussion about the external subject examinations, internal assessment still remains the major component for calculating the students' ATAR results; it is worth 75% (with the exception of Maths and Science).

Since the internal assessment is the major component of the ATAR calculation and there will be fewer of them, each internal assessment item is of paramount importance to results. Therefore, there becomes a greater role for formative assessment.

The feedback provided to students should be early and delivered at the key junctures of the assessment journey. For investigative tasks and with the use of scaffolding such as thinking tools, feedback can be provided at the point where the students have collated their research. If available, students should be provided with clean sample responses of typical 'A', 'B' or 'C' standards of work. Opportunities may be provided where students rank the responses, or attempt to distinguish a 'B' from a 'C'.

The feedback does not always have to be from the teacher. Feedback can be in the form of self-reflection, with the relevant criteria provided by the teacher. Peer-feedback should be encouraged with students offering suggestions to each other on how their work may be improved.

Since each internal assessment item significantly impacts a student's ATAR result, feedback should be provided at several stages throughout their assessment journey with the first feedback occurring at the early stages.

In recapping, with the advent of senior external examinations, schools must be thoroughly conversant with the cognitive verbs and be ready to equip their students with relevant thinking skills and complementary language use, for appropriate examination response. In addition, with a significant component of ATAR scores being made up of internal assessment, the importance of timely formative assessment can be of tangible value to students' success. Furthermore, this culture must be formulated as a whole school approach and be embedded well before the Senior years.

We hope these points assist in your transition to the new assessment system.

Gerard Alford
B.Econ. Dip. Ed. M.Ed.
Director – itc publications

Gerard is the Director of itc publications, an educational services company that provides teacher resources and consulting services for teachers and schools.