



National Foundation for
Educational Research

Coursework in national/state qualifications in France, the Netherlands, Norway, Ontario (Canada) and Victoria (Australia)

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Introduction

In November 2007, the International Information Unit/Eurydice Unit at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to seek information on the role played by coursework in national qualifications. For the purposes of this short thematic probe coursework was defined as:

work assigned to students as part of a national/state level qualification and which counts towards the grade given for the qualification. It is normally work undertaken outside examination conditions.

QCA was interested in the forms of coursework which exist; the weighting of marks awarded for different types of coursework; the controls in place for the regulation of coursework; the external or internal moderation or marking of coursework; and whether coursework was an issue of debate in the five countries/states of France, the Netherlands, Norway, Ontario (Canada) and Victoria (Australia).

Methodology

The International Information Unit at the NFER undertook a brief desk study examining upper secondary level qualifications in the five countries/states. The study focused on information available via the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks (INCA) Internet Archive¹, the Eurydice Network's Eurybase database², and via external websites. For France, the Netherlands, Norway and Ontario, contacts in the Eurydice and INCA networks were also approached to validate and supplement the information obtained via the desk study.

Summary of findings

Coursework - in some form - exists for some, but not all of the qualifications available at upper secondary level in each of the countries/states included in the study.

Across the five countries/states, a wide variety of forms of coursework is available for schools/teachers to use, and there is no one model which is consistent across the five countries. In Norway, for example, coursework takes the form of pupils' work during the school year, usually outside examination conditions, and can include practical work, work in class, homework, tests, project work and group work. In the Netherlands, school-set examinations (as opposed to national examinations) can include project work and, in Ontario, assessment is defined as the process of gathering information from a variety of sources, including assignments, demonstrations, projects, performances and tests, to accurately reflect how well students are achieving curriculum expectations. In France, *travaux personnels encadrés* (TPE - individual supervised school projects) constitute a subject in their own right and are completed in the penultimate year of study for the general (upper secondary) *baccalauréat* examination (pupils aged 16-17), whilst the general upper secondary leaving certificate in Victoria (Australia) – the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) -

¹ <http://www.inca.org.uk>

² <http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/EuryCountry>

includes coursework assessment tasks. These must be part of the regular teaching and learning programme and must be completed mainly in class time and within a restricted timeframe. VCEs in certain subjects, such as art, design and technology, or food and technology also include school-assessed tasks in which products and models are assessed. These school-assessed tasks are completed outside class time and teachers must monitor and record each student's progress through to completion. This requires regular sightings of the work by the teacher and the keeping of records.

Traditional test-based assessments are not considered appropriate assessment strategies for units for the other main upper secondary qualification in Victoria – the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). VCAL units are specifically designed around project-based activities that integrate learning outcomes within a context or thematic approach, and this is regarded as best practice.³

The weighting of marks available for coursework is another area in which there appears to be little consistency either between countries or between specific subjects/courses in an individual country. In Victoria (Australia), where the coursework component of a VCE subject may account for between 20 and 50 per cent of the credits awarded for a course (depending on the subject) (or 100 per cent in the case of the VCAL, which is completely assessed by coursework or continuous assessment), such weightings are set centrally.

Indeed in Victoria and in France, coursework is generally centrally regulated by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) or the Ministry of Education respectively. In Ontario, broad requirements are set by the state, and implemented at the discretion of schools and teachers. Similar conditions exist in the Netherlands, whereas, in Norway, there are no national controls in place for the regulation of coursework. Individual teachers are entirely free to decide which activities to set and assess during the school year.

Information on processes for the moderation of marks for coursework is not available for the Netherlands and Ontario. In France, Norway and Victoria, there appears to be little consistency in moderation practices. Statistical moderation is used in Victoria to ensure that coursework assessment marks given by different schools for the VCE are comparable throughout the state. In France *TPE* are moderated at the local level via 'harmonisation committees' set up by the *recteur*⁴ and, in Norway, although there is no formal moderation of coursework, there may be some unofficial collaboration between teachers.

In terms of current debate around the issue of coursework, the desk research could only find evidence of discussions in Australia and Norway. In Norway, debate centres not solely on coursework, but on ways of improving and standardising the assessment process as a whole. Currently, individual teachers and schools have considerable autonomy, and it is hoped that greater clarity in rules and regulation will lead to higher quality assessment. In Australia too, the debate is wider than coursework per se, focusing on the performance of first-year university students who have

³ *VCAL Unit Assessment Planning Guide*

http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcal/providers/resources/assess_guide/VCALAssesmentGde.pdf

⁴ The local representative of the national Ministry of Education.

experienced different evaluation/assessment regimes during high school education. Research currently appears to suggest that there is little difference between the first-year performance at university of students whose senior secondary school performance has been assessed by continuous assessment and those who have taken external examinations in Year 12 (age 18).

Country reports

France

Forms of coursework

Coursework, or a form of coursework, exists in the general *Baccalauréat (bac)* – in the specific form of *travaux personnels encadrés (TPE)* – individual supervised school projects). There is no equivalent of coursework provision in the other qualifications available at this level (technological *Baccalauréat*, vocational/professional *Baccalauréat*, *CAP* or *BEP*).⁵

The general *bac* comprises compulsory written examination papers, oral tests, optional examinations and *TPE*. *TPE* are long-term projects, which aim to give students the opportunity to work on their own and with their classmates. They are compulsory in the penultimate year of upper secondary education (age 16 – 17); are multi-disciplinary (involving at least two subject areas); and lead to a presentation. All presentations must be preceded by research and documentation phases.

Students generally work on *TPE* in a group of two to four – if a group is larger than four they are split up for the final presentation. Two hours each week are allocated for *TPE* study. Despite the fact that they are group work, *TPE* are assessed individually. They are marked out of 20, and only marks greater than 10 contribute to final examination marks.

There are three main components to *TPE* assessment:

- The conduct of the research and group working: a mark is awarded by the teacher who has supervised the *TPE* work.
- A written summary of the project provided by each individual student.
- The project presentation, a 'viva-type' interview, and a further short interview in which students discuss their contribution to the group's work.

The final two assessment components are marked by teachers who have relevant subject knowledge, but who have not supervised students whilst preparing the *TPE*.

During assessment examiners are looking for:

⁵ *CAP* = *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (vocational aptitude certificate); *BEP* = *brevet d'études professionnelles* (vocational studies certificate).

- Evidence of research skills.
- Appropriate selection and use of resources.
- Subject knowledge.
- Good contribution to the team.
- Quality of oral expression including richness of language.
- Quality of written expression.
- Debating skills.
- Relevance of the work, the topic and the format of the presentation.

Controls for the regulation of coursework

TPE assessment is organised under the authority of the *recteur* of the local *académie* (regional educational headquarters, that is, the local arm of the Ministry of Education). It takes place in the second term of the school year and, in schools, it is the responsibility of the school head. A *commission d'évaluation* (assessment/evaluation commission) ensures the administration of *TPE* (and all other examinations) for the school.

The *recteur*⁶ nominates examiners, members of the school's *bac* jury or deputy examiners from amongst the teachers and librarians at the school concerned. All of those nominated as examiners must have experience of *TPE* and relevant subject knowledge.

Moderation

Moderation is carried out by the local *commission d'harmonisation* (harmonisation commission), set up under the auspices of the *recteur*. This *commission* has access to the mark sheets for each student, information on the numbers of students participating, and details of the average and spread of marks. The commission's work begins with a comparison of marks (average and distribution) and ends with any revision.

Further information is available (in French) in the *Bulletin Officiel*:

<http://www.education.gouv.fr/botexte/bo021128/MENE0202715N.htm>

⁶ The local representative of the national Ministry of Education

The Netherlands

Introduction

In the Netherlands, students at secondary level choose one of three pathways:

- *HAVO*: a five-year course for students aged 12 to 17, which leads to the general upper secondary education certificate, and prepares students for higher professional education. A *HAVO* certificate also allows students to go on to pre-university education.
- *VWO*: six-year course, for students aged 12 to 18, leading to the pre-university certificate, which is designed to prepare students for university.
- *VMBO*: a four-year pre-vocational secondary education course for 12- to 16-year-olds, which prepares students for the pre-vocational education certificate (as a basis for further vocational training/study).

For *HAVO* and *VWO* qualifications, students select one of four fixed subject combinations. Each combination of subjects consists of:

- A common core of subjects, which is the same for all students.
- A specialised compulsory component which is different for each subject combination.
- An optional component.

For *VMBO* qualifications, students choose between four learning pathways and four sectors, each with its own fixed combination of examination subjects. The four learning pathways are:

- The theoretical programme.
- The combined programme.
- The middle-management vocational programme.
- The basic vocational programme.

The four sectors are:

- Engineering and technology.
- Care and welfare.
- Business.
- Agriculture.

Students can also opt for an intrasectoral programme. This means that they can either select to study elements from different specialisations/options within one of the above four sectors, or they can combine subjects across the four sectors.

Forms of coursework

The *HAVO*, *VWO* and *VMBO* school leaving examinations comprise two parts: a national examination held in the final year and a component organised by the school, which is known as the school examination.

In the national examination for the *HAVO* and *VWO*, students are assessed in Dutch, English and all other subjects in the particular subject combination which they have selected. Courses in subjects chosen as part of the optional component for each subject combination are concluded with an examination portfolio. For the specialised compulsory component, assessment includes a project with a study load of 80 hours.

The school examination usually takes the form of an examination portfolio comprising various elements. In addition to a list of grades/marks, this may include examples of project work.

Although the broad requirements for the school examination are approved by the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science and are set out in the examination syllabus, schools have considerable freedom to choose what is included in these examinations. School examinations do, generally, however include the areas (domains and sub-domains as they are known) which are not included in the central/national examinations. Schools also have the freedom to decide when the different parts of the school examination take place. Usually, these are not all scheduled for the final year of the course.

For the *VMBO* qualification, although coursework is not a part of the national examination, the school examination does include a project on a topic relating to a student's chosen sector. This is compulsory for all pupils with the exception of those taking the basic vocational programme (one of the four learning pathways for this qualification).

Norway

Introduction

Upper secondary education (for 16- to 19-year-olds) includes general academic studies, vocational studies and apprenticeship training. Most upper secondary schools offer both general academic education and vocational education. Around half of pupils attend the general stream, the other half the vocational stream.

Students choose between three general (academic) and nine vocational education programmes.

The three general programmes, which last for three years, are:

- General and business studies.
- Music, dance and drama.
- Sports and physical education.

For vocational education programmes, there is a common first year (foundation course) for each of the nine broad sectors, before pupils specialise for different trades and occupations by selecting from the various courses available in the second and third years. The vocational programmes normally involve two years in school and two years in the workplace.

In both general and vocational programmes, the content of upper secondary courses is locally adapted, within a common (national) framework of objectives, to meet the needs of pupils and the local labour market.

There are two different kinds of certificates which can be awarded at the end of upper secondary education:

- The craft/journeyman's certificate in crafts and trades on completion of a total of four years of upper secondary school and apprenticeship training.
- Certificate awarded on completion of three years of upper secondary school leading to either general entrance qualifications for higher education, or vocational qualifications in vocational subjects.

Forms of coursework

Coursework forms part of the mark awarded on completion of upper secondary education. The upper secondary school certificate⁷ records a pupil's coursework marks along with their end-of-year examination results. These two types of marks are recorded separately on the certificate.

Coursework takes the form of pupils' work at the end of the school year, usually outside examination conditions. This can include practical work, work in class, homework, tests, project work and group work. There are no official guidelines and individual teachers are free to choose the activities they assess. Marks for achievement, based on the extent to which the pupil has achieved the competence described in the competence aims/course objectives, and on what the teacher would expect at the time of assessment, are awarded each term by the teacher. Only the end-of-year marks are recorded on the certificate.

Marks are awarded on a six-point scale from 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest); decimal points are not used. Marks are also awarded for end-of-year examinations, using the same grading system. Examinations in written subjects are organised by public examination boards.

Pupils are assessed with the following in mind:

- The course objectives as set out in the core curriculum, in the common objectives for the specialist subjects, and in the objectives for individual curriculum subjects form the basis for assessment.
- It is the pupil's overall competence which is assessed, as described in the course objectives.
- The assessment of pupils should demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the objectives set out in the syllabuses.

Further information is available from the curriculum documents for subjects in upper secondary, which are available via the following link:

http://www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no/templates/udir/TM_Artikkel.aspx?id=1396

⁷ Awarded on completion of upper secondary education for general education courses and for vocational courses completed in school.

In the case of craft/journeyman's certificates for students following certain vocational courses (see above), centrally set theoretical and practical examinations are held and there is no coursework; the mark is 'passed with distinction', 'passed' or 'not passed'.

Weighting of marks awarded for coursework

The upper secondary school certificate records two separate marks – one for the pupil's examination results and one for coursework results. A pupil's coursework mark reflects his/her overall achievement, based on the extent to which the pupil has achieved the competence described in the competence aims/course or curricular objectives at the end of the learning year.

Controls for the regulation of coursework

There are no national controls in place for the regulation of coursework. Individual teachers are free to decide which activities to set and assess.

Upper secondary school certificates are issued on the authority of the school and signed by the principal.

(The county examination board issues craft/journeyman's certificates, which are awarded on the basis of examination results only; there is no coursework.)

Moderation

Teachers generally mark and grade their pupils' coursework single-handedly. There are no regulations on the external or internal moderation of coursework in Norway. However, in some upper secondary schools, unofficial collaboration takes place, where teachers arrange meetings to compare their marking and grading levels.

Current debates

The Ministry of Education and Research intends to introduce a comprehensive system of pupil assessment from the start of the 2009 school year, and has assigned the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training the task of introducing an improved system for individual assessment. During the period 2007 to 2009, a number of measures are being implemented at national level with the intention of ensuring that regulations/rules are clearer; that assessment competence is increased on all levels, with a view to introducing more academically relevant and fair assessment practices; and that better systems for the documentation of continuous assessment and the final assessment of pupils are introduced.⁸

⁸ UTDANNINGSDIREKTORATET (2006). *The Education Mirror 2006: Analysis of Primary and Lower and Upper Secondary Education in Norway* [online]. Available: http://www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no/upload/Rapporter/Utdanningsspeilet_2006/The_Education_Mirror_2006.pdf [14 November, 2007].

Ontario (Canada)

Introduction

High schools in Ontario offer programmes from Grade/Year 9 (age 14-15) to Grade 12 (age 17-18, this final year is post-compulsory). To graduate, students need to:

- Obtain a total of 30 credits, 18 of which are compulsory and 12 optional.
- Successfully complete the Grade 10 literacy test (students aged 15/16).
- Complete 40 hours of community involvement.

Assessment arrangements/forms of coursework

Assessment for high school graduation can take a variety of different forms, which may include coursework. The *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12 Program and Diploma Requirements* (Ministry of Education and Training, 1999) states that:

Assessment is the process of gathering information from a variety of sources (including assignments, demonstrations, projects, performances and tests) that accurately reflects how well students are achieving the curriculum expectations.

To successfully obtain a high school graduation credit, students must complete a 110-hour course in a particular subject area, achieving a mark of 50 per cent or above. The final grade for each course is determined as follows:

- 70 per cent of the mark is based on assessment conducted throughout the course. This portion of the grade should reflect the student's most consistent level of achievement throughout the course, although special consideration should be given to more recent evidence of achievement.
- 30 per cent of the mark is based on final assessment in the form of an examination, performance, essay and/or other method of assessment suitable to the course content and administered towards the end of each course.

Decisions regarding the exact nature of assessment for each course are taken by individual schools/teachers. The *Program and Diploma Requirements* (Ministry of Education and Training, 1999) outline a number of broad requirements for assessment and evaluation strategies. For example, they require the inclusion of samples of students' work that provide evidence of achievement, but do not specify exactly what form these should take.

The Public District School Board Writing Partnership in Ontario has published a number of course profiles at secondary level. These do not stipulate a required teaching approach, but are intended to provide teachers with guidance on delivery of the secondary curriculum. They each include a broad range of possible assessment activities including:

- Journals, portfolios, and projects.
- Performance assessments and presentations.
- Conferencing.
- Tests and quizzes.

The course profiles are available at:

<http://www.curriculum.org/csc/library/profiles/gr10.shtml>

Victoria (Australia)

Forms of coursework

Coursework is included in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).

Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)

The VCE is an upper secondary certificate - available in a wide range of individual subjects or subject combinations - and the course is usually completed over a minimum of two years (students aged 16-18). There are 43 study areas or subjects, with options available within several of the subjects. Most subjects have four units, each lasting one term/semester or half-year. Students must complete at least 16 units over the two years.

VCE studies, except for VCE vocational education and training (VET) studies, have three graded assessments in units three and four. VCE VET studies have two graded assessments. In each, graded assessments include a mix of school-based assessment (see below) and external examination, and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) combines each student's scores for these assessments into a single 'Study Score'. The amount of coursework included in the assessment varies by subject from around 20 to up to 50 per cent. The exact weightings of the percentage of coursework by subject are available in the VCE handbook.⁹

The requirements for coursework are set out in VCE 'Study Designs'. Teachers select from the range of tasks designated for the assessment of the unit outcomes. They might decide that all students will complete the same task or they may allow students to select the task. Where options are available, the assessment tasks are of comparable scope and demand. Task selection is a school decision and is based on what suits the teaching programme, the resources available and the needs and interests of students.

'Assessment Guides' provide advice on the scope of the assessment tasks, the conditions under which they are completed, the timeframe for completion and the criteria used for assessment. This advice is provided to limit student and teacher workload.

VCE Study Designs and Assessment Guides are available online:

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/studies/>

There are two forms of school assessment – coursework assessment and school-assessed tasks (see below).

Coursework assessment is an assessment of each student's level of achievement based on a selection of the assessment tasks designated in the Study Design. For each coursework component, the Study Design specifies a range of assessment tasks which assess the achievement of the unit outcomes.

Assessment tasks designated for coursework assessment must be part of the regular teaching and learning programme and must be completed mainly in class time. They

⁹ <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/schooladmin/handbook/2008/vce-vc-al-handbook08.pdf>

are completed within a restricted timeframe and the scope of each task is described in the relevant Assessment Guide.

The expectation that coursework assessment will be completed in class time does not preclude normal teacher expectations for a student to complete research and learning activities that contribute to the student gaining the knowledge and skills outside of class time. For example, a task for the assessment of unit outcomes may require preliminary preparation and activities associated with the task, for example, gathering necessary research data. The amount of work to be completed as homework is decided by the study teacher, taking into account the nature, scope and purpose of the task. Students should be advised just prior to beginning the task that some information or data may be collected outside the classroom.

School-assessed tasks take place in courses where products and models are assessed. The following VCE courses have school-assessed tasks:

- Art
- Design and technology
- Food and technology
- Media
- Studio arts
- Systems and technology
- Visual communication and design.

School-assessed tasks are completed outside class time and teachers must monitor and record each student's progress through to completion. This requires regular sightings of the work by the teacher and the keeping of records.

Details of school-assessed tasks are outlined in the relevant Study Designs and Assessment Guides. They are initially assessed by the teacher using criteria provided in the Assessment Guides and are subject to external review. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) provides schools with assessment sheets for school-assessed tasks specifying the criteria for the awarding of grades. Schools must use the current year's assessment sheets published annually in the Assessment Guides.

Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), introduced in 2003, aims to provide students with skills for further education, training or employment. It is available, to students in Years 11 and 12 (ages 16 to 18), at three levels – foundation, intermediate and senior. Students normally work towards the intermediate and senior levels in Years 11 and 12 respectively.

Students select units and modules from each of the four VCAL strands to make up their VCAL programmes:

- Strand 1 – Literacy and numeracy
- Strand 2 – Industry-specific skills
- Strand 3 – Work-related skills
- Strand 4 – Personal development skills.

Ten credits are needed to obtain the certificate – one credit is awarded for each completed unit. Units may be drawn from VCAL or VCE units.

Traditional test-based assessments are not considered appropriate assessment strategies for VCAL units. VCAL units which are designed around project-based activities that integrate learning outcomes within a context or thematic approach are regarded as best practice.¹⁰

VCAL units are assessed by the teacher to verify successful completion. A state-wide moderation process to review consistency of standards and students is implemented to guide teachers' assessment decisions and processes. Where students select VCE units to fulfil the VCAL certification requirements, these units are assessed as described above.

Controls for the regulation of coursework

The VCAA Handbook¹¹ sets down seven rules which a student must observe when preparing work for assessment by the school. He or she must:

1. Ensure that all unacknowledged work submitted for assessment is genuinely his/her own.
2. Acknowledge all resources used, including:
 - Text, websites and source material.
 - The name/s and status of any person/s who provided assistance and the type of assistance provided.
3. Not receive undue assistance from another person in the preparation and submission of work. Acceptable levels of assistance include:
 - The incorporation of ideas or material derived from other sources (e.g. by reading, viewing or note taking), but which has been transformed by the student and used in a new context.
 - Prompting and general advice from another person or source which leads to refinements and/or self-correction.
 Unacceptable forms of assistance include:
 - Use of, or copying of, another person's work or other resources without acknowledgment.
 - Corrections or improvements made or dictated by another person.
4. Not submit the same piece of work for assessment for more than one course.
5. Not knowingly assist other students in a breach of rules, or he or she may be penalised.

¹⁰ *VCAL Unit Assessment Planning Guide*

http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcal/providers/resources/assess_guide/VCALAssesmentGde.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/schooladmin/handbook/2008/vce-vcal-handbook08.pdf>

6. Sign an authentication record for work done outside class at the time of submitting the completed task. This declaration states that all unacknowledged work is the student's own.
7. Sign a general declaration that he/she will obey the rules and instructions for the VCE, and accept its disciplinary provisions.

As part of the VCAA's ongoing monitoring and quality assurance programme for the VCE, samples of assessment tasks for school-assessed coursework tasks in each VCE course and scored VCE VET programme can be requested for audit from schools. Schools receive notification of audit by email - the School Coursework Audit Notification (SCAN).

Schools are expected to have a process for collecting and storing the required material for submission by the VCAA due date. The audit material portfolio should contain details of each task set by the teacher. Supporting documentation from teachers should include:

- Details of the marking scheme used by the teacher for each task.
- The conditions under which the task/s were undertaken.

The audit is integral to the quality assurance processes of the VCAA. It is undertaken by the 'State Reviewer', and a small panel for each course if required. The outcomes of the audit aim to assist in planning the VCAA's assessment advice and professional development support for teachers. The audit also examines school assessments for irregularities; for example, cases where the VCAA's requirements have not been followed.

The VCAA draws any irregularities identified by the auditing process to the attention of the principal. In the event of serious irregularity, the Executive Committee of the VCAA determines whether disciplinary or other procedures apply and may alter schools' assessments in the light of evidence presented.

Schools receive initial feedback on the outcomes of the audit by email.

Moderation for VCE and VCAL

The VCAA uses statistical moderation to ensure that coursework assessments given by different schools are comparable throughout the state.

The VCE gives teachers some flexibility in deciding the teaching and learning activities and the coursework assessment tasks they will use to assess the learning outcomes specified in each Study Design. As a result, the coursework assessments from two different schools will sometimes be based on two different sets of assessment activities, although they will be assessing the same learning outcomes.

Statistical moderation is a process for adjusting the level and spread of each school's assessments of its students in a particular course, to match the level and spread of the same students' scores on a common external score. Because the external score is based on examinations taken by all students across the state, it is a common standard against which schools' assessments can be compared.

Each VCE course includes at least one external examination and the VCAA uses the examination scores in each course as the basis for statistical moderation of schools' assessments. In courses with two examinations, scores from both examinations are used.

The VCE assessment programme also includes the General Achievement Test (GAT). Rather than using examination scores alone, statistical moderation uses students' GAT and examination scores in courses where, in doing so, a better match with schools' assessments throughout the state is achieved. In all such cases, examination scores will always be the major influence.

The first step in moderating schools' assessments in each course is to identify the moderation group for each course at each school. For example, the moderation group for legal studies in a particular school will be all the students doing legal studies in that school. If there are a number of legal studies classes in the school, the students in all classes constitute the moderation group. If a school has only a very small number of students following a course, it is advisable for the school to combine with another school for moderation purposes. When this happens, students from both schools who are taking that course constitute the moderation group.

The results for some students require special treatment. The results for these students are initially left out of the moderation process, and the moderated scores for these students are calculated later, in line with the rest of the group. Results are removed, for example, for students who do not have complete coursework assessments, examination scores or GAT scores (in studies where the GAT scores are used in the moderation process).

The second step in moderating schools' assessment is to produce an external score for each student taking the course, based on their examination scores for the course and, for a number of courses, using their GAT scores in addition. These external scores are used as the common standard for all schools teaching that course.

The third step is to use the external scores of the moderation group to adjust the school coursework scores for the group. The moderation procedure aims to ensure that the mean (average) of the moderated scores is as close as possible to the mean of the external scores. The procedure is then applied to the school's coursework score for each student to obtain their moderated coursework score.

Further information is available in the VCAA publications:

- *VCE and VCAL: Administrative Handbook 2008*
<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/schooladmin/handbook/2008/vce-vc-al-handbook08.pdf>
- *Statistical moderation of VCE coursework: Assessment in the VCE*
<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/exams/statisticalmoderation/StatMod2001.pdf>

Current debates

Although we have not found any evidence that coursework has been a cause for recent debate in Victoria, there has been some discussion in the wider Australian press.

A recent article in *Education Review* reports on research stating that there is no difference in first-year performance at university between students whose senior secondary school performance has been evaluated by continuous assessment and those who have taken external examinations in Year 12. The Federal Minister of Education had previously indicated that she felt that continuous assessment regimes, such as those used in Queensland and the Australia Capital Territory (ACT), were inferior. It had been suggested that, as such, Queensland and the ACT could be required to introduce external examinations at the end of Year 12 as a condition of the next school funding agreement. The article, dated 14 November 2007, is available from the following website: <http://www.educationreview.com.au/>

The same research is also presented in an article in *The Australian*:
<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,22644136-13881,00.html>

