STRONGER HSC STANDARDS

MINIMUM LITERACY AND NUMERACY STANDARD

Frequently Asked Questions

Set for success in day-to-day life

1 EXPLAINING THE STANDARD

1.1. What has the NSW Government announced?

The NSW Government has announced that from 2020, all Year 12 students must reach a minimum standard of functional literacy and numeracy to receive the HSC.

1.2. Why did the NSW Government announce this?

Literacy and numeracy skills are the foundation for success in learning and in life.

Through the State Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan 2012–2016\(^1\) the NSW Government has had a strong focus on supporting students in Kindergarten to Year 2 whose literacy and numeracy development is at risk.

The NSW Government will continue to support intervention in the early years of schooling, but has now extended this strong focus on literacy and numeracy to secondary school students.

The new Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017–2020\(^2\) requires cooperation between and action from the three school education sectors, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), schools, teachers, students and parents to ensure every student has the essential literacy and numeracy skills they need for work and life.

1.3. Why is this particular reform being implemented?

Currently the award of the HSC does not require minimum standards to be met.

The introduction of a minimum standard signals high expectations for the achievement of all NSW students and serves to maintain the integrity and value of the HSC for students, employers and tertiary and vocational education providers.


Additionally, the HSC does not directly measure students’ literacy and numeracy skills. A new minimum standard for award of the HSC will provide students, parents, communities, tertiary and vocational education providers, business and employers with an assurance that students have the literacy and numeracy skills required for life beyond school.

1.4. How will students benefit from the new minimum standard?

Literacy and numeracy are core skills in society, providing access to work and further education or training after school as well as in life. Standards set for the HSC influence teaching and learning priorities in the earlier years of school. Every student will benefit from a greater focus on the mastery of knowledge and skills as they move through school. The HSC is not the end of learning for students, but preparation for the next stage of a student’s life.

The new minimum standard will strengthen the existing focus of NSW schools on improving the literacy and numeracy skills of all students from the early years through to the HSC.

Students at risk of not meeting the standard will be identified and supported to reach the standard.

This strengthened focus on literacy and numeracy will also be of great benefit to the 20,000 students each year who leave school without an HSC.

1.5. What evidence supports the introduction of a minimum standard?

From 2016, a minimum literacy and numeracy standard was introduced for the award of the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE, the WA equivalent of the HSC).

Since the WA standard was announced in 2013, when the 2016 WACE Year 12 students were in Year 9, literacy and numeracy test results in WA have improved significantly. Results over four years (Years 9–12) for indicate substantial improvement in literacy and numeracy skills, with the vast majority of Year 12 students (more than 90%) meeting the minimum standard for award of the WACE in 2016.

The minimum standard has improved the value of the WACE and the strengthened focus on literacy and numeracy has raised education standards for all students across WA schools.

1.6. What is the new minimum standard?

It is a nationally agreed standard of functional literacy and numeracy, mapped to the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) Level 3.

The ACSF has been endorsed by federal and state government ministers. It describes the core literacy and numeracy skills required for personal, community, work and training contexts.³

1.7. What are the expectations of students at Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) Level 3?

ACSF Level 3 describes the everyday literacy and numeracy skills required for life after school, for work and further education.

³ More information about the ACSF can be found at https://www.education.gov.au/australian-core-skills-framework
The minimum standard is set at a level of literacy and numeracy needed for everyday tasks such as:

- following operating instructions in equipment manuals
- interpreting routine tables, graphs and charts
- writing a job application, and
- preparing an invoice.
2 MEETING THE STANDARD

2.1. How will students demonstrate they meet the minimum standard?

Students will demonstrate they meet the standard by achieving a pass in new online reading, writing and numeracy tests that will be developed by NESA.

These online tests will be made available to students in Years 10–12 from 2018. Reading and numeracy test items will be mapped to ACSF Levels 2–4.

2.2. Do all students have to take the new online reading, writing and numeracy tests?

No.

It is anticipated that a significant number of students will prequalify for the minimum standard and will not need to take any or all of the three online tests.

2.3. How do students prequalify for the minimum standard?

Students may prequalify by achieving Band 8 or above in their Year 9 NAPLAN reading, writing and numeracy tests.

Students with Band 8 or above in all three NAPLAN areas will not need the online NESA tests. Students with Band 8 in one or two areas will only need to sit the online NESA test in the area in which they scored below Band 8.

Secondary students should note that:

- the Year 9 NAPLAN language conventions test is not included as a prequalification requirement.
- the prequalification requirement can be achieved by Year 9 students only. Students in Years 5 or 7 who achieve Band 8 in NAPLAN reading, writing and numeracy tests will NOT prequalify for the minimum standard.

Students undertaking Year 9 NAPLAN in 2017 (the Year 12 HSC students of 2020) will have the first opportunity to prequalify for the new minimum standard.

2.4. If a student meets the minimum standard for literacy in the reading and writing areas but not the numeracy domain, do they still have to do the online test in the three areas?

No.

If a student meets the minimum standard in one area, they will not need to sit that area again.

For example, if a student achieves a pass in the online reading and writing tests in Year 10 but not in numeracy, they will only need to sit the online numeracy test component in later years until they can demonstrate the minimum numeracy standard.

Equally, if a student achieves Band 8 results in NAPLAN reading and numeracy domains, they will only be required to sit the online writing test component until they can demonstrate the literacy standard.
2.5. Can a student still receive an HSC if they don’t achieve Band 8 results in Year 9 NAPLAN?

Yes.

A student’s NAPLAN results or online tests results do not prevent a student from progressing to Years 10, 11 or 12.

Students will have multiple opportunities after Year 9 NAPLAN to demonstrate that they meet the standard by taking the new online reading, writing and numeracy tests available in Years 10–12.

2.6. How many opportunities are there to achieve the minimum standard?

The first opportunity to meet the standard is by prequalifying in Year 9 NAPLAN. This gives students, their teachers and schools time to improve their literacy and numeracy skills well before the HSC.

Those students who do not prequalify for the standard in Year 9 will have time with their teachers, parents and schools to work on strategies and measures to improve their performance during Years 10, 11 and 12.

It is proposed that students will have up to two opportunities to sit the online tests in each year. More information about the online tests is available in section 5.

2.7. Why are there multiple opportunities to meet the standard?

It is fair to provide students with multiple opportunities to reach the standard. Students mature at different stages, and may master essential literacy and numeracy concepts at different times.

Providing an early opportunity at Year 9 NAPLAN also prompts a focus on literacy and numeracy in the earlier years of school, and on students meeting their progressive milestones in these core skills. Teachers and schools will be able to track student progress toward the minimum standard through primary school and the earlier years of secondary school. This focus will help all students well before they reach the HSC.

2.8. What happens if a student does not meet the minimum standard by the end of Year 12?

Students will have five years after starting their first HSC course to meet the literacy and numeracy standard and receive an HSC. This pathways provision is not new. Currently a proportion of NSW students accumulate their HSC over a period of up to five years.

2.9. If a student does not meet the standard prior to the end of Year 12 can they still sit for the HSC examinations?

Yes. Students will not be excluded from sitting for their HSC exams if they have not met the standard.

Students who sit for the HSC exams without meeting the standard will have their results recorded on the Record of School Achievement (RoSA).
3 SCHOOL CREDENTIALS

3.1. Will students still receive a credential if they don’t meet the minimum standard?

Yes.

Year 12 students who do not meet the minimum standard for award of the HSC will receive the Record of School Achievement (RoSA).

The RoSA records completed Stage 5 (Year 9-10) and Stage 6 (Years 11-12) courses, results and grades, and participation in any uncompleted Stage 6 courses. Current students who leave school before the HSC already have the option of sitting an online literacy and numeracy test and recording the result on their RoSA.

3.2. Will there be exemptions from the minimum standard requirement for some students?

Yes.

The following exemptions apply:

- students undertaking Life Skills English or Mathematics courses in Years 9, 10, 11 or 12.
- students undertaking a full Life Skills program (ie four or more Life Skills courses)

Further consultation on other possible exemptions will be undertaken by NESA in 2017 with the school sectors, principals associations, teacher unions and parent groups on an exemptions policy for release in 2018.

Students with a disability will also receive appropriate adjustments to sit NESA online literacy and numeracy test (through the existing NESA special provisions policy).

NESA will undertake further consultation with stakeholders in 2017 on necessary adjustments to the special provisions policy for the online tests.
4 SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

4.1. How will students be prepared to achieve the standard?

Quality teaching of the NSW curriculum is the best way to prepare students to achieve the standard. All NSW syllabuses from Kindergarten to Year 12 integrate the development of literacy and numeracy skills through general capabilities, cross-curriculum content or key competencies.

The new Year 11 and 12 syllabuses for English Studies, English Standard and Mathematics Standard are aligned to the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) Level 3 so that teachers are able to support students to meet the minimum standard by the end of Year 12.

4.2. How will schools support students at risk of not meeting the standard?

All schools currently have in place processes for identifying students who do not meet expected literacy and numeracy benchmarks and for providing additional support to these students.

Teachers and schools know their individual students best and will determine the most appropriate way of providing additional support to students identified as being at risk of not meeting the new standard.

Strategies and materials will be also made available to assist teachers in supporting students to reach the standard through the *NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017–2020*.

4.3. What additional support materials and resources will be available from NESA?

New support materials and resources from NESA, will emphasise the early identification of students in primary and high school at risk of not meeting the standard.

From 2017, a specifically designed mathematics pathway will be available for Years 9 and 10 students who are identified at risk of not demonstrating the minimum numeracy standard by the end of Year 10.

4.4. If students do not reach the numeracy standard by the end of Year 10, will they have to take a mathematics course for Stage 6?

No. Study of a mathematics course is not mandatory for Stage 6 (Years 11–12 students).

However, studying a mathematics course in Stage 6 may be the best option for students to develop the skills needed to meet the numeracy standard.

The current Preliminary Mathematics General, HSC Mathematics General 1 and HSC Mathematics General 2 courses are designed to give students the numeracy skills needed for everyday life, work and further education.

The new Year 11 Mathematics Standard course (to be introduced from 2018) and the new Year 12 Mathematics Standard 1 and Year 12 Mathematics Standard 2 courses (to be introduced from 2019) are aligned to the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) Level 3.

4.5. How will students complete the additional numeracy courses or maths topics while still meeting the mandatory requirements of their subjects in their Preliminary course of study?

Schools will decide on the most appropriate way to offer additional support for students.
Some schools will choose to offer short courses or topics within the timetable, whereas others will offer additional support outside timetabled hours or through one-on-one tutoring.

Students who need to improve their numeracy skills should consult their school on the appropriate strategy to achieve this. It may include completion of additional NESA numeracy courses or maths topics in order to meet the minimum standard.

4.6. What options are available for students who move from interstate?

Students who move from interstate will have their prior Year 9 NAPLAN achievements recognised.

NESA will work with stakeholders in 2017 to develop rules governing transfer and recognition of other literacy and numeracy achievements for students in Years 10–12. The guidelines will be released in time for the Year 10 students of 2018.

4.7. Will students who have not met the minimum standard for award of the HSC be able to apply to university?

Yes.

The HSC is not a requirement for an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). The ATAR is an Australian ranking system used by universities to allocate university placements. The ATAR is not a mark, nor is it a summary of the HSC.

Each university sets its own entry requirements and most offer preparation or alternative pathways to applicants who do not meet a university’s general entry requirements.

Students should visit the University Admissions Centre (UAC) website for more information about the requirements for undergraduate applications in NSW, including prerequisites for specific tertiary courses.

4.8. Will attainment of the minimum standard be recorded on the HSC credential?

No.

The award of the HSC credential from 2020 will be the tangible indication to vocational and tertiary providers and employers that the student has met the minimum standard of literacy and numeracy.
5 ABOUT THE TESTS

5.1. When will the online literacy and numeracy tests first be available?

The online tests will be available towards the end of Term 1, 2018.

Trial tests will be conducted in the second half of 2017.

5.2. Who is developing the new online tests?

NESA is developing the new online tests.

5.3. Where will the online tests be sat?

The arrangements for sitting the tests will be finalised in consultation with the school sectors but the intention is for students to sit the tests at their school.

5.4. How many tests are there?

There are three individual test components for reading, writing and numeracy that take about 45 minutes each.

5.5. How will the new tests be different to the current optional literacy and numeracy tests available for early school leavers?

The current Record of School Achievement (RoSA) literacy numeracy online test does not assess writing. This test was developed for a different purpose, so NESA needs to adapt it to support students to reach the minimum standard.

Schools are already familiar with the existing platform, which will be further developed to assess achievement of the minimum standard.

5.6. How long will the tests take?

Each reading and numeracy test will run for 45 minutes and will contain 40 test items. There will be a mix of question types, including multiple choice items.

The writing test will take up to 45 minutes and will have one extended response question based on a prompt or stimulus, such as an image. Students will type their response.

5.7. What will be assessed?

The areas assessed for each test component include:

- **reading**: comprehension, grammar, punctuation, spelling and vocabulary
- **numeracy**: number, measurement, space, data and algebraic representation
- **writing**: audience and purpose, structure and cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and spelling.
5.8. Will students receive questions that are sufficiently challenging to give them a sense of their performance during the test?

The reading and numeracy tests will use computer-adaptive technology with students receiving questions based on their ability level and responses to previous questions.

By tailoring the test to the individual ability of each student it will deliver better feedback to teachers and students with the assistance of technology.

5.9. How often will students be able to sit the tests?

From 2018, there will be four test windows per year, one in each school term, with each window open up to four weeks.

Students will be able to sit the tests a maximum of twice each year.

5.10. How many attempts can students make at the online literacy and numeracy tests per year?

Each student may sit each of the tests up to twice a year in Years 10, Year 11 and in Year 12. In consultation with their teachers, students will determine the optimum time for sitting the tests.

The emphasis is on students attaining functional levels of literacy and numeracy, not on passing the tests at the earliest possible time or sitting the tests as many times as possible until they pass.

Students may need extra support and tuition between sitting the tests to improve their skills to the level of the standard. The number of times per year a student may sit a test will thus be limited to ensure the focus remains on improving students’ skills, not on passing a test.

5.11. When will students last be able to take the test?

There will be four test windows per year, one in each term.

While HSC students will not be excluded from sitting the online literacy and numeracy tests, schools will decide on appropriate access to the tests during the HSC exams period.

5.12. How will schools enter students to take the tests?

Through Schools Online, schools will register and schedule students to take the test.

5.13. How much flexibility will schools have in choosing when students take the test?

Schools will be able to select the appropriate test window for each student to sit the test.

If a student is not successful, they will have time to work with their teachers to develop their skills before they sit the test again.

5.14. What support materials will be available to schools, teachers and students for the new online tests?

A test demonstration site with sample test items will be available by the end of Term 1, 2017 and pilot tests will be trialled later in 2017.
Annotated student writing samples aligned to the minimum standard will be available in late 2017. Additional support materials and teaching resources will be provided through the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017–2020.

Sample reports and feedback from the tests will also be provided.

5.15. What information will students receive after the test?

A test report including results and feedback on a student’s performance in the reading and numeracy test will be available within 24 hours after taking the test. This is so that students can work through the outcome with their teachers.

While the reading and numeracy test will be automatically marked by computer, the writing test will be marked by trained markers, and the process will take longer. A student’s result and more detailed feedback will be provided within 21 days of test completion.

The test report will identify skill areas that require development, so that those areas may be targeted for further study. Sample test reports will be provided for consultation in 2017.

Students will also be able to track their own progress via Students Online, and teachers can track students’ progress via Schools Online.

More detail on the report, results and feedback will be available in the first half of 2017.

5.16. What information will teachers and principals receive after the test?

Schools will be able to keep track of the areas in which students have demonstrated the minimum standard and any further tests required via Schools Online.

The reported results will guide teachers in interpreting the data and informing the support and resources students required, and decisions about how to engage individual students.

Individual school and student results will not be published.

5.17. How will the NSW Education Standards Authority ensure the security of the test?

Consultation will occur with school sectors in 2017 about arrangements to ensure security of the tests and will be finalised in time for delivery of the online tests in 2018.

Schools and the NSW Education Standards Authority have considerable experience in running state-wide testing for NAPLAN and the HSC exams.

5.18. Will disability provisions be available for the online tests?

Yes. Disability provisions will be available for students with a permanent or temporary disability to provide a fair opportunity to respond to the online tests.

Students with a disability will also receive appropriate adjustments to sit NESA online literacy and numeracy test. Disability provisions will be in line with existing NESA protocols for NAPLAN and the HSC exams.
How can I find out more information about these HSC reforms?

NESA will keep parents, students, teachers and the broader community informed of progress via the website www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au.

NESA will continue to use existing communication channels and committee structures, including the Board, to monitor these reforms and update the community regularly.

Please direct your questions to: strongerHSC@bostes.nsw.edu.au

Further updates can be found via:

- twitter: @NewsAtNESA
- Subscribe to NESA News
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