

SECTION 9: MARKS ADJUSTMENT PROCESS FOR TER

Introduction

The mark students receive for each subjects/course comes from two sources; their numerical school assessment (their 'school mark') and their mark from the examinations set by the Curriculum Council (their 'examination mark').

Why standardise, moderate and scale?

In Western Australia there are about 230 senior high schools offering a variety of TEE subjects and WACE courses. Students can choose to do any combination of these subjects and courses. This choice makes it fairly difficult to compare the results of all students in all the schools and subjects/courses across the State.

For example, it is not possible to fairly compare the value of '50' Australian dollars with '50' US dollars without a conversion of one to the other. Similarly, for any given calendar year, it is not possible to fairly compare:

- a school mark of 80 in Art at one school with a mark of 80 in Art at another school
- a school mark of 80 in Art at one school with a mark of 80 in Calculus at the same or a different school
- an examination mark in Drama Studies with an examination mark in Calculus, or
- school or examination marks from a different calendar year.

Standardisation, moderation and scaling

Standardisation and moderation are processes the Curriculum Council uses to compare student results. Scaling is a process jointly undertaken by the Council and the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre. In general, these processes bring students' marks onto a common scale. This enables the universities to compare students, even if they have done completely different subjects/courses at different schools in different calendar years.

What actually happens to students' school marks?

Throughout Year 12, teachers collect information on students' achievement in semester examinations, classroom tests, class work, research assignments and practical work. At the end of the year they use this information to summarise school performance in each subject and course unit students have studied. The school submits to the Curriculum Council:

- a letter grade (A,B,C,D, or E); and
- a school (numerical) mark.

for each subject and course unit studied in your final year of senior secondary schooling.

Letter grades are recorded on a student's statement of results. They are used for admission to TAFE courses but play no direct part in the university admission process.

However, school marks play a direct part in the university admission process. This will be described later.

Curriculum Council examinations

At the end of the year, the Curriculum Council conducts examinations in all subjects and courses offered in schools. Written papers are set for all of these, and for some, including languages and the Arts, there also may be a practical component.

Each examination paper is set by an examining panel and then independently reviewed. This process seeks to ensure that the examinations appropriately reflect the syllabus and are a fair test of student achievement.

Examination marking

Each written examination script is separately marked by at least two qualified markers under the supervision of a Chief Marker. To ensure maximum fairness, the markers have access only to student numbers.

If the two markers disagree on a student's mark, or even a mark for one part of the paper, they will either work together to decide which mark is correct or another marker will re-mark the paper.

The overall percentage mark for the examination (including the practical component, where applicable) is called the raw examination mark.

Standardising the raw examination mark

The raw examination mark then goes through a process called standardisation. Standardisation is undertaken because examination papers for individual subjects/courses vary in difficulty from year to year, and from subject/course to subject/course. Standardisation adjusts for these differences in difficulty.

Two important outcomes of standardisation are:

- the distribution of standardised marks is the same from year to year and from subject/course to subject/course; and
- the top student in each subject/course is given a standardised mark of 100.

Standardisation ensures that no student is disadvantaged if an examination is harder than usual in the year they do their examination. If an examination is harder, the student's standardised mark in that subject/course may be higher than their raw mark. If, on the other hand, an examination is easier than usual, their standardised mark may be lower than their raw examination mark.

Moderated school mark

A student's moderated school mark is calculated from their school mark. Moderated school marks are on the same numerical scale as the standardised examination marks and, therefore, they have the same meaning in every school. Standardised examination marks are used as a common scale because the examination is the same for all schools, unlike school-based assessments.

The ranking of students according to the moderated school marks is the same as in the school marks.

The moderated school mark is likely to be different from a student's school mark. This is quite normal. The bigger the difference, the bigger the gap between their teacher's assessment scale and the scale used for standardised examination marks.

Standardising the school mark

The moderated school mark is also standardised using the same process as is used to standardise raw examination marks (see above).

Combining the examination mark and school mark

The standardised examination mark and standardised moderated school mark for the same subject/course (which are both out of 100) are then averaged to arrive at a combined mark for each subject/course. Combined marks are then scaled.

Scaling

Scaling adjusts for differences in difficulty between subjects/courses and aims to ensure that students are not disadvantaged if they choose a difficult subject/course. Scaling involves the Curriculum Council and the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC) applying a statistical process – the Average Marks Scaling (AMS) method – to the combined mark.

The AMS method uses the information provided by students' combined marks to compare the achievements of the group of students studying each subject/course. This information is used to adjust or 'scale' the marks of all subjects/courses at the same time.

For example, if the Ancient History students as a group perform better across all their subjects/courses than students of Accounting, the Ancient History marks will generally be scaled up relative to Accounting.

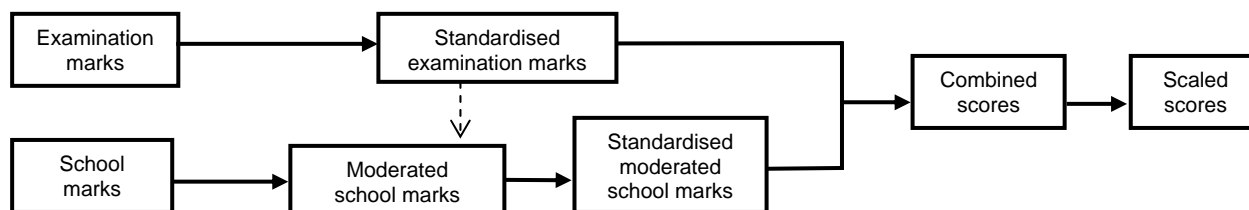
Fairest system

This is the fairest system experts in this field have been able to find which:

- enables students to study the subjects/courses they want
- enables teachers to develop teaching and assessment programs suited to their students' needs
- acknowledges the value of the work students do throughout their final year of schooling; and
- enables tertiary institutions to compare students who undertake different courses.

The scaled mark a student is awarded for a subject/course may be quite different from the school mark, because of these adjustments.

What happens to students' marks: A summary



Further Information

For more information, please see the Curriculum Council information brochures on standardisation, moderation and scaling, or contact the Curriculum Council on (08) 9273 6317 or visit the website at http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/Senior_Secondary/Exam_Information/Your_Marks/.

For information about calculating the TER and all other aspects of university admission visit the TISC website www.tisc.edu.au.