

HSC Student Feedback Survey 2018

**Motivations for course choices and views on HSC
courses**



Introduction and methodology

In 2018, the 12th annual HSC Student Feedback Survey was available to all students enrolled in HSC courses. The survey focussed on the students' course experiences, and was open from September to December 2018.

The survey was administered using Students Online, NESA's secure Internet-based service that gives students access to their own records and other useful information (e.g. a personalised exam timetable). Through Students Online, the survey was customised for each student, obviating the need for questions about demographics or course choices.

Survey respondents

2,922 students participated in the survey, which was approximately 4% of those eligible. In terms of demographics and NESA-held course performance data, the sample has a similar profile to the student population (see Appendix 1). There is some bias towards students taking higher-level subjects and those eligible for an ATAR. Table 1 contrasts survey respondents with the rest of the student population.

Table 1. Student demographics

Variable	Non-Respondents	Respondents
Age (median)	18yrs 1 month	18yrs 1 month
Gender (% female)	49	63
Remoteness (% regional/remote)	23	21
Area-based Socioeconomic Status (SES; % in bottom quartile)	21	20
% awarded HSC	90	94
% ATAR eligible (of HSC awardees)	82	96
Estimated ATAR (median)	70	79
Major course choices:		
% English (Advanced)	38	56
% Mathematics or higher	30	45
% VET (1 or more units)	28	17
School sector (% Government)	57	57
Fully Selective (% of Government)	10	15

74% of schools had at least one student participate in this survey. There was a handful of schools with more than 100 HSC students but no survey participation (e.g. Chifley College Senior Campus, Wagga Wagga High School, Southern Cross Catholic Vocational College, Corpus Christi Catholic High School, Champagnat Catholic College).

The distributions of final marks in English, Mathematics and Biology for survey respondents were similar to those for the rest of the HSC student population (see Appendix 1).

Survey responses

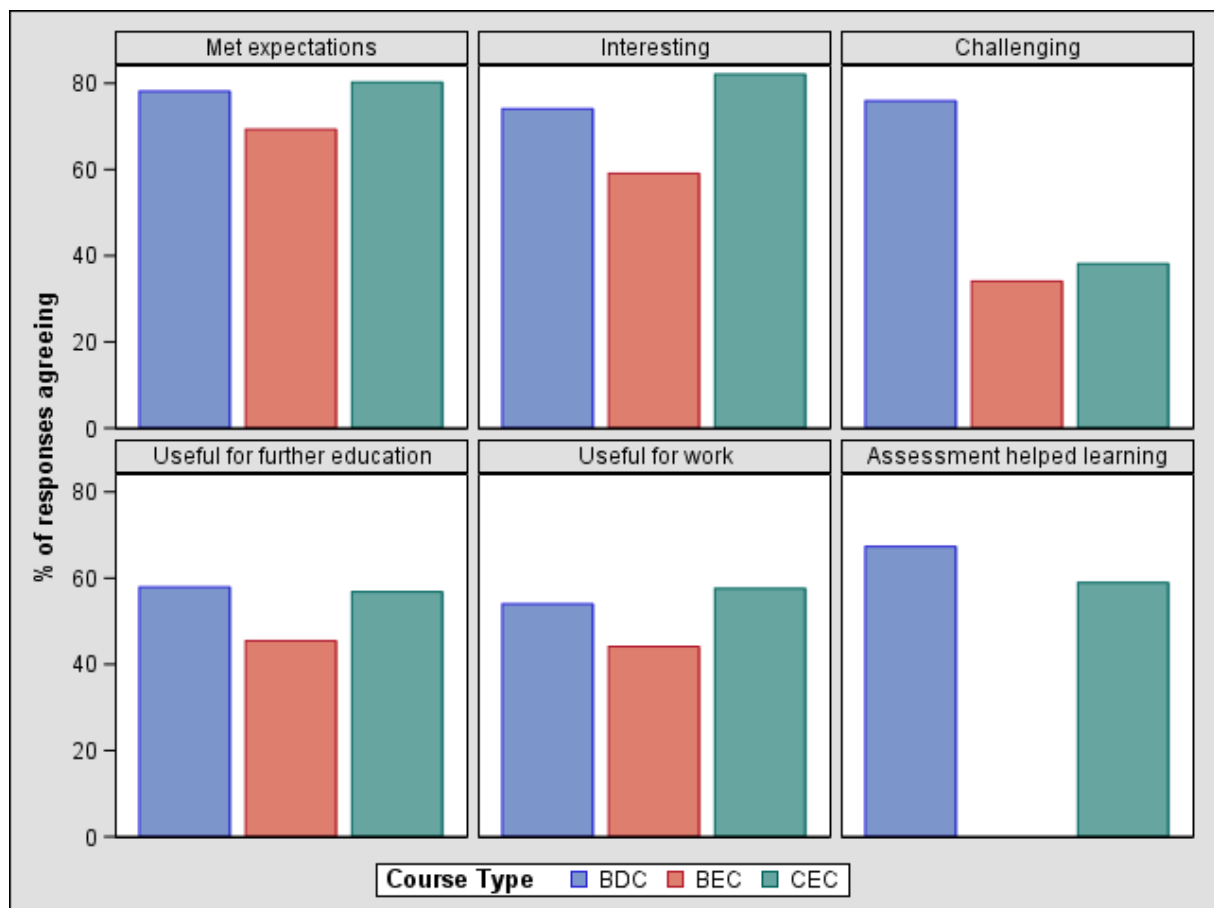
Items in the 2018 survey included course-level evaluation questions, questions about the reasons students chose each of their courses, the opportunity to make short comments in relation to both of these sets of questions, and an open-ended question asking students what one aspect of the HSC they would change if they could. There were six statements relating to the student's satisfaction with each of their 2018 HSC level courses (including Board Developed, Board Endorsed, and Content Endorsed Courses) which they could rate from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. The survey offered students up to six common reasons for choosing each of their courses; they could check 'Yes' or 'No' for one or more of them. Students were also free to give their own reasons.

Obviously respondents will have their own interpretation of the terms "challenging", "useful", "helpful", and so on.

Students' evaluation

As a group, respondents studied over 100 Board Developed Courses (BDCs) covering a wide range of subject areas. Board Endorsed Courses (BECs) and Content Endorsed Courses (CECs) were also studied. CECs are very diverse courses and generally have small candidatures.

Figure 1. Student evaluation

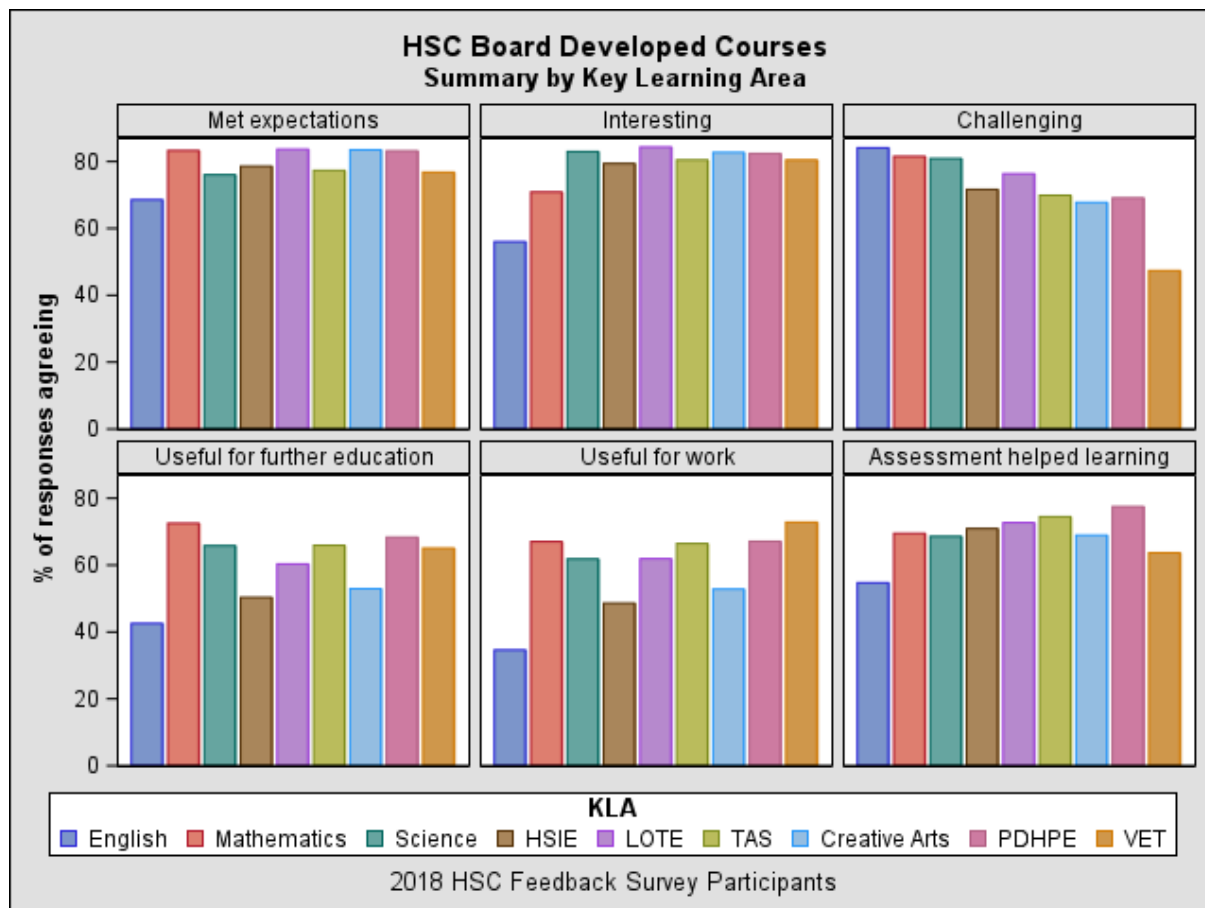


The majority of respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that the BDCs they studied were interesting, challenging and met expectations, but only about 60% agreed that they would be useful for work or further education. The figures were similar for BECs and CECs. The major

exception was that less than 40% of respondents agreed that the BECs and CECs they studied were challenging.

Figure 2 shows the extent of agreement with the reflection questions by Key Learning Area (KLA) for BDCs.

Figure 2. Proportion in agreement with statements about students' Board Developed Courses

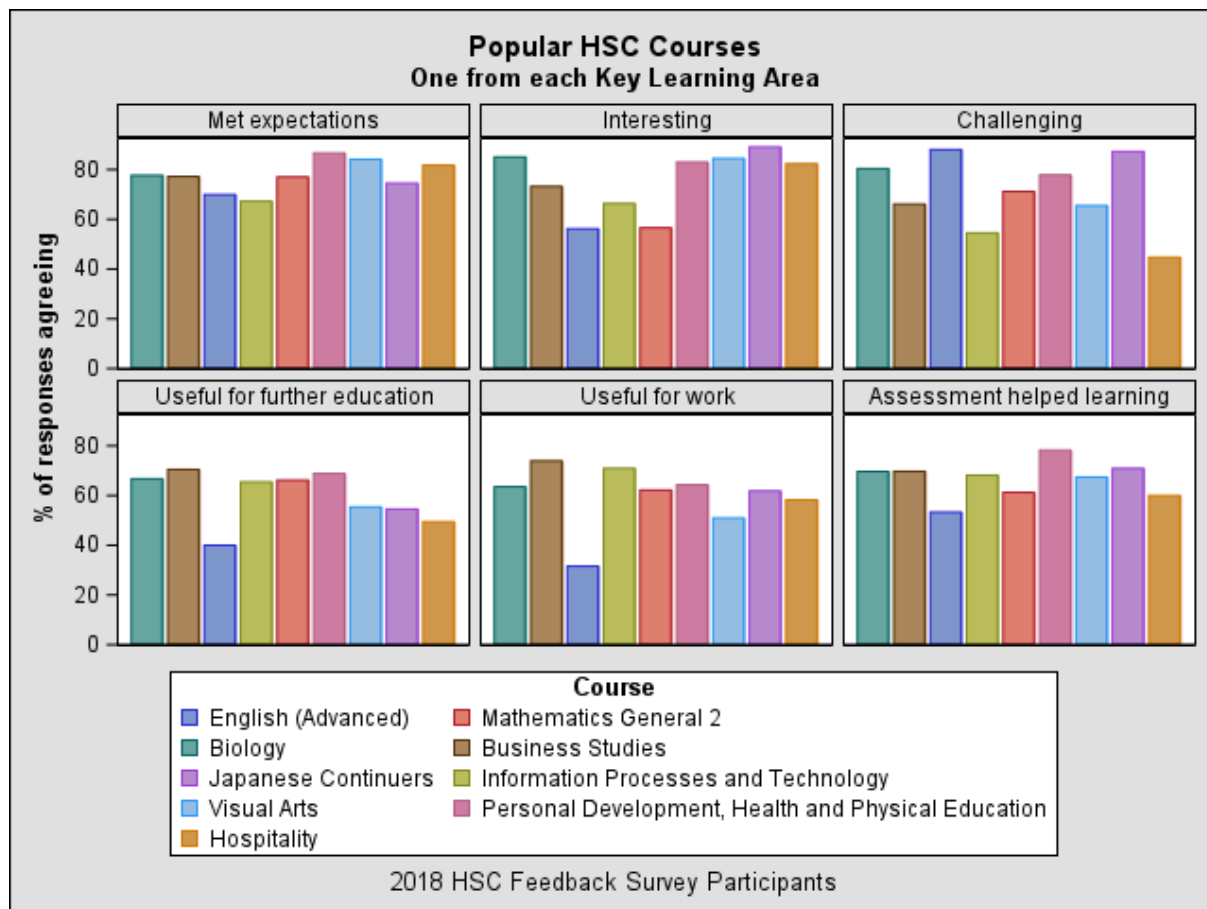


Notable exceptions to overall trends included that respondents rated English courses as less interesting, more challenging, and less useful for work and further education, thus less likely to meet expectations. VET courses, whilst deemed interesting and useful, were judged less challenging. Respondents rated HSIE courses low on future utility, although they were judged to be interesting and met the students' expectations.

In terms of the value to learning of the course assessments, English courses (and to a lesser extent, VET courses) rated relatively poorly.

In Figure 3 evaluations for the most popular course in each KLA are shown.

Figure 3. Most popular courses for each Key Learning Area

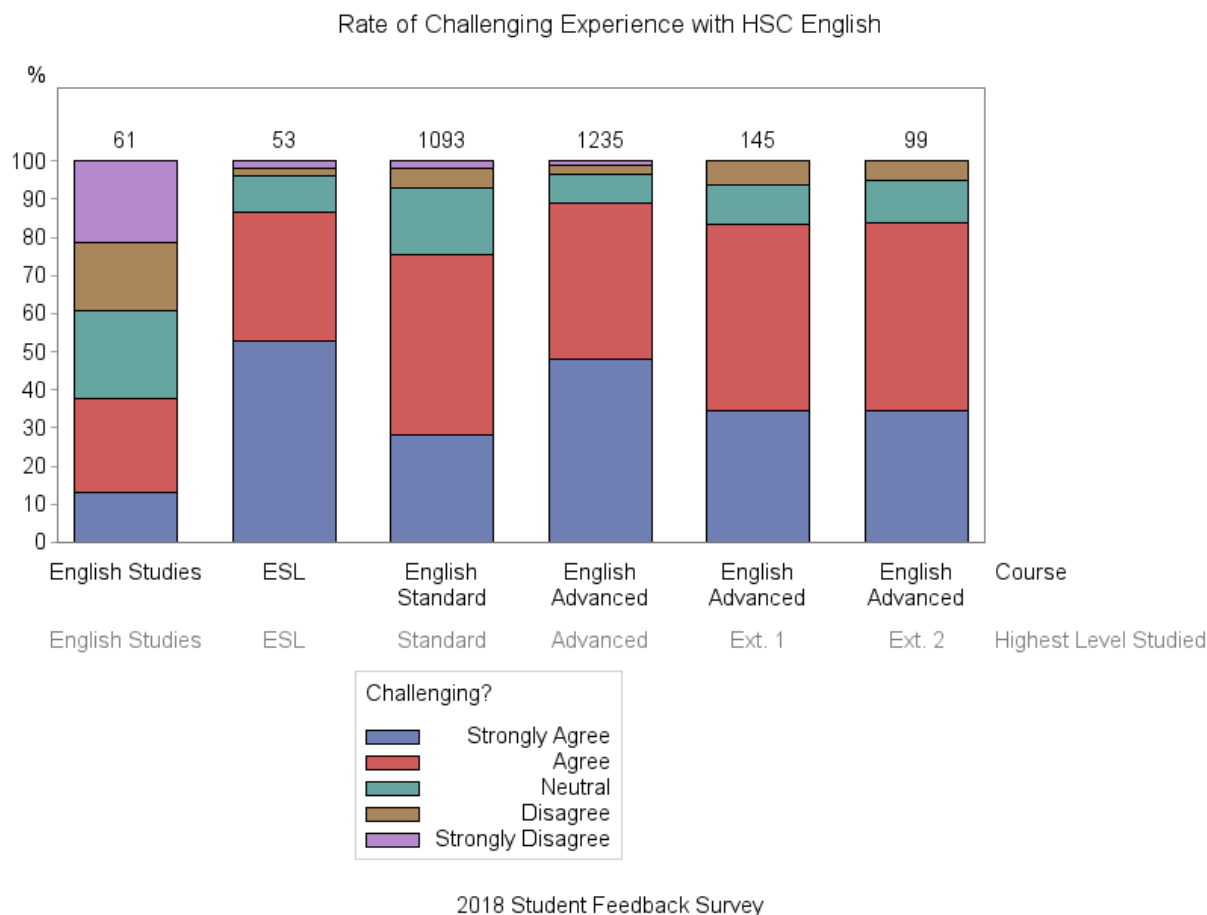


In general, respondents rated English (Advanced), Japanese Continuers (a Language course) and Biology (a Science course) to be the most challenging. Hospitality (a VET course) was least likely to be challenging (< 50%). The popular courses English (Advanced) and Mathematics General 2 were found interesting in less than 60% of cases.

Figures 4 and 5 examine the relationship between the perception that courses were challenging and the highest level of the HSC course completed.

Figure 4. The extent to which respondents found English courses challenging, by highest level studied

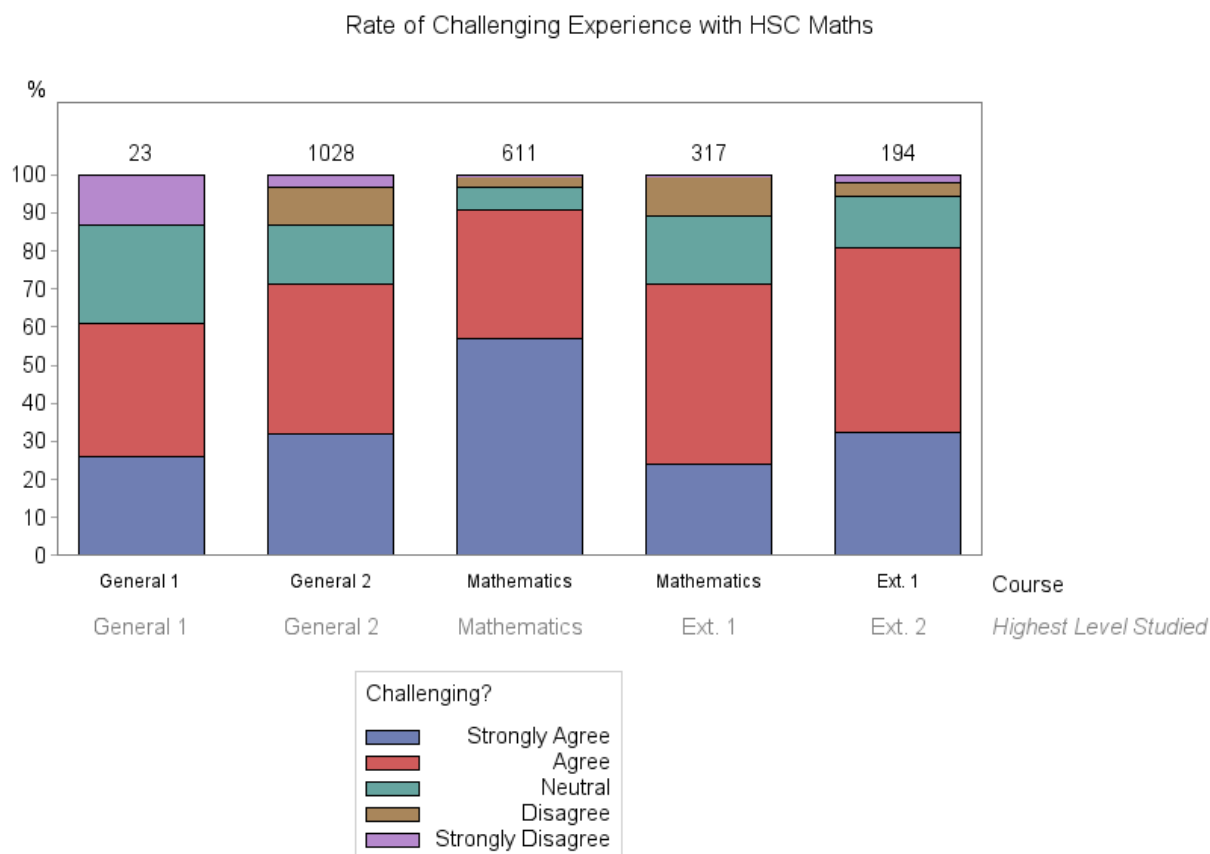
(Numbers above the bars are numbers of respondents)



Error! Reference source not found. shows that English Studies was perceived to be the least challenging course (< 15% strongly agreed), followed by English (Standard; < 30%). The students most likely to perceive their course to be challenging were those doing English (Advanced) without any extensions (48% strongly agree). Students taking the English Extension courses – the most competent students in English - found them to be somewhat less challenging than students whose highest level of English was English Advanced.

Figure 5. The extent to which respondents found Mathematics courses challenging by highest level studied

(Numbers above bars are numbers of respondents)



Error! Reference source not found. shows that Mathematics General 1 was perceived c hallenging by a smaller proportion of respondents (60% agreed/strongly agreed) followed by General 2 (71%). The students most likely to perceive their course to be challenging were the ones whose highest level of Mathematics was Mathematics (90% agreed/strongly agreed).

Students doing Mathematics Extension 1 and/or Extension 2 – the most competent Mathematics students - found their Mathematics course less challenging than those taking Mathematics with no Extension course. As was found for English, we can see that different Mathematics courses do not appear to present challenge for all. In particular, Extension students are much less likely to find their Mathematics course challenging.

By creating simple means of the 5-point Likert-scaled responses by course, the more than 100 courses can be ordered in terms of student responses to the six statements. Combining these means for pairs of statements produces the scatterplots shown in Figures 6 to 8.

Figure 6 shows the relationship between respondents' perceptions of challenge and interest in the most popular HSC courses. Figure 6 shows that -

- Studies of Religion I, Senior Science, Mathematics General 2, and Information Processes and Technology as seen as less challenging and less interesting
- English (Advanced and Standard), Software Design & Development, and Mathematics are seen as challenging, but less interesting.

This result fits with the previous finding that Mathematics was very often challenging for students not doing an extension course.

- Extension courses in English, Mathematics and History are viewed as the most challenging and interesting, as are Physics, Chemistry, Legal Studies, and Engineering Studies.
- Industrial Technology, Society and Culture, Community and Family Studies, Creative Arts and VET courses are seen as interesting, but less challenging.

Figure 6. The relationship between students' perceptions of challenge and interest in the most popular HSC courses

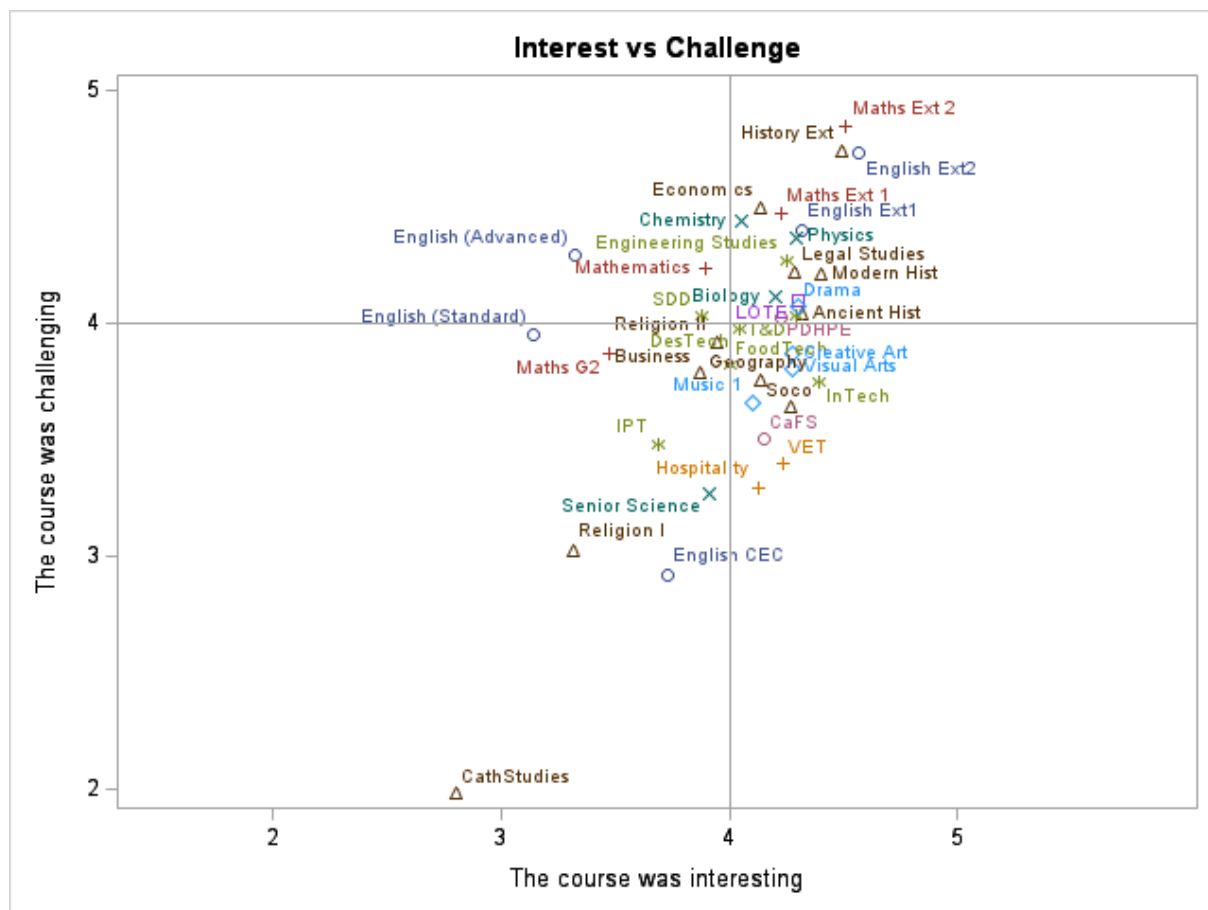
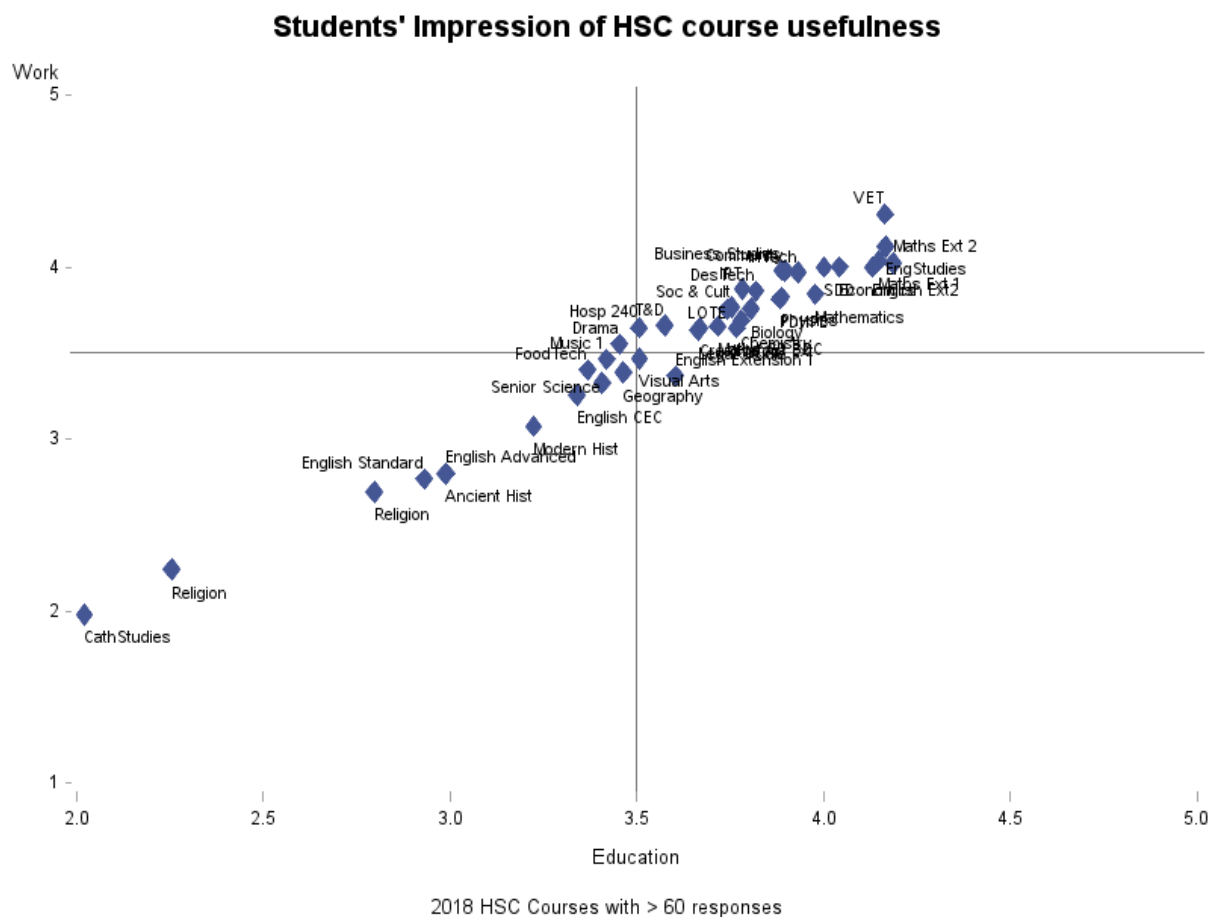


Figure 7 shows the relationship between students' perceptions of the usefulness for work and for future education of various popular HSC courses.

It is clear that every courses lies close to a 45-degree diagonal, which shows that responses at a course level were very similar for 'useful for future work' and 'useful for future education'.

Figure 7. The relationship between students' perceptions of the usefulness for work and for future education of various popular HSC courses

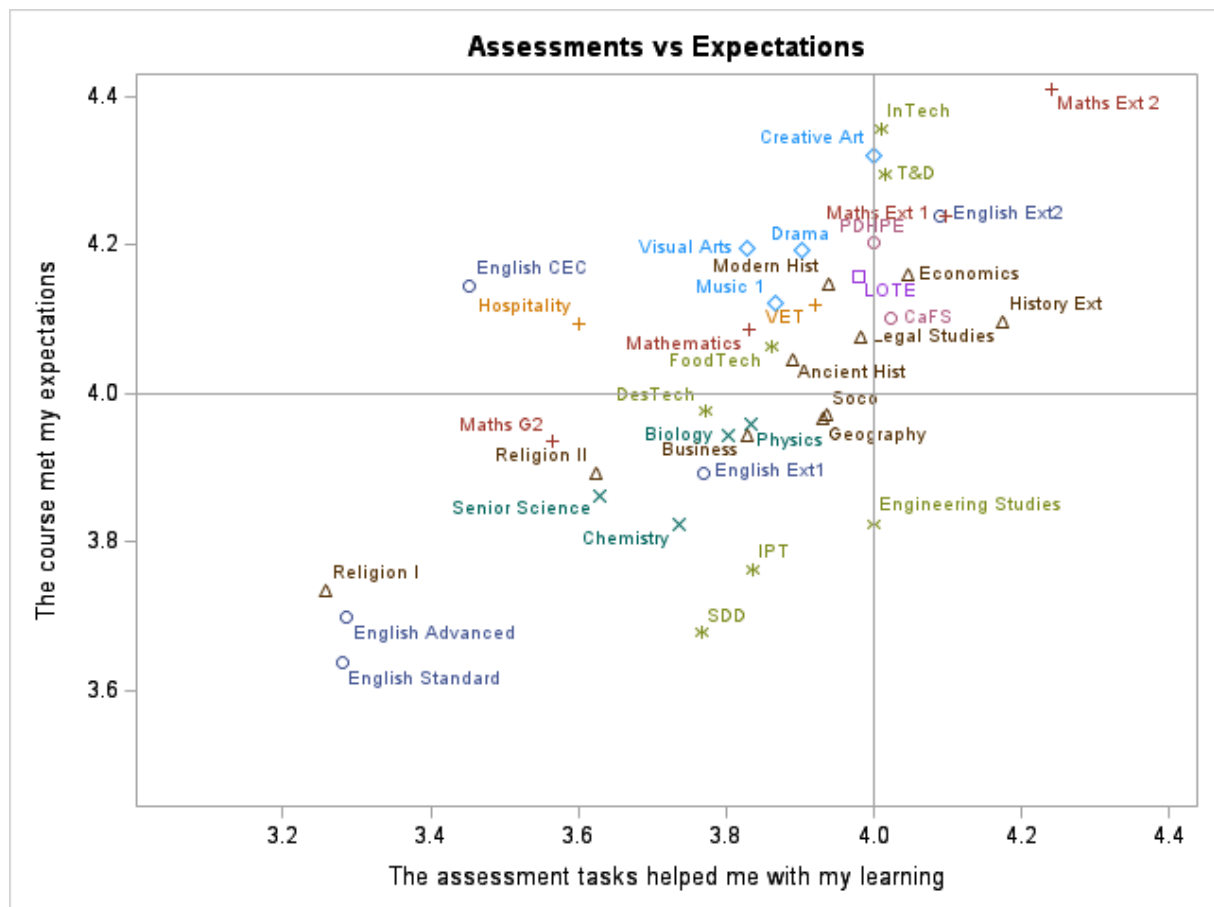


Error! Reference source not found. shows the relationship between students' perceptions of the usefulness of assessment tasks in popular HSC courses, and whether these courses met their expectations.

Figure 8 shows that:

- On a scale of 1 to 5, all courses were rated above 3.6 on Expectations, and above 3.2 on Assessments Helping with Learning, i.e. almost all courses appear to be performing well on both these criteria.
- There was not much agreement with the statements about meeting expectations or helpful assessment tasks for courses like English (Advanced and Standard), Studies of Religion (I and II), Mathematics General 2 and Senior Science.
- the Mathematics Extension courses, English Extension 2, Industrial Technology, Textiles and Design, PDHPE and Community and Family Studies met students' expectations and had helpful assessment tasks
- As per Figure 1, students generally did not feel that their assessment tasks were particularly useful. As in previous years' surveys, students did not feel that assessment tasks in English and Studies of Religion were helpful. VET and Creative Arts courses (e.g. Visual Arts, Drama and Music 1), Food Technology and Mathematics could have assessment tasks which prove 'more useful' to the student.

Figure 8. The relationship between students' perceptions of the usefulness of assessment tasks in popular HSC courses, and whether these courses met their expectations



Comments about courses

Respondents made more than 1,300 course-specific comments on more than 70 BDCs. They covered a range of themes, some of which were specific to courses (see Appendix 3), but the common themes (in descending order of frequency/priority) were:

- *Enjoyment and enthusiasm for a course or subject.* Some courses were clearly more popular with respondents than others. Through their comments students nominated a range of courses (e.g. Chemistry, Economics, English Extension 1 and 2, Legal Studies, Mathematics General 2, Mathematics, Mathematics Extension 1 and 2, Metal and Engineering, Modern History, Music 1, and Studies of Religion II) as their favourite.
 - “Economics has always been my favourite subject and that is down to a terrific course structure which I feel really makes the study of the domestic and global economy very interesting. . .”
- *The profound effect of teachers on course success and enjoyment* – both negative and positive examples. Respondents often cited mid-course teacher changes as a problem.
 - “If it wasn’t for the teachers I had, I doubt I would be able to work at the ability I am working at for English”
 - “Our teacher had no interest in teaching us properly, however I was able to learn much of the content on my own with friends. Assessment tasks given were odd; no assignments (only exams) ...” - Business Studies student
- *A crammed syllabus*, leading to problems like there *not being enough class time to cover everything, rote learning and memorisation of facts* without grasping the meaning of the material, and not feeling satisfied with the depth of understanding reached. This was a feature that came through when referring to some popular courses e.g. Biology, PDHPE, Ancient and Modern History, Legal Studies, Business Studies, Community and Family Studies and Chemistry.
 - “The Biology course was so content-heavy that our class was always behind, rushing through topics, and there was never any time for me to look at the interesting parts more in depth. The assessments essentially became a memory test, and all the fun sucked out. . .”
- *The challenging nature of some courses.* In various cases, this was more or less than what the student had expected. Some respondents saw this challenge as positive; in other cases it was just the result of time pressure.
 - “I believe this subject is extremely good and beneficial for everyone in their everyday life. General Math 2 could be challenging at times but was overall rewarding when worked out. The content and assessment tasks creating a depth of understanding ...”
 - “English, being a mandatory subject that I admittedly enjoy, may be challenging sometimes with quotes, but overall a very enjoyable subject that I know definitely will help me progress in the future”

- *The problems with compulsory courses.* In particular English, Studies of Religion, and Mathematics (in certain schools) are compulsory for certain cohorts. Some respondents had their worst experiences with these types of courses. In general students did not expect changes to the policy, but sometimes made suggestions like:
 - English should be compulsory, but not be included in ATAR calculations
 - Put Mathematics on a par with English, in the sense that either both or neither should be compulsory courses. One (English Extension 2) student suggested that two units should be enough, and expressed resentment at having to do English (Advanced) as well.
 - Make one unit of English enough (for ATAR calculations)
 - Have only one paper for the English final exam
 - An option to focus on English skills that apply in real life e.g. particular writing forms like job applications, and basic skills like grammar and punctuation
 - Make English compulsory in Preliminary (Year 11) only
 - Some other courses were suggested as necessary for all students e.g. Economics, Philosophy
 - “Allow greater freedom to create a fairer system accommodating for the natural variation in interests i.e. make English an elective, or at least make the course less demanding. At present, the compulsory two units favours humanities students over STEM students”
 - “Useless course, a complete waste of time. I’d prefer to watch paint dry whilst getting punched in the face by Mike Tyson than sit in one Catholic Studies class. Catholic Studies was and will always be the most pointless exercise of my entire life.”

- *Outdated syllabi* - especially in relation to technology-based courses, science courses and courses involving laws and statistics.
 - “Perhaps movement towards incorporating IT as a business function into the syllabus for future years could prove more current and useful.” -Business Studies

- *The highly interesting content in some courses.* Conversely, some courses were characterised as boring, or having boring sections.
 - “I studied Navigating the Globe and it was amazing and so contextually important. Helped with my perception and interest in global trade and communications.” - English Extension 1 student
 - “Whilst I did enjoy the course, many of my friends found the course extremely difficult and found the selected texts quite boring. Perhaps care could be taken to assess the texts that are to be studied to ensure students can strongly resonate with the ideas.” - English (Advanced) student

- An optimism that a course will be highly relevant and useful in future life.
 - “I believe that General maths would be beneficial in everyday life, such as calculating taxes and loan repayments”

- The *exam* for 2018 was *not a good method of measuring achievement*. Respondents gave a variety of reasons, including (especially for English) the short time allowed to write multiple essays, as well as the number of exams scheduled over one or two days.
 - “A good course, that I actually enjoy, however I just am not good with exams, so I would know the content and just not be able to properly synthesise or put my ideas in the proper wording that would get me the marks.” – Biology student
- Respondents said *some courses were too easy*, e.g. many students thought there was too much of a gap between Mathematics General 2 and Mathematics. Some students could not find their ideal level.
 - “It is far too easy for a 17/18 year old. It should be just a little easier than 2 unit, not a return to Year 9/10 maths” - Mathematics General 2 student
- *Perceived handicaps when it comes to scaling*. This seemed to be about ATAR calculations, although the phrasing of survey questions did not allow students to make this clear. Students feel that certain courses, especially those rated as challenging and/or involving major projects, do not receive adequately recognition in the ranking process. Many students found the ranking process to be generally problematic.
 - “Although this was by far my best and favourite course, looking at previous years’ scores and the type of scaling the course got was demoralising.” - Information Processes and Technology student
 - “Scaling punishes you way too hard if you do English Standard. Please advise all future years never to pick Standard because all it's done is ruined my life”
- Skills gained for life. Respondents gave many courses high praise as imparting skills for life, work or future study. In some cases, students wanted more life skills and felt demotivated with the current syllabus. Mathematics General 2 received the most praise.
 - “I felt that the course taught the students how everyday things work, such as household products, so that we would know what would be more beneficial. It also gave a peek at the different subjects of science which was satisfying for me ...” - Senior Science student
 - “The skills such as spelling, grammar, proof-reading and expanding our vocabulary are useful skills I have gained. However, now that school is over and I have to begin functioning in a different world, the rushed essays do not seem to have made any benefit” - English (Advanced) student
- There were many comments about *school-based assessments*, both positive and negative. In some cases students said there were too few (or none, in the case of VET courses), and this led to too much stress and pressure at final exam time. For many respondents there were only essay-style assessments, and they wanted more variety.
 - “Financial Services was my most challenging subject but I WISH the HSC exam wasn't worth 100% I have been successful through Year 12 but if I don't get the mark I want in the exam there is no previous backing to support my efforts throughout the year“

Motivation

Students were asked to check 'yes' or 'no' against a list of common reasons for choosing each of their courses. The aim was to establish the extent to which school/NESA rules, career prospects, aptitude, perceived ATAR advantage, and administrative considerations (e.g. subject line clashes) influenced student course choice.

Figure 9 shows that the majority of BDC choices involved considering interest in the content (68%) and perceived aptitude for a course (63%). Thoughts about future work (36%) or maximising their ATAR (33%) motivated fewer students. Being compulsory or just filling out a subject line figured in less than 20% of BDC choices. There were far fewer responses about BECs and CECs, but they followed roughly similar patterns, with the exception of BECs, where Catholic Studies was compulsory in over 75% of reported choices.

English is distinctive from other BDCs, with 'being compulsory' figuring in over 55% of reported choices. It had correspondingly low levels of motivation relating to interest (40%), future work (15%) and perceived ability (48%).

Figure 9. Recalled motivation for choosing HSC courses, by course type

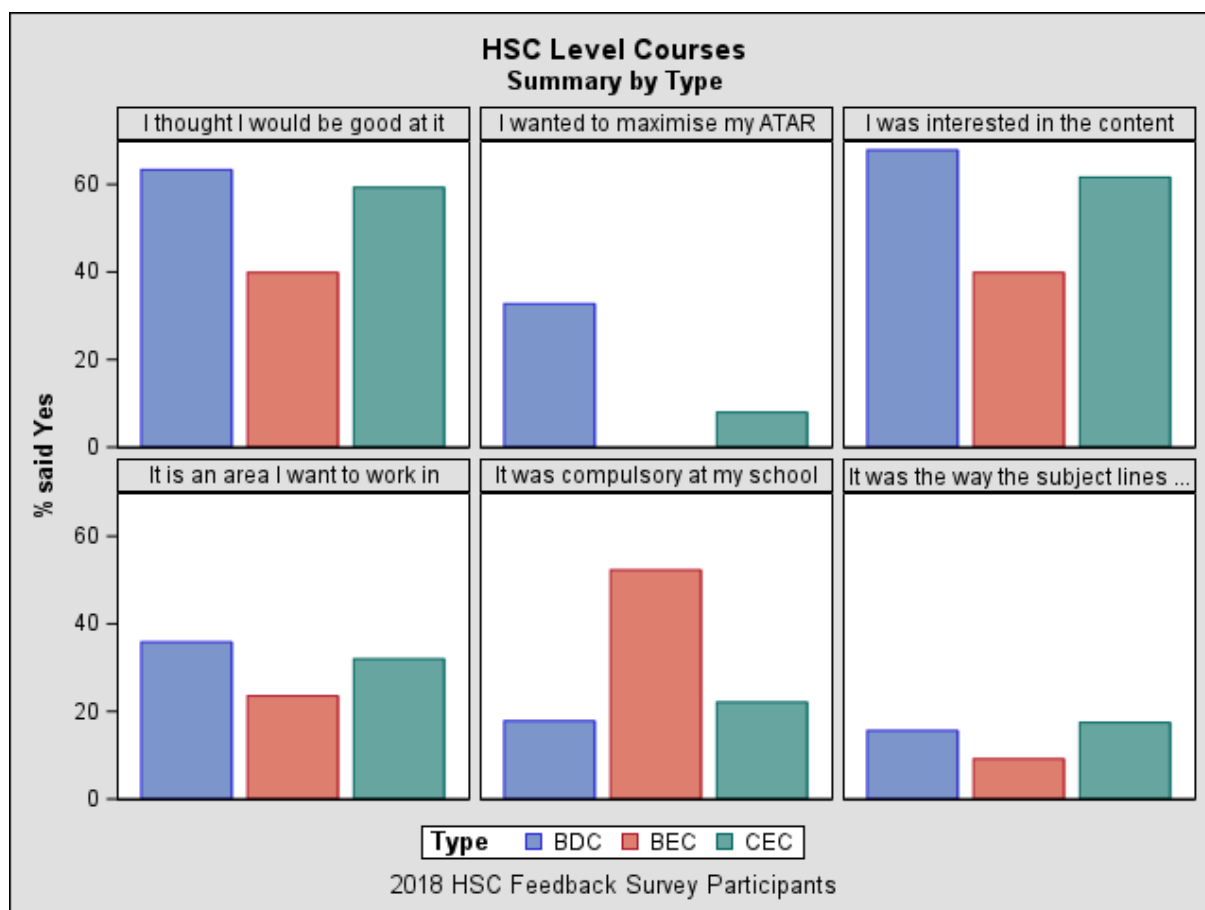


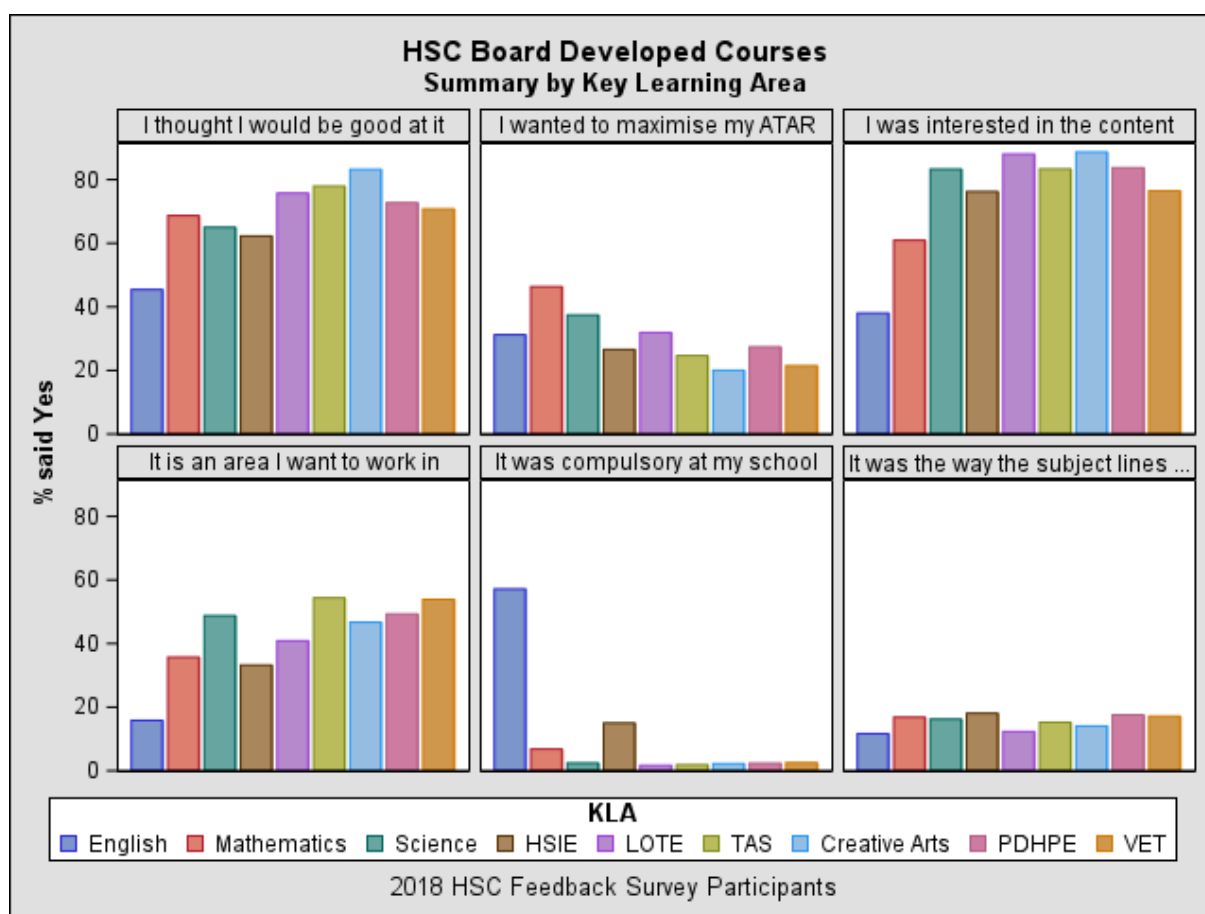
Figure 10 shows that, for courses apart from English, more than 60% had motivations of 'I thought I would be good at it' and 'I was interested in the content'. For English courses, around 40% of respondents agreed with these as motivations.

The proportion of respondents who said they chose Mathematics courses for ATAR maximisation was higher (45%) than for courses in the other KLAs, although for all KLAs the rate was still around or above 20%. The proportion who chose Mathematics (and English) for interest's sake was much lower than in other KLAs.

Interestingly, Languages courses were often chosen with ATAR in mind (> 30%), and HSIE courses were sometimes compulsory at the school (e.g. the Studies of Religion courses at religious schools).

Only about 50% of students who took VET and more vocationally oriented Technologies courses said they were motivated by future work considerations. This rate was just a few points higher than in PDHPE and science courses.

Figure 10 Recalled motivation for choosing BDCs by KLA.



Other reasons for choosing courses

In addition to the six reasons offered in the survey, students could supply their own reasons for choosing courses. Many students expanded on the themes of future work/education, natural aptitude, interest, ATAR considerations and subject line constraints. Other reasons, in order of popularity were:

- *As a prerequisite (or highly recommended) course for university study* (10% of user-supplied responses). Courses included Biology, Chemistry, Physics, English (Advanced) and, especially, Mathematics. Respondents sometimes mentioned Engineering as a career aspiration.
- *Following a great teacher or their recommendation, or in some cases avoiding bad teachers* (5% of user-supplied responses). Respondents gave this reason for more than 20 different courses, including English, Mathematics, Science, PDHPE and Languages.
- *Fun and enjoyment, or a passion for the subject* (5% of user-supplied responses). Respondents mentioned more than 20 courses including Biology, Community and Family Studies, Dance, Drama, English, IPT, Mathematics and Society & Culture.
- *To obtain basic life skills or become a well-rounded, informed person* (5% of user-supplied responses). Respondents gave this reason for around 20 courses, most commonly Mathematics General 2 and Economics, but also Business Studies/Services, Community and Family Studies, Modern History, Society and Culture, and Studies of Religion.
- *Advice or pressure from parents or peers* (3% of user-supplied responses). Respondents gave this reason for around 10 courses, most notably Mathematics General 2.
- *A default continuation of a choice made in earlier year levels.* Again this reason was given for around 10 courses, including English, Mathematics, Music, Drama, French, Chemistry and Physics, plus some more applied subjects like Business Studies/Services, and Textiles and Design:
 - “I had participated in Textiles in Years 9 and 10, and enjoyed it plus sustained number one rank, so I believed I had a good opportunity to do well.”
- *To balance the student’s overall pattern of study in terms of challenge, workload or creativity* (around 10 courses).
 - “Desperately wanted to get out of the Visual Arts course in Year 11, as I felt I would not be able to handle the coursework & required major work. The careers adviser suggested I pick up a Category B subject as the workload was typically lighter.” - Financial Services student
- The course was a *co-requisite for an HSC Extension course* i.e. students wanting to do English Extension 2 were required to do English Extension 1 and English (Advanced), students doing Mathematics because they wanted to do Mathematics Extension.
- *As an alternative to a preferred course, which the school did not offer* (around 5 courses mentioned). In a few cases students mentioned being able to take their preferred course via distance education, but this was less common:
 - “Our school offered us textiles in Years 9 & 10 but not in 11 & 12, so I completed it by distance education.”
- The desire to get *part or all of a TAFE qualification or as part of a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship*
- *Family background* (common in Language courses)
- The *opportunity to accelerate* i.e. complete an HSC course in Year 11

Ambiguity in the question led to many responses relating to the choice **of level within a subject** rather than the subject itself. The most common reasons here were:

- Students found their first choice was too difficult so they dropped down a level (25%). No comments mentioned moving up a level. Some views about level were interesting e.g.:
 - “I was recommended (and had chosen) Biology but found the course too difficult so I dropped to Senior Science.”
 - “Religion was compulsory at my school. I had chosen SOR but found it difficult so I dropped to Catholic Studies.”
- Student wanted a challenge (10%) or made a judgement about the right level for them (15%).
- Pressure or compulsion by the school, teacher or parents (15%)
- The desire to put one’s energies into other courses (5%)
 - “Chose Standard over Advanced because all my other subjects were heavy content” –English Standard student

These course and level choices reflect the fact that students are not free to choose any pattern of study, even within the NESA rules. Students usually consider what is available at the school, how much work will be involved in their pattern of study, as well as influences from family, peers, teachers and the school.

Top and bottom courses by motivation

The lists below show the top courses for each of the six motivation statements, where ‘%YES’ is the proportion of respondents who answered in the affirmative for that course. The probability index shows the ‘%YES’ as a ratio, with the average for all courses reported on. For example, Visual Arts students were 1.30 times more likely to agree with the statement ‘I thought I would be good at it’ than the average course choice. Only courses with 30 or more responses were considered.

Being compulsory at the school figured in the majority of English and Religion course choices. Unfortunately, the question was asked in an ambiguous way (multiple answers could include ‘It was compulsory’ as well as more positive reasons). An alternative for future surveys could be ‘I only did it because it was compulsory at my school’.

ATAR considerations were very prominent in choices to do Mathematics and its extensions, as well as Economics, Physics and Chemistry. Some comments mentioned scaling advantages as well as extension courses supporting the learning in the core courses.

Table 2. “I thought I would be good at it”

Course	Probability Index	%YES
Industrial Technology	1.41	89
Music 1	1.40	88
Textiles and Design	1.38	87
Food Technology	1.32	83
Visual Arts	1.30	82

Course	Probability Index	%YES
English Extension 1	1.24	78
Drama	1.24	78
Mathematics Extension 1	1.23	77
PDHPE	1.18	74

Table 3. “I was interested in the content”

Course	Probability Index	%YES
Visual Arts	1.36	91
Modern History	1.34	91
Drama	1.33	90
Physics	1.31	89
Legal Studies	1.29	87
PDHPE	1.28	87
Ancient History	1.28	87
Biology	1.28	86
Mathematics Extension 2	1.27	85
Chemistry	1.19	80

Table 4. “It is an area I want to work in”

Course	Probability Index	%YES
Engineering Studies	2.00	71
Software Design and Development	1.90	68
Industrial Technology	1.69	60
Business Studies	1.54	55
Physics	1.54	55
Biology	1.49	53
Mathematics Extension 2	1.48	53
PDHPE	1.41	50
Mathematics Extension 1	1.38	49

Course	Probability Index	%YES
Chemistry	1.33	48

Table 5. “I wanted to maximise my ATAR”

Course	Probability Index	%YES
Mathematics Extension 2	2.13	69
Mathematics Extension 1	1.82	59
Economics	1.50	49
Mathematics	1.45	47
Physics	1.44	47
Chemistry	1.41	46
History Extension	1.34	44
English Extension 1	1.30	42
English (Advanced)	1.19	39
Mathematics General 2	1.05	34

Table 6. “It was compulsory at my school”

Course	Probability Index	%YES
English (Standard)	4.40	80
Studies of Religion I	4.30	78
Catholic Studies	4.16	76
Studies of Religion II	3.34	61
ESL	3.25	59
English (Advanced)	2.91	53
English Studies	2.35	43

Table 7. “It was the way the subject lines worked out”

Course	Probability Index	%YES
Senior Science	2.12	33
Business Services	1.75	27

Course	Probability Index	%YES
Society and Culture	1.44	22
Geography	1.38	21
Food Technology	1.36	21
Hospitality	1.32	21
Mathematics General 2	1.32	21
Business Studies	1.27	20
Economics	1.25	20
Modern History	1.25	19

The courses which under-index are in Tables 8 to 11.

These tables also show that the least popular courses in terms of future work plans, interest and perceived aptitude are often those that are compulsory. History, Mathematics General 2 and Senior Science courses (whilst not being compulsory) clearly cater to particular needs in the student cohort, perhaps being useful for life or being interesting in themselves (see 'Other reasons for choosing courses'). These motivations could be added to future surveys.

Some students commented that they were consciously avoiding an ATAR program, a feature of the different groups of students for whom different motivations may predominate.

Table 8. "I thought I would be good at it (not)"

Course	Probability Index	%YES
Catholic Studies	0.38	24
Studies of Religion I	0.39	25
English (Standard)	0.48	30
ESL	0.68	43
English Studies	0.73	46
Studies of Religion II	0.76	48
English (Advanced)	0.78	49
Senior Science	0.94	59
Mathematics General 2	0.95	60
Chemistry	0.97	61

Table 9. “I wanted to maximise my ATAR (not)”

Course	Probability Index	%YES
English Studies	0.24	8
Society and Culture	0.49	16
Drama	0.53	17
Visual Arts	0.55	18
Hospitality	0.56	18
Music 1	0.59	19
English (Standard)	0.60	19
Community and Family Studies	0.63	21
Studies of Religion I	0.64	21
Ancient History	0.67	22

Table 10. “I was interested in the content (not)”

Course	Probability Index	%YES
Catholic Studies	0.28	19
English (Standard)	0.34	23
Studies of Religion I	0.46	31
English (Advanced)	0.58	39
Mathematics General 2	0.67	45
English Studies	0.68	46
ESL	0.71	48
Studies of Religion II	0.91	61
Business Services	0.91	61

Table 11. “It is an area I want to work in (not)”

Course	Probability Index	%YES
Studies of Religion I	0.16	6
Catholic Studies	0.20	7
Studies of Religion II	0.25	9

Course	Probability Index	%YES
English (Standard)	0.35	13
English (Advanced)	0.39	14
Mathematics General 2	0.6	21
Modern History	0.62	22
Senior Science	0.65	23
Ancient History	0.7	25
English Extension 1	0.74	26

Student-level insights

In general, there were correlations among responses to positive statements at the student level. For example, courses judged as interesting were also more likely to be seen as meeting expectations (correlation = 0.64), being useful for further education (0.52), future work (0.51), having helpful assessment tasks (0.59), being chosen for interest (0.55), chosen for work (0.33), and being chosen because of perceived aptitude (0.30). Thus, these statements in some sense describe a “good” course.

On the other hand, “challenging” was not well correlated with “interesting” (0.21) or meeting expectations (0.14), suggesting that students did not expect all their courses to be challenging, and did not necessarily find challenging courses interesting. Hence Figure 6 shows there are different groups of BDCs, perhaps completed for different reasons, including compulsion but also for interest, future work and ATAR advantage.

On the negative side, a course taken because it was compulsory was less likely to be judged interesting (-0.26), useful for further education (-0.24), useful for future work (-0.26), or chosen out of interest (-0.36) or because of perceived aptitude (-0.27). The exception was with how challenging students perceived a course to be. There was no relationship of level of challenge with compulsion, suggesting that students sometimes found compulsory courses challenging and sometimes not. This issue only really applies to a small subset of courses and perhaps deserves further exploration. In the comments, a significant minority of students expressed a desire for change in the nature of the compulsory courses. Perhaps the policy goals of the current arrangement need to be validated with data and better communicated to students.

Correlations with HSC mark

Appendix 1 shows the limited extent of participation bias in this survey, if anything towards higher performing students. The correlation between statement agreement and HSC mark awarded was investigated to assess the impact of this bias and to see if there were any patterns between experience and performance.

Across both motivation and experience statements, the correlations with mark were negligible, meaning that achievement does not predict reported experience. Interestingly, being perceived as challenging had no simple relationship with HSC English mark. Thus we expect whatever response bias (in terms of higher achievers) not to significantly affect the top line

experience results for English.

Tables 12 to 17 show the correlations for English (average of Standard and Advanced) and some other courses with more than 30 respondents, between post-course summary statements and a student's final mark. Except for Table 12 only noteworthy correlations (absolute value > 0.3) are shown.

Table 12. Correlations between statement agreement and HSC English mark

Statement (in order of asking)	Correlation
The course met my expectations	0.16
The course was interesting	0.15
The course was challenging	-0.03
The course will be useful for my further education	0.06
The course will be useful for my future work	0.05
The assessment tasks helped me with my learning	0.12
I was interested in the content	0.05
It is an area I want to work in	0.03
It was the way the subject lines worked out	-0.13
I wanted to maximise my ATAR	-0.01
I thought I would be good at it	0.08

Table 13. Correlations between choosing a course out of interest and HSC mark in that course

Course	Correlation	Sample size
ESL	-0.33	53

For the courses in Table 14 below, meeting expectations tended to be associated with higher HSC marks, especially for French Continuers.

Table 14. Correlations between a course meeting expectations and HSC mark in that course

Course	Correlation	Sample size
Agriculture	0.38	42
Geography	0.38	176
Mathematics General 2	0.39	1038
Mathematics	0.32	932

Course	Correlation	Sample size
PDHPE	0.31	464
Textiles and Design	0.32	68
French Continuers	0.57	36

Table 15 below shows the popular courses (more than 50 respondents) where students' experience of being challenged correlated with lower HSC mark (correlations < -0.3). This may suggest that students bring different levels of ability to a course and this is reflected in their perception of challenge. Another view might be that students' experience was of a fixed level of difficulty, regardless of their ability i.e. opportunities to customise a course to the ability of the class, whilst staying within the syllabus, were not taken or did not exist.

Table 15. Correlations between a course being challenging and HSC mark

Course	Correlation	Sample size
Business Studies	-0.30	575
Mathematics General 2	-0.38	1038
Mathematics	-0.36	932
Software Design and Development	-0.33	88
Japanese Continuers	-0.47	56

Table 16 shows popular courses (more than 30 respondents) where students who reported being motivated by perceived aptitude did indeed tend to obtain a higher HSC mark than those choosing the course for other reasons (correlations > 0.3).

Table 16. Correlations between choosing a course because 'I thought I would be good at it' and HSC mark

Course	Correlation	Sample size
Agriculture	0.50	42
Design and Technology	0.35	88
Engineering Studies	0.35	89
Mathematics General 2	0.37	1038
Music Extension	0.36	33

HSC marks for the courses in Table 17 Table 17. Correlation of utility statements with HSC mark were associated with students seeing them as useful for future work/education and/or agreement that the assessment tasks for the course were useful. Generally these attitudes were associated with higher marks, with the exception of ESL where choosing because of future work aspirations was associated with a lower mark.

Table 17. Correlation of utility statements with HSC mark

Course	An area I want to work in	Useful for further education	Useful for future work	Useful assessment tasks	Sample size
Agriculture		0.44	0.44	0.33	42
Economics			0.32		246
Engineering Studies	0.32				89
ESL	-0.32				53
French Continuers		0.32			36
Mathematics				0.33	932

“If you could change one thing...”

Students were asked to respond to the question ‘If you could change one thing about the HSC program, what would it be?’ Of the more than 2000 responses to this question, a randomly selected 50% of responses were categorised into themes. The most common themes were as follows:

- Make English optional or make Mathematics the same compulsory status as English (20% of comments). Some students suggested it should be that two units of English or Mathematics be mandatory. Some saw the value of doing English but didn’t want that mark incorporated in their ATAR calculation.
- Put less *stress and pressure* on students (15% of comments). Some students described the effects of this pressure as a mental health issue, creating depression and taking the fun out of subjects they used to enjoy. Students mentioned a number of sources of stress, including the number of assessments, major projects, trial exams and exams required given the students’ total HSC pattern of study. One suggestion was that 6 or 8 units would be more manageable.
 - The perceived importance of final ranks, and the pressure coming from parents, teachers, schools and universities to rank highly.
 - “The stress and the pressure. To many the HSC program is not about learning, but about marks. Due to its competitive nature (emphasis on ranks rather than grades, and the final result being an ATAR) you focus on the marks you lose, rather than the result you achieve” – Menai High School student
- The high weighting put on the final exam results.
- Related to the first theme above, some students felt they weren’t good at English but had to take it at Advanced level and achieve high marks for their overall results to be good enough for their future plans.
- Students suggested *final exams were weighted too heavily* or were otherwise problematic (10% of comments) for the following most popular reasons:
 - The skills most useful for exams were not seen as useful for later life
 - Many students saw the task of writing essays or creative responses under exam conditions as rewarding memorisation only. They often mentioned the

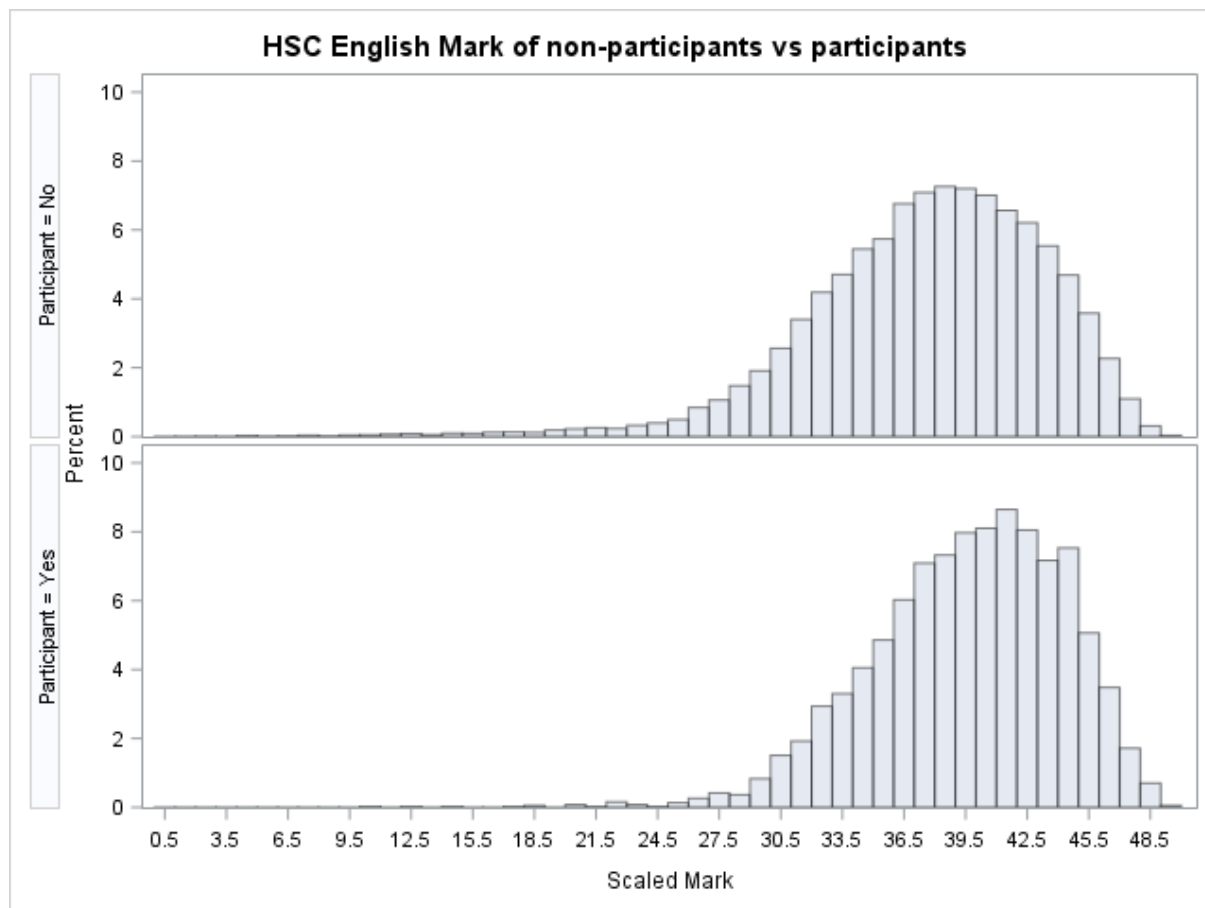
idea of having pre-prepared responses, which may not even have been the student's own work.

- The time limit was seen as rewarding faster writers and rote learning, over understanding the content
- Some students felt there was wide variation in how well they performed under pressure, compared to peers
- For content-heavy courses, the exam did not cover all the material (or in some cases, students alleged that teachers had not even covered all the material in class).
- Respondents saw assessment tasks as representing more work over a longer period and that they would thus be a fairer measure. Some students suggested more externally moderated assessments to enable them to have more weighting, which would give the students more credit for their work.
- A few students resented the school-/course-based scaling using exam results, feeling that it was unfair on students who had more motivation than their peers.
- "Tests are too subjective, just because a student doesn't do well in a written test, doesn't mean that they should get a low ATAR. Incorporate practical tests to gauge their life skills instead of just their skills in memorizing information and regurgitating . . ." - John Edmondson High School student
- Have *less content in the syllabuses* in general, or in key courses (5% of comments; this was a theme in many course-specific comments as well). Interested students wanted more time to delve deeply into material. Some thought they would not remember it past school because it was too rushed. Courses specifically mentioned were English, Biology, PDHPE, History and Legal Studies. One commented that there was too much variation in the workload between courses worth the same number of units.
- ATAR calculations (3% of comments). Students thought the process was:
 - Opaque
 - Unfair to students who were not at high SES schools
 - Didn't reflect the effort put into individual courses
 - Unfair to students strong in STEM over the Humanities (because of the compulsory inclusion of English)
 - Philosophically objectionable, leading to a competitive culture and high stress.
 - "Higher scalings on creative subjects such as drama. In drama you have to do two major works (group project and individual project) as well as study at least four texts for two essays. Can I get a bit more reward for the effort I put in, please?" – Kincumber High School student
- A greater focus on *life skills and getting ready for a future in the workforce* (3% of comments). Commenters often mentioned tax returns, job applications and grammar.

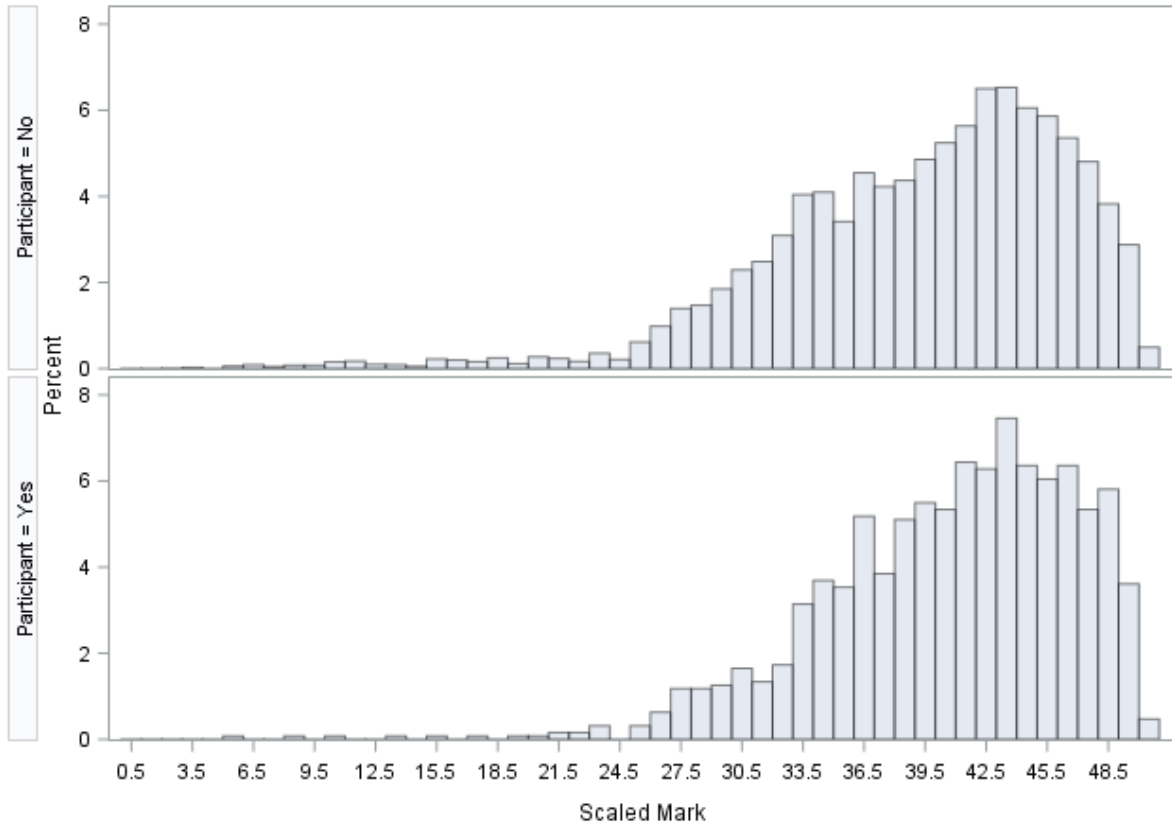
Appendix 1

Distribution of marks for survey respondents vs non-respondents

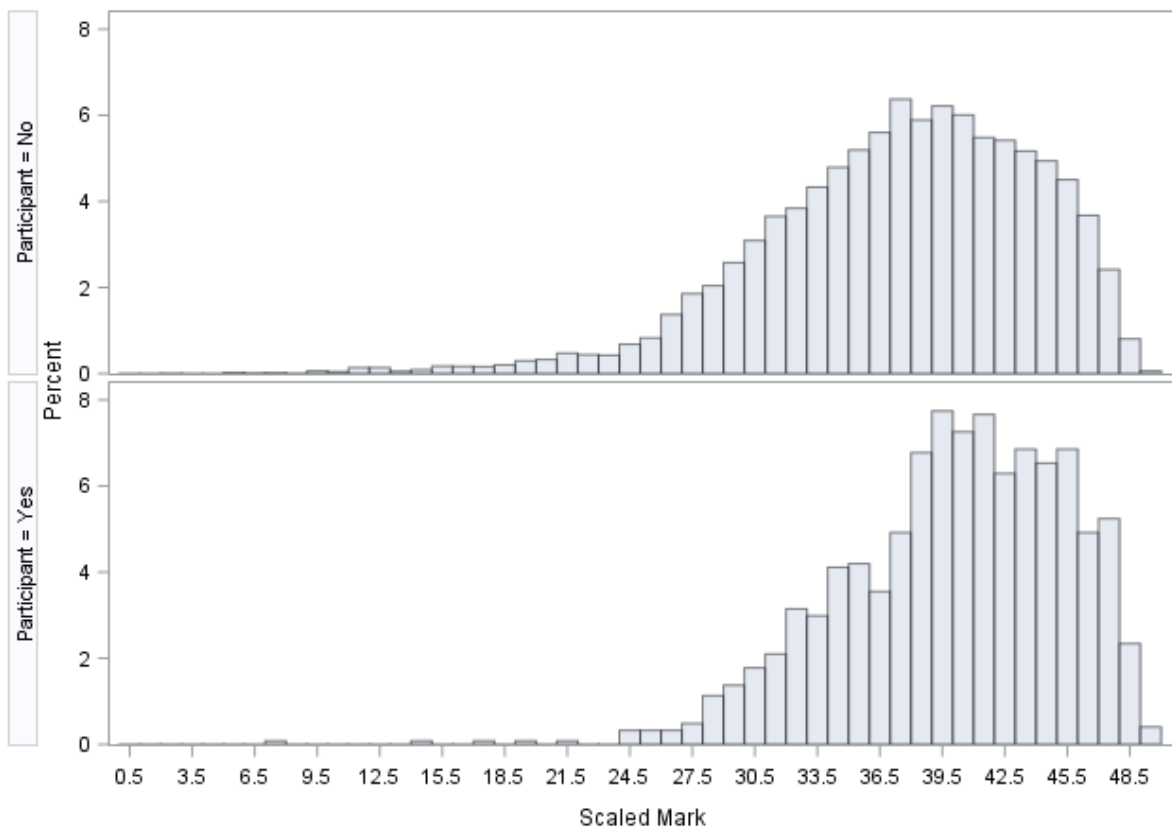
For the most popular courses, the distribution of HSC marks awarded was similar for survey respondents and non-respondents. The tables below shows distributions of marks for survey participants vs non-participants for English (combined Standard and Advanced), Mathematics (2 unit) and Biology (i.e. the most popular courses).



HSC Mathematics Mark of non-participants vs participants



HSC Biology Mark of non-participants vs participants



Appendix 2: The 2018 Survey

A2.1 Introduction Page

HSC Student Feedback Survey

Welcome

Respondent: **Nicholas Stokes - Intranet (STOKESN)**

[Next](#) Page 1 of 2

Welcome to the 2018 HSC Student Feedback Survey	
You will be asked a few questions about every HSC course you studied this year.	
You can also make some comments about your courses.	
On the final page, you must 'Submit' the survey to have a chance to win a JB Hi-Fi Gift Card.	
Thank you for participating. Click 'Next' to continue.	

[Next](#)

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A2.2 Courses Page – Cycle through each BDC

HSC Student Feedback Survey

Your HSC Courses

Respondent: **Adrienna Ross - RSBS Branch (ROSS1)**

Previous

Next

Page 2 of 4

Think about the course shown above. Choose the response that best reflects your view.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
* The course met my expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* The course was interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* The course was challenging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* The course will be useful for my further education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* The course will be useful for my future work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* The assessment tasks helped me with my learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What were the reason(s) you choose this course or course level? Tick as many as apply:

I was interested in the content

It is an area I want to work in

It was compulsory at my school

It was the way the subject lines worked out

I wanted to maximise my ATAR

Other reason (please specify)

Comment (Optional)

You can make a further comment about this HSC course here:

A2.3 Courses Page – Cycle through each BEC

HSC Student Feedback Survey

Your HSC Courses

Respondent: **Adrienna Ross - RSBS Branch (ROSS1)**

[Previous](#) [Next](#) Page 3 of 4

Think about the course shown above. Choose the response that best reflects your view.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
* The course met my expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* The course was interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* The course was challenging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* The course will be useful for my further education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* The course will be useful for my future work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What were the reason(s) you choose this course or course level? Tick as many as apply:

I was interested in the content

It is an area I want to work in

It was compulsory at my school

It was the way the subject lines worked out

Other reason (please specify)

Comment (Optional)

You can make a further comment about this HSC course here:

A2.4 Final Page

HSC Student Feedback Survey

This is the last page

Respondent: **Adrienna Ross - RSBS Branch (ROSS1)**

[Previous](#)

[Finish Survey](#) Page 4 of 4

If you could change one thing about the HSC program, what would it be?

Thank you for completing the HSC Student Feedback Survey

Please Click "Finish Survey" and then click the SUBMIT button on the next page.

After you SUBMIT the survey your responses will be sent to NESAs and you will have a chance to win a JB Hi-Fi Gift Card.

[Previous](#)

[Finish Survey](#)

Appendix 3: Comments specific to courses

History in Science

Many Physics students' comments included complaints about too much history and politics in the course. Many said it was not what they expected based on earlier years, it did not set them up for university, and that they wanted to focus on the science of physics only.

"This course is barely physics. To have that little maths in a physics course is ridiculous. Some of the course is just an assortment of irrelevant facts (Einstein vs Plank politics and science dot point etc) and the Standard Model component is insulting."

The most positive comment, out of about 20 comments, was:

"Motors and Generators was a bit tricky, but Space is a great topic. The focus on scientists was a bit annoying, but in hindsight I actually found it quite interesting knowing how science has grown and developed over time."

Students made similar comments about Chemistry and Biology.

English essays memorised for the exam

There were many courses where students saw rote learning as a dominant feature of the experience. In particular, some English (Advanced) students wrote of needing to memorise lots of quotes and whole essays.

"In the English course, we were metaphorically spoon-fed our essays, then told to memorise them. I do not believe that memorising 1000 word essays is useful for any job."

Related to this was the common comment that the exam time limit was too short to produce the required essays.

Personal Interest Project

Many Society and Culture students commented on how big a task the Personal Interest Project was.

"The Personal Interest Project was a very challenging obstacle, yet I managed to enjoy the amounts of work it required to finish the assessment."

Effort and time for creative subjects

Some students felt that certain courses involved a workload disproportionate to the number of units and also the perceived ATAR scaling factor.

"An extremely underestimated course in terms of difficulty. It is truly sad that major work courses, such as drama, are generally scaled so poorly. Although the work is not necessarily hard, it is VERY time consuming . . ."

A few drama students had bad experiences with their group project, and wished they could have been in a different group or been able to work alone.

One exam only for VET courses

Students doing VET courses mentioned a range of special factors affecting them specifically. Some were grateful to get a qualification; some were pleased to be doing a traineeship. A few thought that it was unfair to have only one exam at the end of the course to decide the NESA-awarded mark.