
HSC STUDENT FEEDBACK SURVEY 2019

Course Motivations and Reflections

Executive summary

The 13th annual HSC Student Feedback Survey was open to all HSC students from September to December 2019. The survey asked students what motivated their HSC course choices and obtained their impressions of each of their courses. 4112 students (about 5.5% of those eligible) responded to the survey.

The survey found that:

- The majority of Board Developed Course choices involved students considering their interest in the content (68%) and perceived ability (64%). Thoughts about future work (36%) or maximising their ATAR (33%) motivated fewer students.
- The proportion of students who said they chose Mathematics for interest's sake was much lower than in other KLAs.
- Only about 55% of students who took VET courses said that future work considerations motivated their course choice.
- Students rated the new Science Extension course as very useful for future education.
- Other reasons students gave for choosing courses included:
 - their being a prerequisite for university study
 - following a great teacher or their recommendation (or avoiding bad teachers)
 - obtaining basic life skills or becoming a well-rounded and informed person
 - following advice or pressure from parents or peers
 - balancing the overall challenge, workload or level of creativity in their pattern of study.
- In most courses, around 70% of respondents felt that the course met their expectations, with the highest rates being for PDHPE courses (85%) and the lowest for English courses (65%).
- Courses rated as interesting were more likely to be rated as meeting expectations, being useful for further education and future work, and having helpful assessment tasks.
- Respondents rated:
 - PDHPE, Earth and Environmental Science, Food Technology, Society and Culture, Community and Family Studies, Geography, Music 1, Visual Arts and VET courses as interesting but not challenging
 - The core English and Mathematics courses, and Engineering Studies as challenging but not interesting
 - Studies of Religion I as the least interesting and the least challenging large candidature course
 - English courses, Studies of Religion, most Science courses and some Technologies courses as not meeting their expectations, and having assessment tasks that did not help with their learning. In contrast, Extension courses in Mathematics and History, Legal Studies, Agriculture, Food Technology, Business Services, PDHPE and Community and Family Studies met expectations and had helpful assessment tasks
- Compared to previous years, fewer students questioned the usefulness of rote learning, and there was less of a sense that pre-preparing an English essay was a valid option.
- Students also commented that there should be more support for courses with a new syllabus eg, model responses, teacher training and sample exams.

Introduction and methodology

From September to December 2019, the 13th annual HSC Student Feedback Survey was available to students enrolled in any HSC course. The survey focussed on students' course experiences and their recalled motivations for choosing those courses.

NESA administered the survey using Students Online, a secure Internet-based service that gives students access to their own records and other useful information (eg, a personalised exam timetable). Students Online allows us to customise the survey to each student's course choices, and automatically links to student demographics.

Survey respondents

There were 4112 respondents, which was about 5.5% of those eligible. This sample was similar to the overall student population in terms of demographics and HSC course performance data (see Appendix 1) but with some bias towards students taking higher-level courses and those eligible for an ATAR. Table 1 contrasts survey respondents and non-respondents.

Table 1: Student demographics.

Variable	Respondents	Non-respondents
Age (median)	18 years, 4 weeks	18 years, 6 weeks
Gender (% female)	65	51
Remoteness (% regional/remote)	21	23
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander %	2.4	3.9
Area-based Socioeconomic Status (SES; % in bottom quartile)	20	21
% awarded HSC	94	90
% ATAR eligible (of HSC awardees)	96	82
Median ATAR (estimate only)	78	70
Major course choices:		
% English Advanced	55	38
% Mathematics or higher	44	30
% VET (1 or more units)	17	28
School sector (% Government)	58	56
Fully selective school (% of Government)	14	10

77% of schools had at least one respondent, while a handful of schools with 100 or more HSC students (eg, Newman Senior Technical College, St Paul's Catholic College and St Stanislaus' College) had no respondents.

The English, Mathematics and Biology mark distributions for survey respondents and non-respondents were similar (see Appendix 1).

Survey responses

The survey included course evaluation questions, course motivation questions, and an open-ended question asking what one thing respondents would change about the HSC. The course evaluation questions consisted of six statements relating to the respondent's satisfaction with each of their 2019 HSC courses. Respondents rated their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree; see Appendix 2). For each of their courses, the motivation questions provided students with six common reasons for choosing courses. They ticked all the reasons that applied, but were also free to provide their own.

Course evaluation

As a group, the respondents studied and hence evaluated more than 130 Board Developed Courses (BDCs) covering a wide range of subject areas. Respondents also evaluated the Board Endorsed Courses (BECs) and Content Endorsed Courses (CECs) that they studied, but these courses are very diverse and generally have small candidatures. As such, the results are most reliable for BDCs.

As seen in Figure 1, the large majority of responses 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. Although they had far fewer responses, the percentage figures were generally similar or better for CECs, the exception being that respondents rated CECs as less challenging. In contrast, BECs had much lower levels of agreement, with only about 50% of responses agreeing that they were interesting, 25% agreeing that they were challenging, and about one-third agreeing that they would be useful for future work or education.

About two-thirds of respondents said they found assessment tasks useful, but this varied greatly between Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and courses (see below).

Figure 1: Responses to evaluation statements by course type

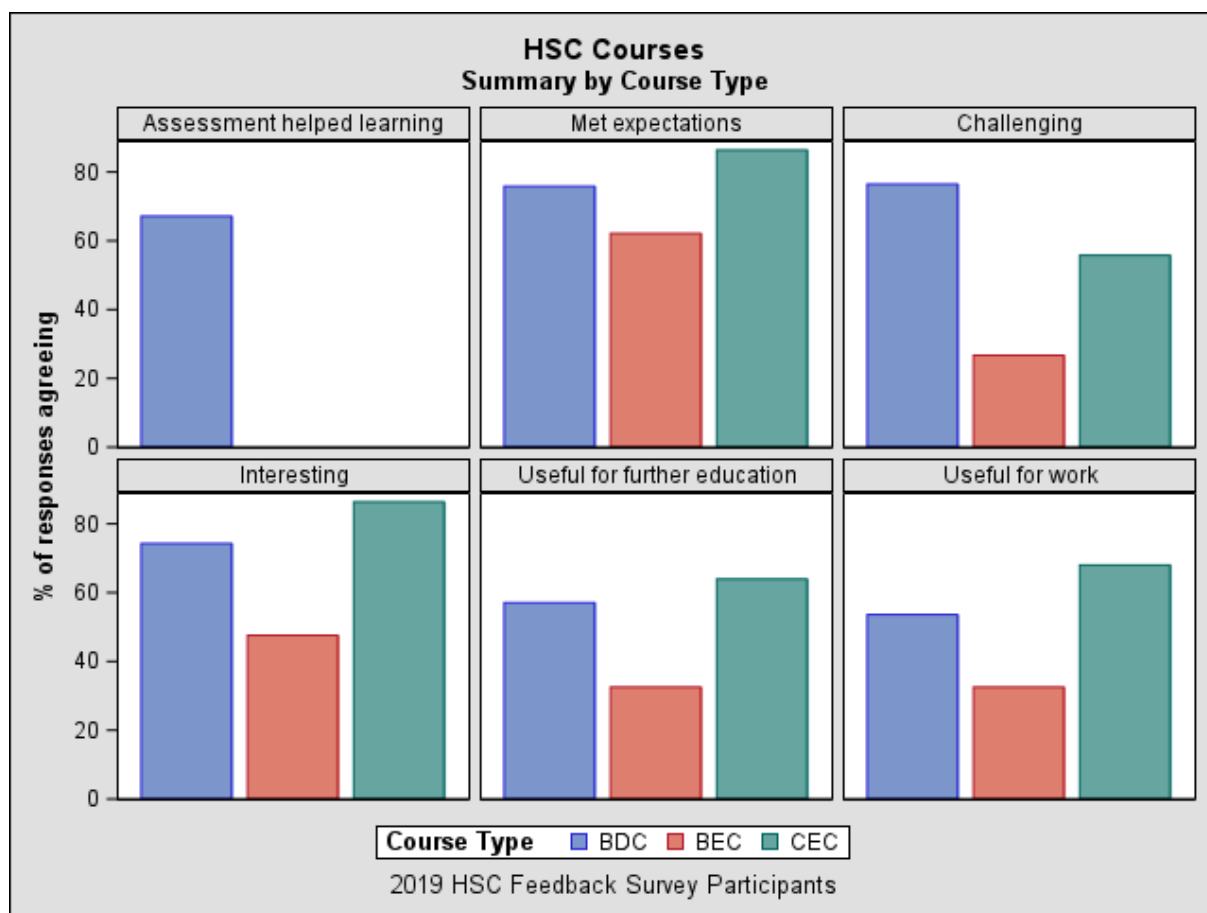
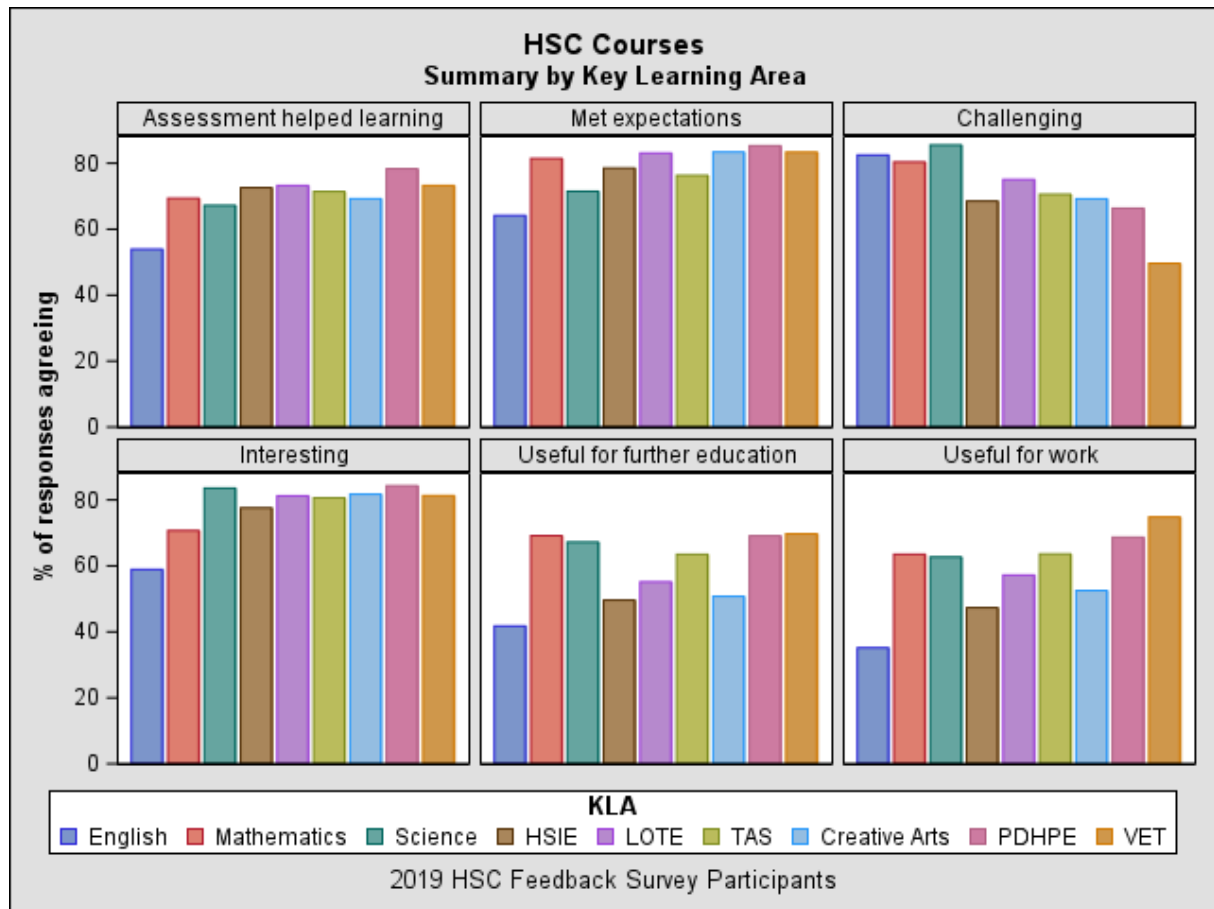


Figure 2 shows the extent of agreement with each of the evaluation statements by KLA for BDCs.

Figure 2: Responses to evaluation statements for BDCs by KLA



Notable exceptions to overall trends were that less than 60% of respondents rated English courses as interesting and less than 50% rated VET courses as challenging. Only around 40% of responses said English courses were useful for further education and even fewer said they were useful for future work. Respondents also rated HSIE and Creative Arts courses low on future utility.

Figure 3 shows the evaluation data for the course in each KLA with the most respondents.

Figure 3: Responses to evaluation statements for the course with most respondents in each KLA

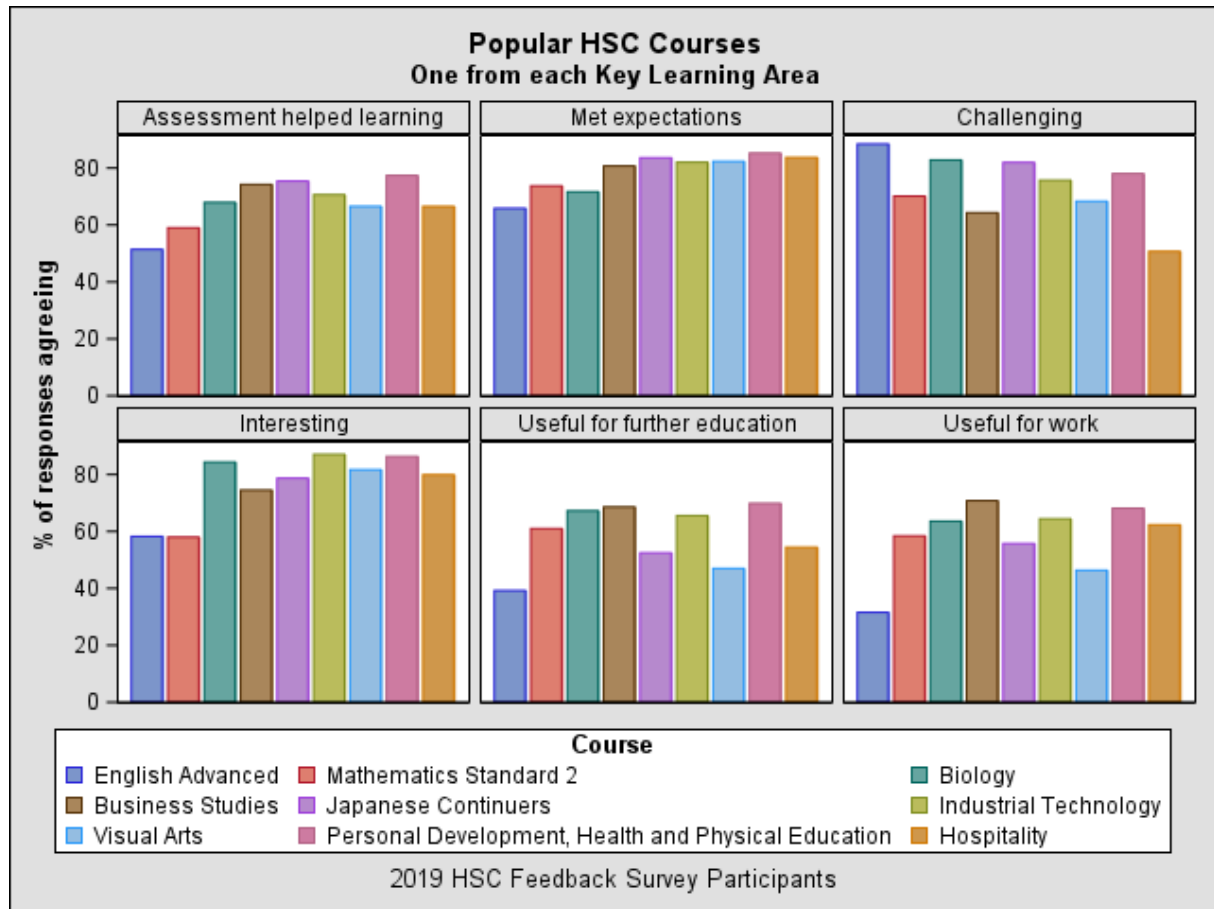


Figure 3 shows that respondents rated English Advanced and Biology to be the most challenging (more than 80% agreement), and Japanese Continuers to be as challenging as Biology. Only 50% of respondents rated Hospitality as challenging.

Differences in student experiences of challenge in English and Mathematics

Figures 4 and 5 show that there was a strong relationship between:

- the perception that these core courses were challenging, and
- the highest level of HSC course that the respondent completed.

Less than 60% of respondents said that they found English Advanced and Mathematics Standard 2 interesting.

Figure 4: Experience of challenge in English courses by highest level studied
(The numbers above the bars are the numbers of respondents)

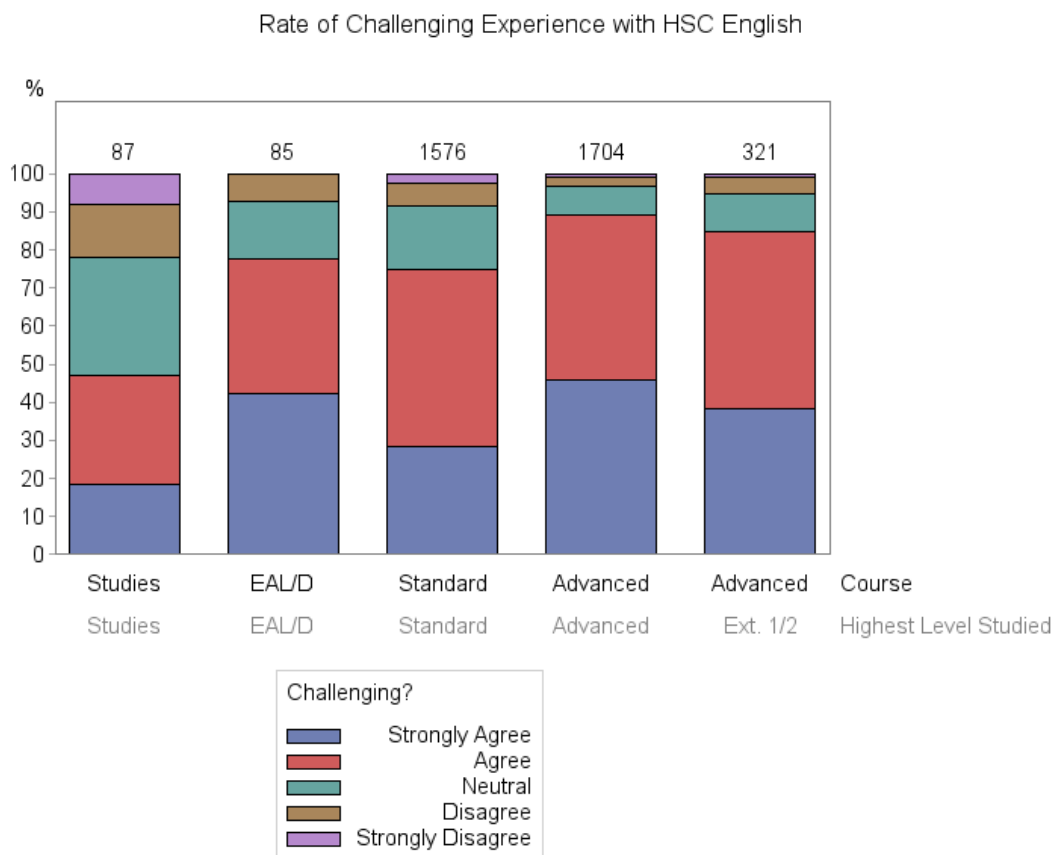
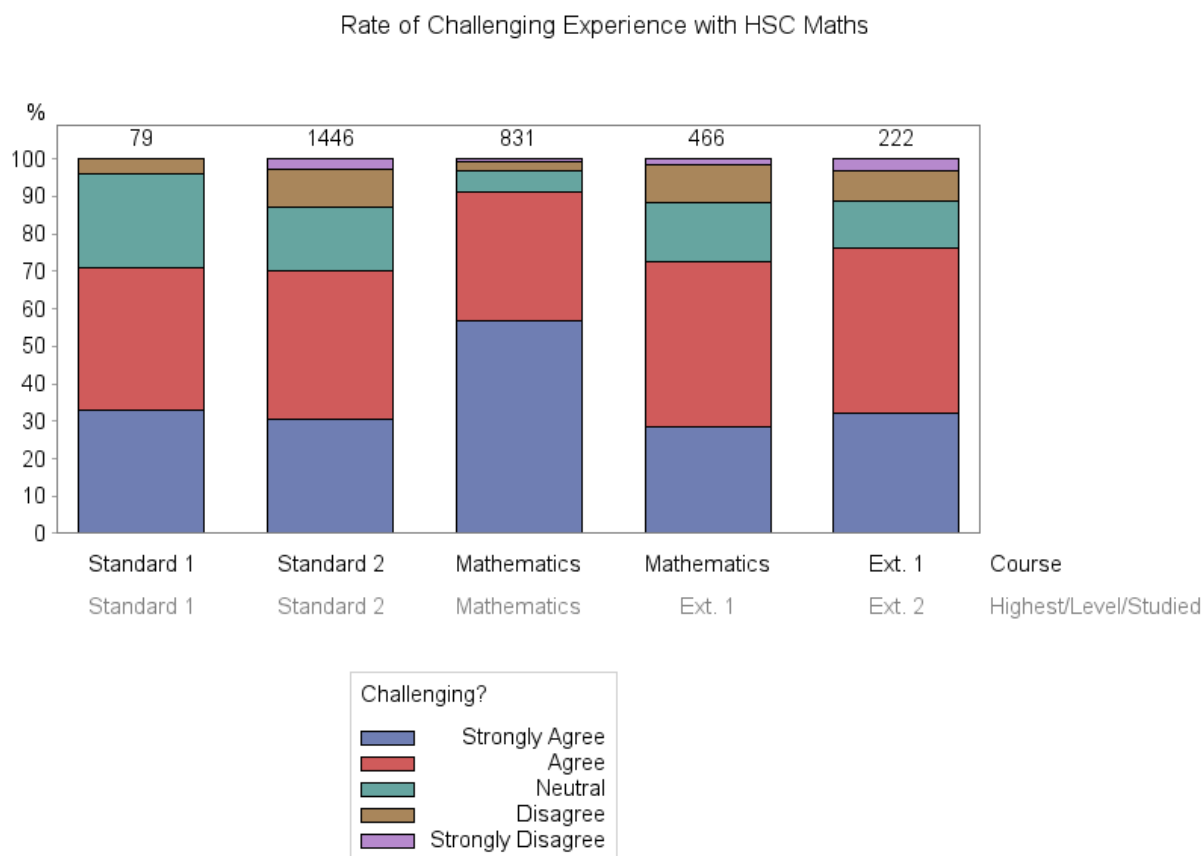


Figure 4 shows that respondents perceived English Studies (with or without exam) to be the least challenging course (< 50% agreed or strongly agreed), followed by English Standard (< 75%). The students most likely to perceive their course to be challenging were those doing English Advanced with no extensions (~90% agreed/strongly agreed). The data suggest a big difference between the English Standard cohort's perception of challenge and that of the cohort doing English Advanced (no extensions). As a group, the 2019 students did not appear to be equally suited to their core English course's level of challenge.

Figure 5: Experience of challenge in Mathematics courses by highest level studied
 (The numbers above the bars are the numbers of respondents)



2019 Student Feedback Survey

As in English, Figure 5 shows that students doing Mathematics with no extension were most likely to perceive their course to be challenging (> 90% agreed/strongly agreed). Mathematics Standard students found their courses about as challenging as the Mathematics Extension 1 students found their core Mathematics course (70% agreement). Thus, the largest candidature Mathematics courses appear to challenge the students who take them. Mathematics Standard 2 students were much less likely to find their course challenging than were students who only took Mathematics.

Course evaluation responses to pairs of statements

In this section, we averaged the course evaluation responses by statement and course. Combining these means for pairs of statements, we produced the scatterplots shown in Figures 6 to 8 (see Appendix 3 for a list of the abbreviations used in these graphs).

Figure 6: Relationship between perceptions of challenge and interest in large candidature courses

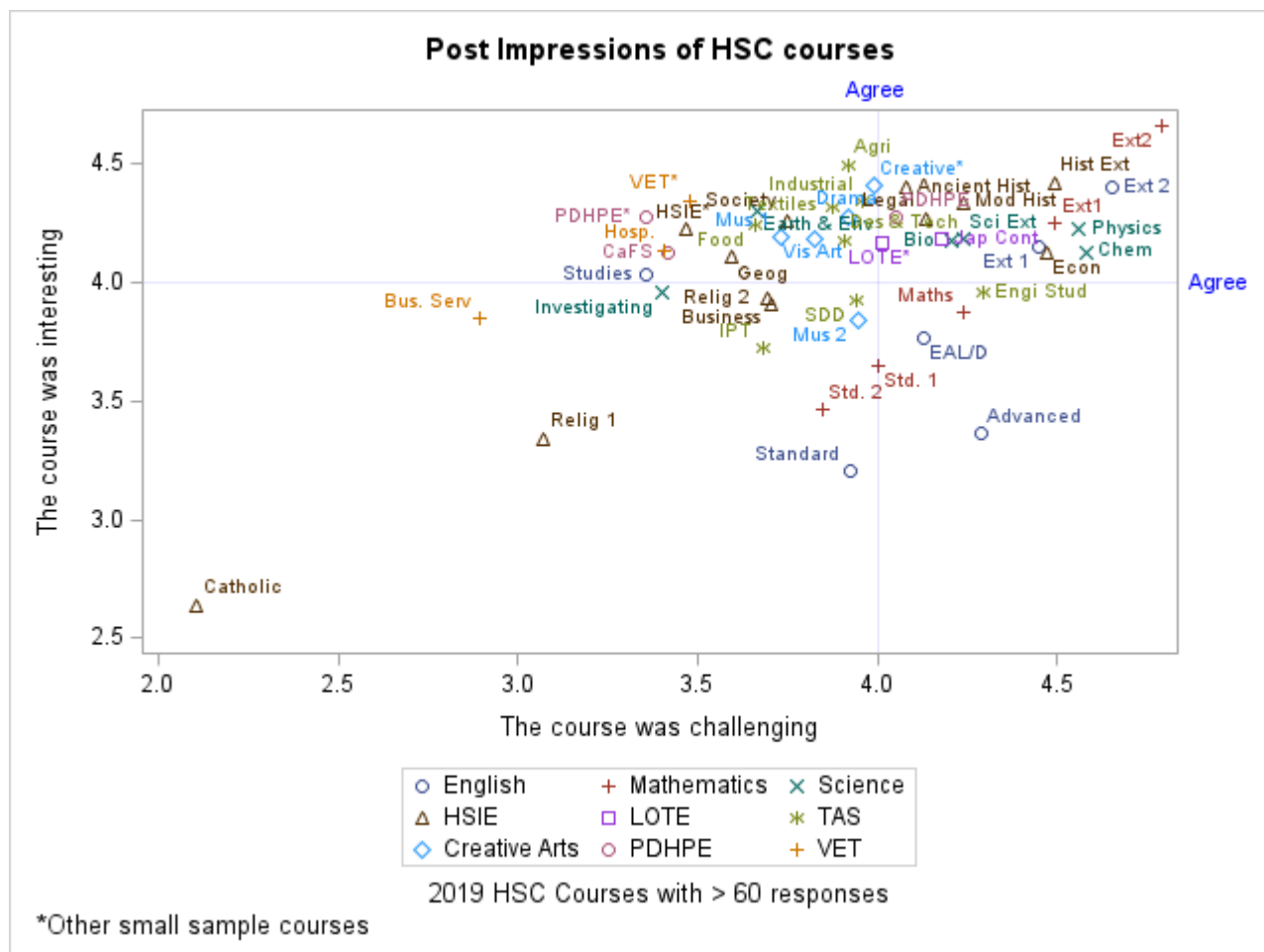


Figure 6 shows that respondents rated:

- English Standard, Studies of Religion, Investigating Science, Mathematics Standard 2, Information Processes and Technology, Business Studies, Business Services and Music 2 as less challenging and less interesting,
- English Advanced and EAL/D, Engineering Studies, Mathematics, and Mathematics Standard 1 as challenging but not very interesting. This needs to be seen in light of the earlier finding that the Mathematics course was very often challenging for students not doing an extension course, but less so for Extension students,
- Extension courses in English, Mathematics and History as the most challenging and the most interesting, followed by Physics, Chemistry, Science Extension, Legal Studies and Economics, and
- PDHPE, Earth and Environmental Science, Food Technology, Society and Culture, Community and Family Studies, Geography, Music 1, Visual Arts, small candidature HSIE courses, Hospitality and several other VET courses (eg, Construction,

Entertainment Industry, Primary Industries, Automotive) as interesting but not challenging.

In Figure 7 we plot each course's mean response on a combined 'useful for future work' and 'useful for future education' 'General Utility' horizontal axis, and a bias towards education or work vertical axis.

The courses rated highly for future utility include English Extension 2, Mathematics Extensions 1 and 2, Science Extension, Agriculture, Business Studies, Business Services, PDHPE, Community and Family Studies and Industrial Technology, while Studies of Religion, English (Standard and Advanced) and Ancient History were rated the least useful.

English Advanced and Extension 1, Mathematics and its Extensions, History Extension and Science Extension were all seen as more useful for future study rather than work, while Hospitality, Drama, Music, Japanese Continuers, Engineering Studies and Design and Technology were seen as more useful for future work.

Figure 7: Perceptions of future utility versus bias towards work or further education in large candidature courses

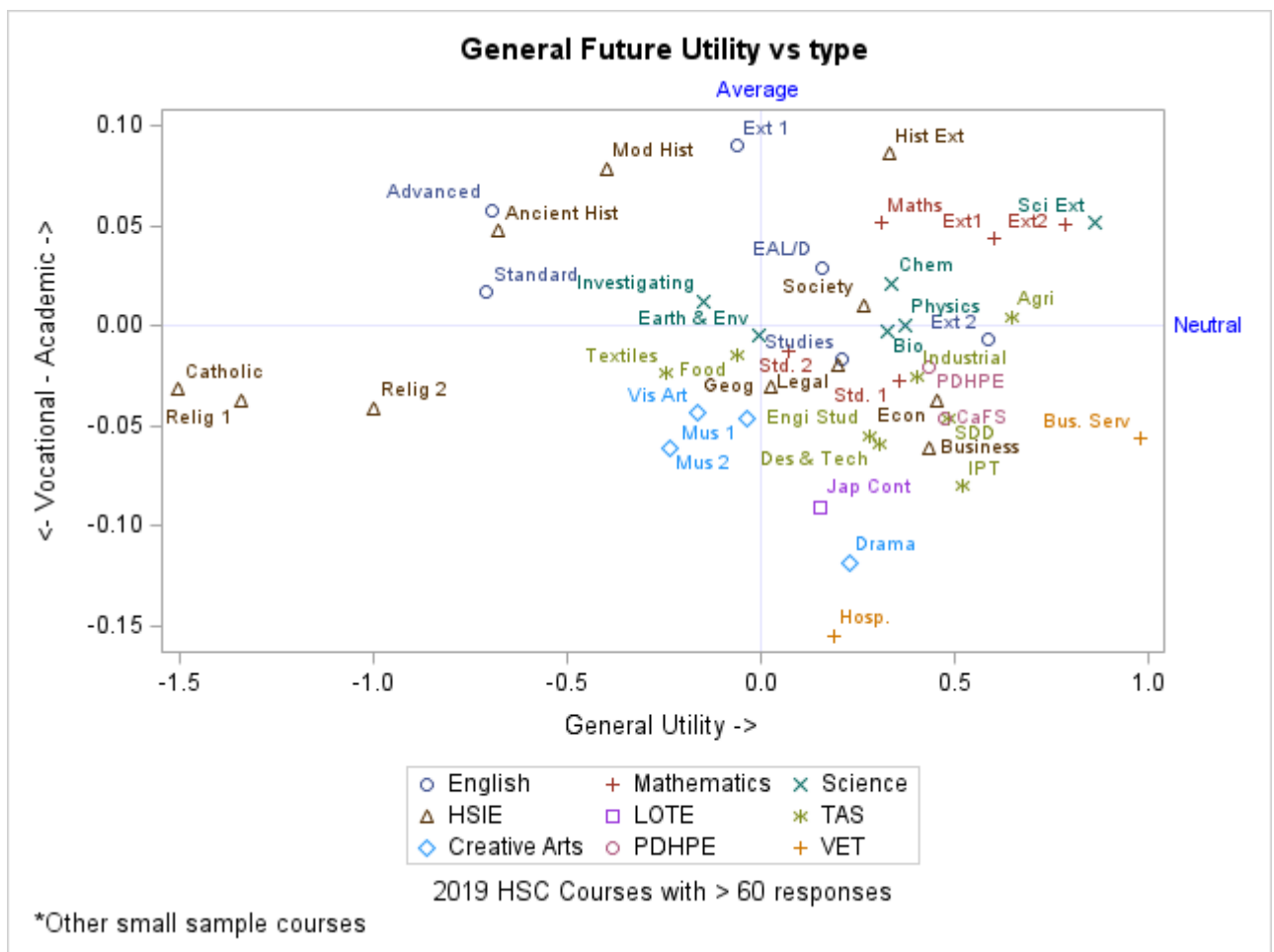


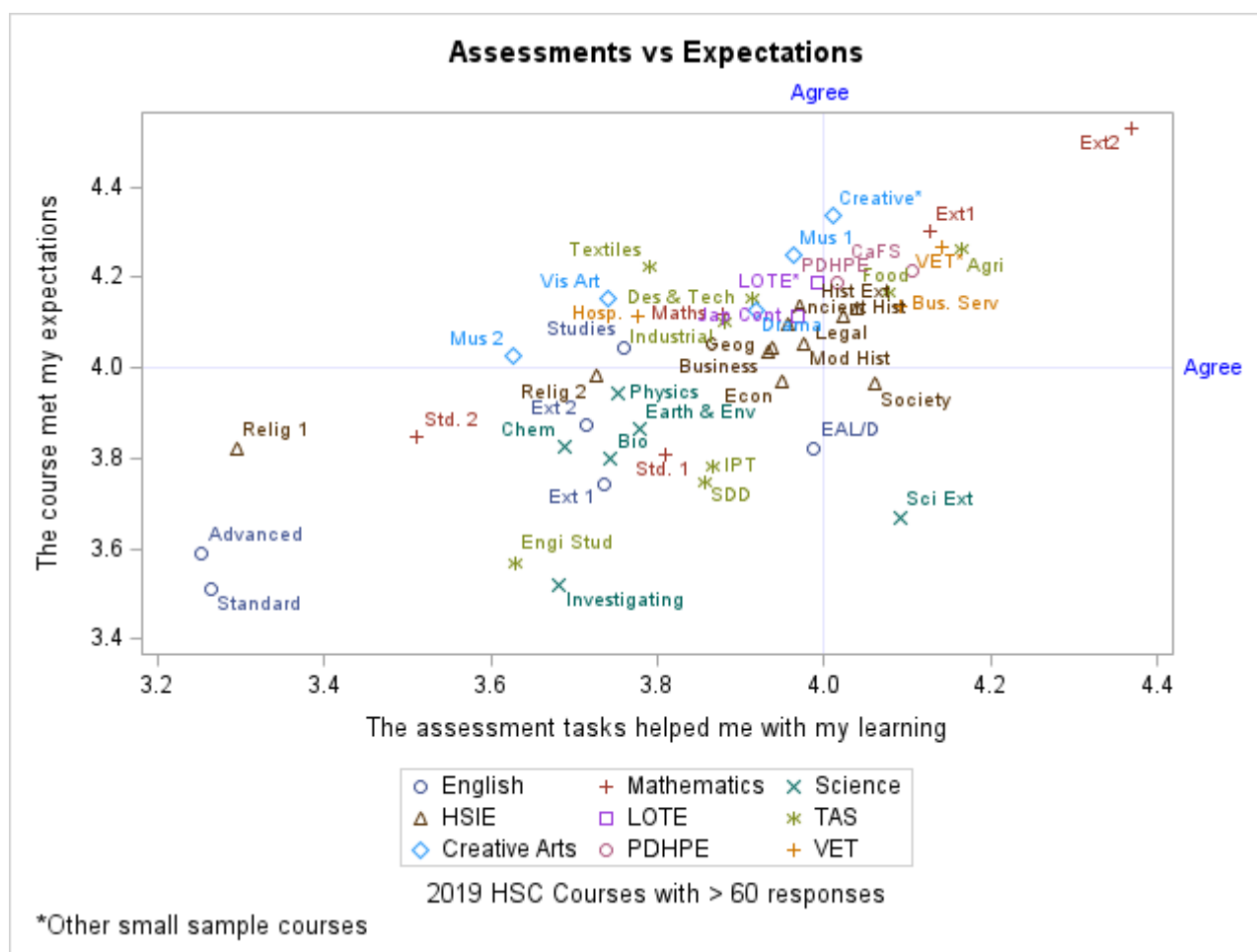
Figure 8 shows that:

- Large candidature courses like English (Standard, Advanced, and Extensions), Studies of Religion, Mathematics Standard, most Science courses (Chemistry, Biology, Earth and Environmental Science, Physics, Investigating Science), and some Technologies

courses (Engineering Studies, Software Design and Development, and Information Processes and Technology) did not meet expectations or have helpful assessment tasks,

- The Mathematics Extension courses, History Extension, Legal Studies, Agriculture, Food Technology, Business Services, Automotive, PDHPE, and Community and Family Studies met students' expectations and had helpful assessment tasks,
- English Studies, Hospitality, Visual Arts, Music (1 and 2), Drama, Textiles and Design, and some HSIE courses (Ancient and Modern History, Geography and Business Studies) met expectations but did not provide helpful assessment tasks, and
- Society and Culture and Science Extension had useful assessment tasks but did not meet expectations.

Figure 8: Relationship between perceptions of the usefulness of assessment tasks and whether courses met their expectations



Comments about courses

There were nearly 2,400 comments on more than 100 courses, of which we read and categorised a random 20%. There were many interesting comments covering a range of themes. In descending order of frequency the most common themes were:

- General positive feelings,
 - Problems with the final exam,
 - Course relevance and usefulness,
 - Teacher compliments and criticisms,
 - Wanting more support for new courses or changed syllabuses,
 - Courses having too much content,
 - The usefulness of rote learning, and
 - Compulsory courses
- **General positive feelings** (> 12% of respondents). Courses mentioned as enjoyable or a favourite included Mathematics Extension 1 and 2, Science Extension, French Beginners, History Extension, Community and Family Studies, Information and Digital Technology. In some of the major courses, particular topics were specifically mentioned as excellent:
 - *“Thoroughly enjoyed undertaking this course, particularly the Religion and Peace unit”* – Studies of Religion student
 - *“Really enjoyed the biology course, particularly the mandatory depth study - which enabled independent learning and research”*
 - *“Great course! Sport medicine is a great option and is very interesting”* – PDHPE student
 - **Problems with the final exam** eg, it did not match what respondents studied (9%). Particularly in new courses or changed syllabuses, respondents were surprised by exam questions and in some cases felt that their teachers or NESAs’ course materials had not adequately prepared them. As in previous surveys, respondents stated that in content-heavy courses, they would like to be able to demonstrate more of their content knowledge.
 - *“Having the new syllabus was a bit challenging and inconvenient at times, especially since we didn't have access to any past papers”* – English Advanced student
 - *“The legal studies HSC exam is quite possibly the worst exam in the HSC. I don't understand how it is supposed to be balanced with 2x25mark essays, a 15 mark essay, short answers consisting of essentially a 6-8 mark extended response, and then 7-9 marks left”*
 - *“HSC exam was not expected. Learnt about the eye, ear and kidney and received a question about the brain”* – Biology student
 - **How relevant and useful** some courses were for life now and in the future (8%). About two-thirds of these comments were positive while the rest expressed concern that they had missed out on learning practical skills.
 - *“The most related course to the society and even the globe we're living in. Have less problems understanding contents in news since taking Economics”*
 - *“I found that each topic was quite practical, and most topics are relevant to components of life e.g. bill, car insurance, time, tax and money”* - Mathematics Standard 2 student
 - *“The English HSC and other stages of the English subjects need to place a higher emphasis on learning the foundations of the language e.g. grammar. so higher levels of comprehension/more useful for everyday life can be achieved”*

- **Teacher compliments and criticisms (8%).** There were many comments about great teachers, but respondents also mentioned some teachers being unavailable to help, uninformed or unprepared for new courses or changes to the curriculum, and there being too much teacher turnover during the year.
 - *“I really enjoyed studying this course at TAFE because the teacher worked in the industry which enhanced my understanding of concepts in the hospitality industry”*
 - *“Our teacher would not give us any of the necessary cluster tasks, making the whole class behind and incompetent, we were then given a teacher who hadn’t taught hospitality for five years and would never show up to class”*
 - *“The quality of the English course almost entirely depends on the teacher. Someone at NESAs please give [teacher’s name] a raise, she deserves it.”*

- **Wanting more support for new courses or changed syllabuses (6%),** eg, more study materials or teacher assistance to prepare for the final exam.
 - *“Networks chapter was too broad and there were minimal example questions available for the HSC exam”* – Mathematics Standard 2 student
 - *“The change in syllabus and curriculum made the course difficult for teachers to teach and it reflected in our results and amount of independent study needed.”* - Mathematics Standard 2 student
 - *“Need to be more explicit in what you want from your students. Half of the stuff in the exams did not correlate with what was being taught. You need to properly inform teachers on ANY new syllabus before you expect them to teach students to YOUR standards”* – English Standard student
 - *“Needs more clarity on what a discursive text including examples, worksheets etc. as many teachers and tutors were unsure of what it was and gave varied definitions”* – English Advanced student

- **Courses having too much content** (to the extent that topics had to be rushed or left out altogether), requiring a high degree of memorisation, and lacking depth (5%). Biology was the course mentioned most often.
 - *“Great course though wish could study more about the Spartans and their battles as well as the society as it feels kind of generic just studying about the structure of their life as there is so much more to it that isn’t studied”* – Ancient History student
 - *“Way too much content in the syllabus. There isn’t enough time to get a good understanding of the course without doing at least 3 hours of homework every night”* – Modern History student
 - *“Teachers did not finish almost half the content and students had to seek chemistry tutoring to learn the content we should have been taught within school. People do not have the money to buy the education their children should already be given.”*

- Related to the amount of content, respondents questioned **the usefulness of rote learning (5%),** although much less than in previous years. Although it was still mentioned this year, there was definitely less of a sense that pre-preparing an English essay was a valid option.
 - *“It is a lot of memorisation for the exam where in a job you would be allowed to look up legislation and media articles”* – Legal Studies student
 - *“There was a lot of content where memorisation of certain species was expected to be known (although HSC exam looked at more scientific skills which I personally think is a better way of testing knowledge that is being able to apply content to situations).”* – Biology student
 - *“As the first year of the new syllabus, the questions were definitely unpredictable. The questions were challenging but accessible, allowing for critical thinking/responding in the exams.”* – English Advanced student

- The perennial issue of **compulsory courses** (2%). For example:
 - **Catholic Studies:**
 - *“If I’m being completely honest this course became a bludge subject for the entire of my class”*
 - Many of these respondents stated that, in the modern world, **Mathematics** is as deserving of compulsory status as English:
 - *“I believe that some form of mathematics should be compulsory like English, so that individuals who are stronger in maths than English (such as me) are not disadvantaged with students who are naturally gifted in English”*
 - In the case of **English**, many respondents felt they didn’t even have a choice as to which course they took, and felt the following flow-on effects:
 - That their ATAR was adversely affected
 - A focus on text analysis, when what they wanted was more basic literacy skills
 - A lot of time spent developing skills that were not seen as useful for life after school
 - An unfair advantage for people who were already good at English.

The many other comments respondents made related to the following broad themes:

- the integration of curriculum material (or lack thereof),
- the reward and recognition of work done not reflecting the effort involved,
- wanting more choice over what they studied,
- courses being too hard/easy, and
- very detailed exam- or syllabus-related points that speak to the intensity of the HSC experience.

Motivation

For each of their courses, we provided respondents with six common reasons for choosing courses and asked them to indicate their choice of motivations by ticking all the reasons that applied. The six reasons related to:

- interest in the content,
- career prospects,
- the course being compulsory,
- perceived ability,
- perceived ATAR advantage, and
- subject line clashes.

Figure 9 shows that, at least in hindsight, the majority of BDC choices involved considering interest in the content (68%) and perceived ability (64%). Thoughts about future work (36%) or maximising ATAR (33%) motivated smaller numbers of respondents. Being compulsory or just filling out a subject line figured in 18% and 15% of BDC choices respectively. There were far fewer responses about BECs and CECs, but they followed roughly similar patterns, with the exception of some BECs. This group included Catholic Studies, Biblical Studies and Orthodox Studies which respondents said were compulsory in more than 75% of cases.

Considering BDCs in more detail, Figure 9 shows that English is distinctive, with its being compulsory figuring in more than 55% of cases. It had correspondingly low levels of motivation

relating to interest (40%), future work (15%) and perceived ability (48%).

Figure 9: Recalled course choice motivation by course type

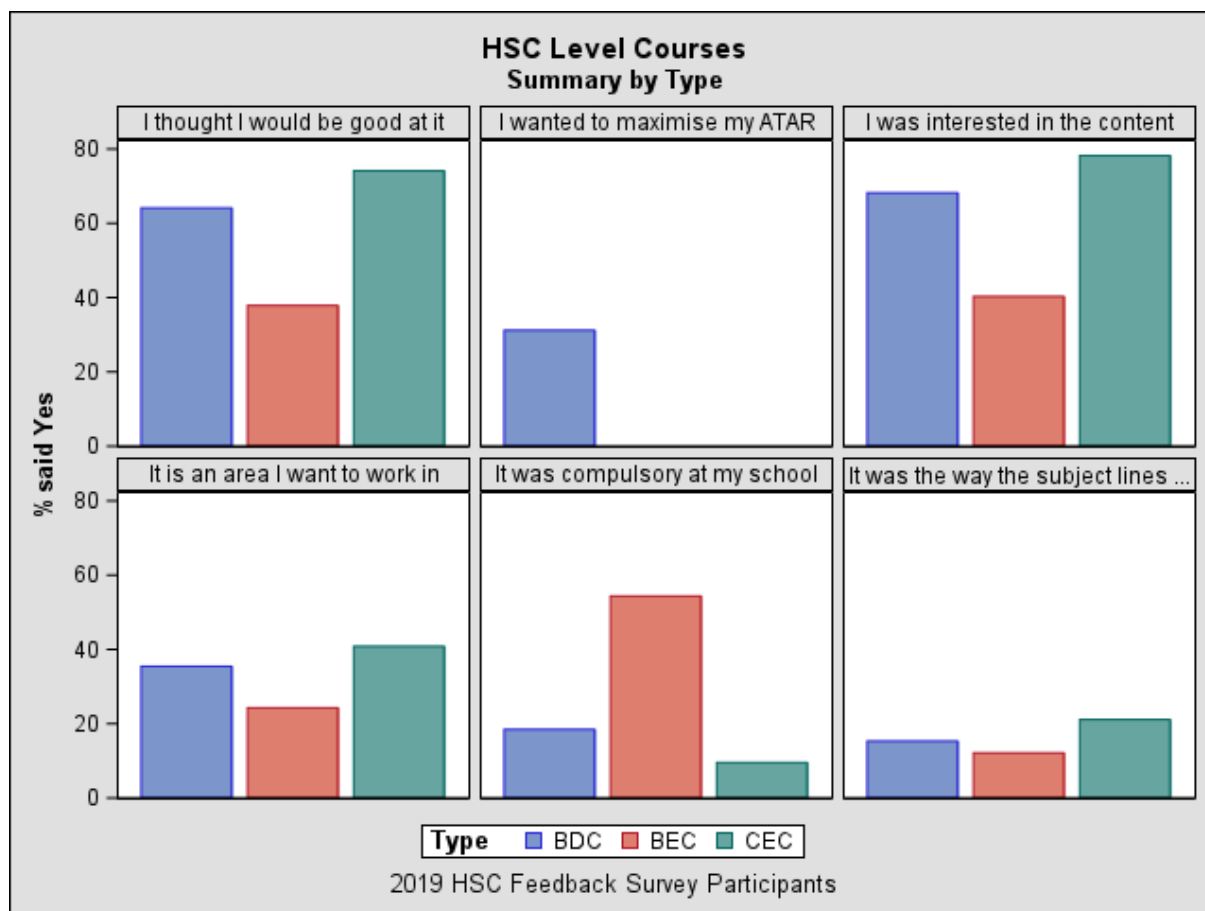


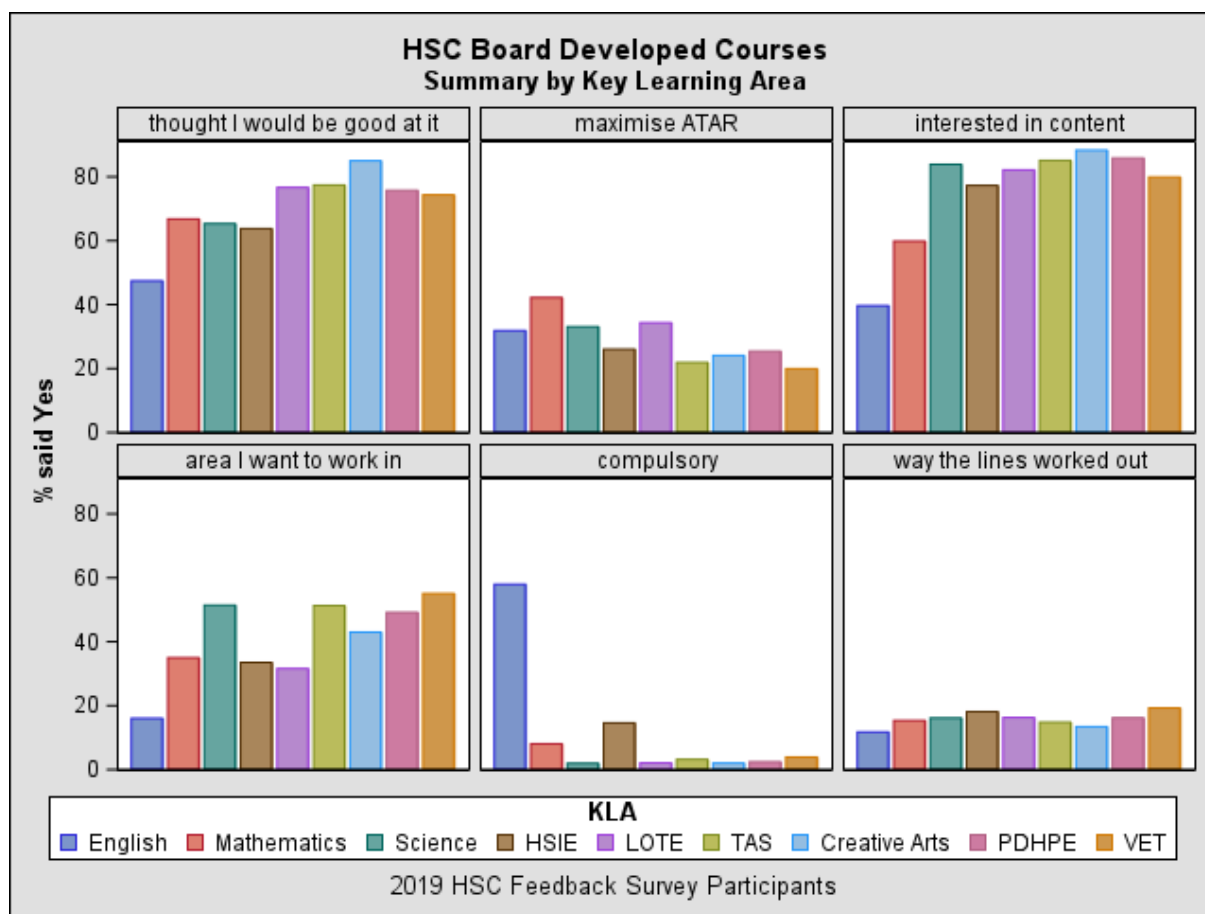
Figure 10 shows that, for courses other than English, more than 60% recalled motivations of perceived ability and interest.

In Mathematics, the proportion of respondents choosing courses to maximise their ATAR (42%) was far higher than in any other KLA (around or above 20% higher). The proportion who recalled choosing Mathematics for interest's sake was much lower than in other KLAs.

Interestingly, Languages courses were often chosen with ATAR in mind (> 30%, as much as for English and Science), and HSIE courses were sometimes compulsory at the school (eg, Studies of Religion at religious schools). Respondents at a significant minority of schools also considered Mathematics to be compulsory.

Future work considerations motivated only about 55% of VET course choices. This was just a few percentage points higher than in Technologies, PDHPE and Science courses. Below we discuss the specific courses underlying these KLA-level results.

Figure 10: Recalled BDC choice motivation by KLA



Other reasons for choosing courses

In addition to the six course-choice motivations we provided, respondents could supply their own. Some expanded on the answer they had already given, but in order of frequency¹, the other reasons were:

- Enjoyment (10%)
- Pattern of study requirements (8%)
- Teacher/faculty (8%)
- University prerequisite (real or perceived; 7%)
- To gain skills for life (6%)
- To continue with a course chosen in an earlier grade (5%)
- Real-world experience/non-school qualification (4%)
- Best of the available course options at the school (4%)
- Acceleration (3%)
- Influence of parents, relatives or peers (3%)
- Balance of subjects/manageable workload (2%)

¹ Of about 1100, we categorised 300 into popular themes. The actual percentages are in brackets.

- Co-requisite/good match with a desirable course (2%)
- **Enjoyment.** In addition to being interested and good at it, many respondents thought they would enjoy the course.
 - *“I enjoy learning about the human body and society”* – PDHPE student
- Filling out the HSC **pattern of study requirements.** Sometimes respondents were pleasantly surprised, sometimes they indicated no enthusiasm at all. Sometimes they simply wanted to avoid Mathematics.
 - *“Wanted to do extension history but wasn't allowed to only do 3 "subjects" (english, maths, history)”* – Society and Culture student
 - *“Extension 1 unit maths could only be paired with SOR 1U at my school”* – Studies of Religion I student
- **Teacher/faculty.** Respondents were seeking a great teacher, avoiding a bad one or following the advice of one. They also mentioned the motivating quality of a well-resourced faculty.
 - *“Teacher extremely helpful, knowledgeable and experienced”* – Visual Arts student
 - *“The TAS faculty of my school is amazing and gave me an incentive to study a TAS course, with adequate equipment and active school support (Fashion Show).”* – Textiles and Design student
- **University prerequisite** (real or perceived).
 - *“Needed to do Biology to get into my uni course as it 'd needed for some of the units that are studied.”*
- To gain **skills for life.** Some respondents felt that their course would be useful in a broader context than simply work or study.
 - *“I thought it would assist helping me with finances and situations outside of the school environment”* - Business Studies student
- A **continuation of a choice** made in an earlier grade. Apparently sometimes because of enthusiasm, but sometimes without giving it much thought
 - *“I have a strong passion for theatre and have been involved in school drama at high school since year 8. I also studied drama in years 9 and 10 and couldn't turn the idea away as doing for my HSC. Also meant I didn't have to do Maths, which is not my favourite.”*
 - *“I chose food technology because I have always been interested since year 7 however when it came to year 12, our class got a new teacher who wasn't engaging, and the topic we studied did not interest me enough, like the Australian food industry.”*
- As the **best course offered** at the school in the subject area or KLA. Related to the pattern of study reason above, a student attending a particular school can only choose from a limited range of courses, so can't always go with their first choice..
 - *“I always wanted to learn another language, as I want to travel after school and French Beginners was the only language that I would be able to learn at my school, as the other language offered was a Continuers course.”*
 - *“SDD was unavailable at my school, but I do enjoy learning about technology.”*- Information Processes and Technology student
- **Acceleration.** This was a good way for more capable students to complete some of their courses early, or to spread them out and reduce the pressure in their final year.

- *“It was offered as an accelerated course at my school and presented a great opportunity to further my writing skills and knowledge about different world views.”* – Studies of Religion II student
- *“I was offered this subject as an accelerated subject in year 11 and gladly took the opportunity in hope that I may free up some time next year for other subjects.”* - Biology student
- The **influence of parents, relatives or peers** – this included some cases where students chose a course so it would be popular enough to run (possibly for the sake of friends who had stronger desire to take the course).
 - *I was needed for numbers to allow the class to run.* – Dance student
- To get a **balance** of subjects and manage their workload for the year.
 - *“This was a good substitute instead of taking the Biology course as I was able to maintain an education in science and succeed in staying on top of all my courses that are high in demand.”* - Investigating Science student
- **Real world experience**, a qualification or starting a traineeship
 - *“You learnt a lot about what was happening in the real world, especially how the legal system works”* – Legal Studies student
 - *“Completed it to be able to progress to management at work”* – Retail Services student
- **A co-requisite** or good match with a desirable course eg, students wanting to do History Extension were required to do Ancient or Modern History.
 - *“Cross over in skills with Modern”* – Ancient History student
 - *“I thought it would be useful whilst completing the Business Studies subject”* – Business Services student

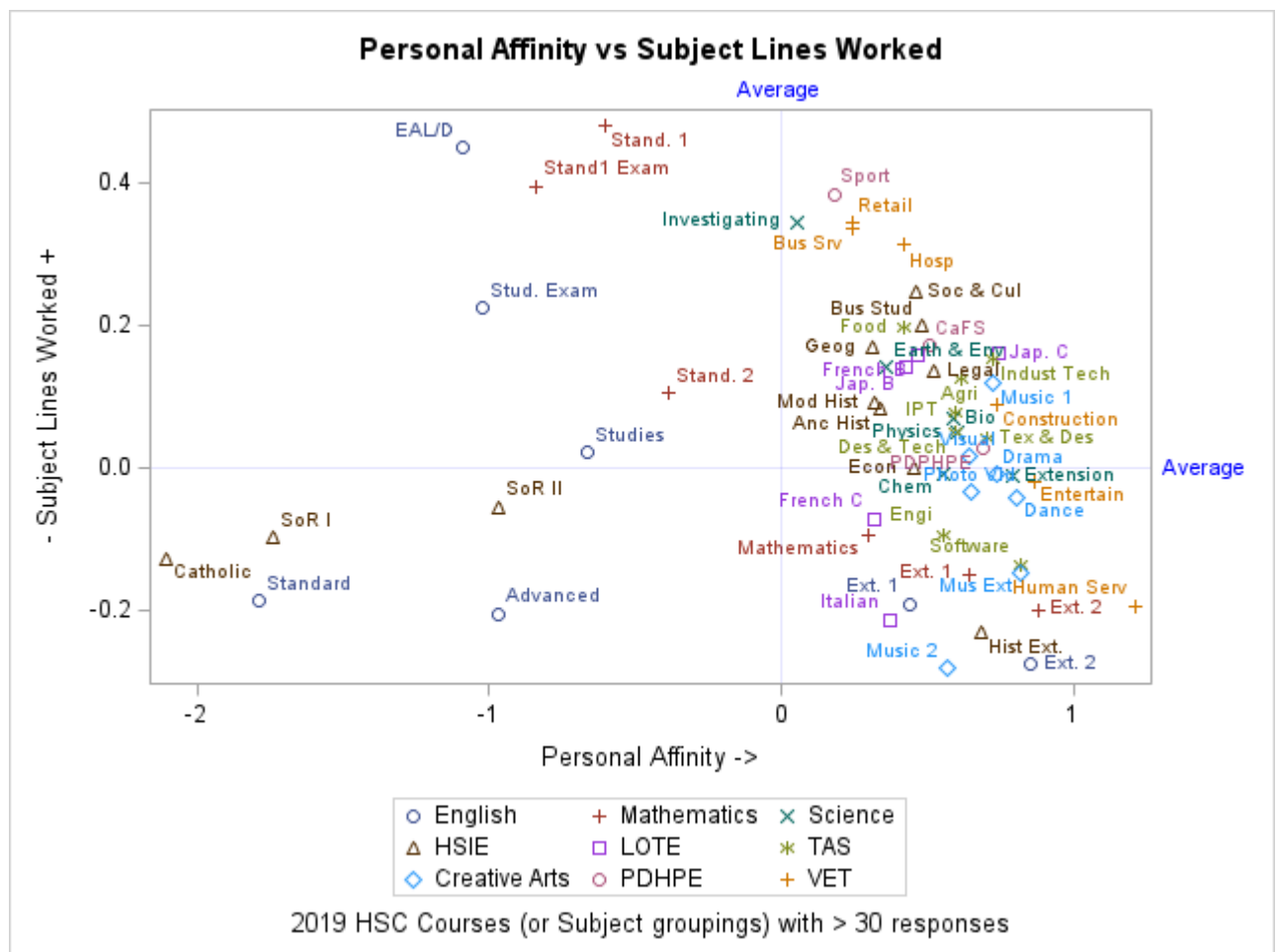
Factors underlying course choice motivation

As in previous years, some course choice motivations tended to go together. Using factor analysis we found that the three biggest factors underlying course choice were:

- 1) **Personal affinity** (correlated with being good at the course, interested in it, intending to work in that area, and not doing it because it was compulsory)
- 2) **School administrative requirements** (the way the subject lines worked out)
- 3) **Institutional requirements** (Maximising ATAR and being compulsory)

Figures 11 and 12 show how courses loaded on these 3 factors (see Appendix 3 for a list of the abbreviations used in these graphs).

Figure 11: Relationship between personal affinity for a course and school administrative requirements as course choice motivations



As seen in Figure 10, Figure 11 shows that Creative Arts (light blue) and VET (orange) courses figure prominently among those students who choose them because they have a personal affinity with them, but choosing these courses depended to different extents on school subject line considerations. For example, Hospitality was more associated, and Music 2 was less associated, with this convenience factor.

HSIE courses (dark brown) covered a range of feelings of personal affinity but all bar Catholic Studies and Studies of Religion were above average. Among the 'above average' courses, History Extension was the one most likely chosen before taking into account subject line considerations. Interestingly, English EAL/D was very strongly associated with subject line convenience.

Figure 12: Relationship between personal affinity for a course and institutional requirements as course choice motivations

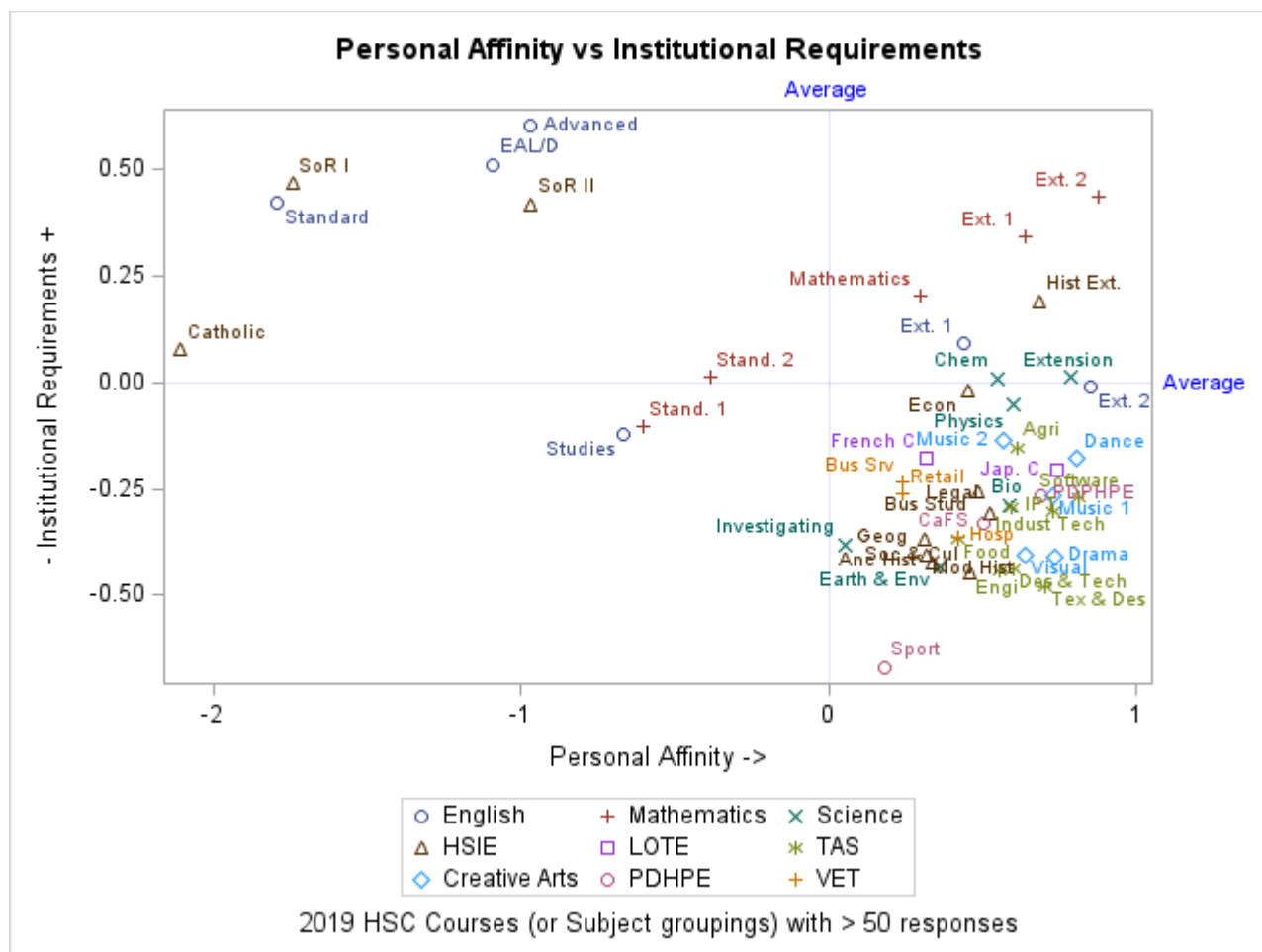


Figure 12 plots personal affinity against Institutional Requirements. Most courses bunch in the bottom right indicating that students took them out of interest and confidence rather than because they wanted to maximise their ATAR or because they were compulsory. Core English and Religion courses are compulsory (top left), while students took higher-level Mathematics, English and History Extension courses both because they had an interest in them and because they were seen as being beneficial for ATAR (and in some cases may be compulsory at their school).

Correlations with HSC mark

In Appendix 1, we show that there was some bias towards survey respondents being higher achieving and more highly engaged. Thus we investigated the correlation between survey responses and HSC course mark to assess the impact of this bias, and to see if there was a relationship between students' experience of courses and their performance in them.

Tables 2 to 8 show the correlations between responses to each of the course experience statements and students' final marks in the course. Table 2 shows the correlations between responses to each of the statements and English mark (average of Standard and Advanced) whereas Tables 3 to 8 take each statement at a time, and, for courses with more than 30

respondents, show only the larger correlations (absolute value > 0.3²).

Table 2 shows that, across both motivation and experience statements, the overall correlations with mark were negligible (absolute value < 0.18), meaning that there was little relationship between course experience and achievement. Interestingly, there was no simple relationship between English courses being perceived as challenging and the HSC mark a student achieved. Therefore, our course experience results are probably not just the opinions of higher achievers.

Table 2: Correlations between responses to evaluation and motivation statements and English mark

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Correlation</i>
EVALUATION:	
The course met my expectations	0.13
The course was interesting	0.13
The course was challenging	0.07
The course will be useful for my further education	0.07
The course will be useful for my future work	0.02
The assessment tasks helped me with my learning	0.10
MOTIVATION:	
I was interested in the content	0.09
It is an area I want to work in	0.01
It was the way the subject lines worked out	0.05
I wanted to maximise my ATAR	0.16
I thought I would be good at it	0.17

Table 3 shows two courses where being interested from the start led to a higher mark.

Table 3: Notable correlations between choosing a course out of interest and HSC mark in that course

Course	Correlation	Sample size
Geography	0.35	235
Agriculture	0.31	61

² The benchmark of 0.3 is a convention in this type of attitudinal research. Correlations less than this are considered trivial.

Table 4 shows that courses that met expectations tended to be associated with higher HSC marks, especially in Japanese Beginners.

Table 4: Notable correlations between a course meeting expectations and HSC mark in that course

Course	Correlation	Sample size
Japanese Beginners	0.56	35
Textiles and Design	0.42	72
Dance	0.41	52
Japanese Continuers	0.39	59
Mathematics Standard 2	0.35	1474
French Continuers	0.34	53
Chemistry	0.33	758
Mathematics	0.33	1309
Studies of Religion II	0.30	344

Table 5 shows the courses where students who felt that a course challenged them actually had lower HSC marks. This may simply reflect the fact that the different levels of ability students bring to a course are reflected in their perception of challenge. Alternatively, it might be that students experienced a fixed level of difficulty in the classroom, regardless of their ability ie, that either teachers did not take opportunities to customise a course to the ability of their class or that NESAs' curriculums do not provide them.

Table 5: Notable correlations between a course being challenging and HSC mark in that course

Course	Correlation	Sample size
Japanese Beginners	-0.51	35
Japanese Continuers	-0.42	59
Mathematics	-0.38	1309
Mathematics Standard 2	-0.36	1474
Earth and Environmental Science	-0.34	118
Business Studies	-0.32	871
French Beginners	-0.32	45

Table 6 shows the courses where respondents who reported being motivated by perceived ability tended to obtain a higher HSC mark than those choosing the courses for other reasons.

Table 6 Notable correlations between choosing a course because of perceived ability and HSC mark in that course

Course	Correlation	Sample size
Food Technology	0.39	167
Mathematics Standard 2	0.33	1474
French Beginners	0.32	45
Studies of Religion II	0.30	344

HSC marks for the courses in Table 7 were associated with respondents seeing them as useful for future work or education and/or agreement that the course's assessment tasks were useful.

Table 7: Notable correlations between utility statements and HSC mark in course

Course	Further education	Future work	Assessment tasks	Sample size
Agriculture	0.35	0.35	0.40	61
Economics		0.31		301
Engineering Studies	0.41	0.39		111
Food Technology			0.35	167
French Continuers		0.41		53
Textiles and Design	0.30		0.40	72
Japanese Beginners	0.39	0.34	0.49	35

Finally, Table 8 shows the cases where school administrative motivations were associated with lower HSC marks.

Table 8 Notable correlations between school administrative motivations and HSC mark

Course	Statement	Correlation	Sample size
Dance	It was compulsory at my school	-0.30	52
Music Extension	It was the way the subject lines worked out	-0.34	41
Textiles and Design	It was the way the subject lines worked out	-0.32	72
Music 1	It was the way the subject lines worked out	-0.31	246

“If you could change one thing...”

We asked respondents to tell us what one thing they would change about the HSC program. Of the nearly 3000 responses to this question, we read and categorised a random 20%. The most common themes were:

- Change the compulsory subjects
 - Change the English syllabuses
 - Make Mathematics compulsory
- Reduce the stress levels/intensity of the final stages of the HSC program
 - Less weighting on the final exams
- Modify or abandon the scaling of marks and ATAR
- Issues with exams or the general method of examination
- Have less content in certain syllabuses to allow more in-depth study and more time to digest
- The exam timetable is too much of an influence
- More support for courses with a new syllabus
- More study aids for final exams
- Reward skills rather than memorisation
- More practical skills/projects/collaboration
- Greater scope for customisation of courses

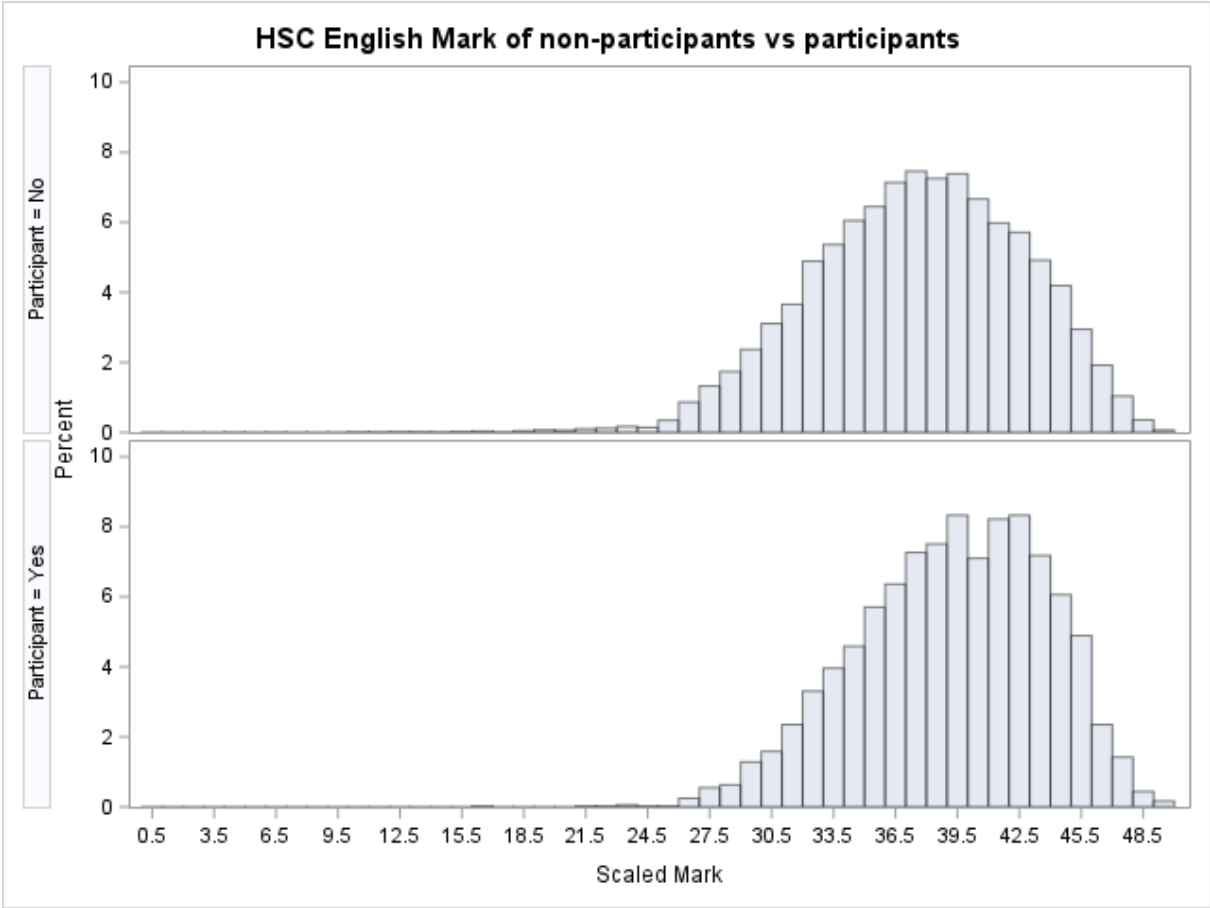
- **Change the compulsory subjects** (15% of comments). Some respondents wanted Mathematics on the same footing as English - both compulsory or both optional, or with a choice between the two.
 - *“English should not be compulsory for the HSC program. I believe it lowered my ATAR significantly more than other subjects. We learn how to do all things English from year 1 - 10. All other subjects provide how to write in different ways to suit the course “*
 - *“I think English should not be compulsory or should be changed so it is not literature based as I think this is not helpful for the future or every student. At the very least it should not have to count in the calculation of ATAR . . .”*
- Change the English syllabuses (a further 6%) – given that it is compulsory, some students would change the focus from literature and essays to more practical skills and correct use of language.
 - *“. . . the English courses should be more fundamental to life instead of critique of old-fashioned writers I would rather the standard course was similar to the studies course and it's relevance to real world situations . . .”*
- Make Mathematics compulsory (a further 3%; no mention of English).
 - *“Make maths compulsory, or introduce a 'life skills' maths course that is the bare minimum, because maths is extremely important and students should have the necessary skills to complete their own finances and make smart decisions without having to outsource”*
- **Reduce the stress levels/intensity of the final stages of the HSC program** (10%). This issue manifested itself in one of three ways. First, some respondents interpreted this question to mean the HSC exams, whereas others took it to mean just the ATAR, both revealing a narrow focus which in itself may create stress. Second, respondents talked about pressure from parents and teachers and the way assessments and exams rank them against their peers. Third, some respondents suggested ways in which the assessments and exams could be better spread over time to allow for more preparation.

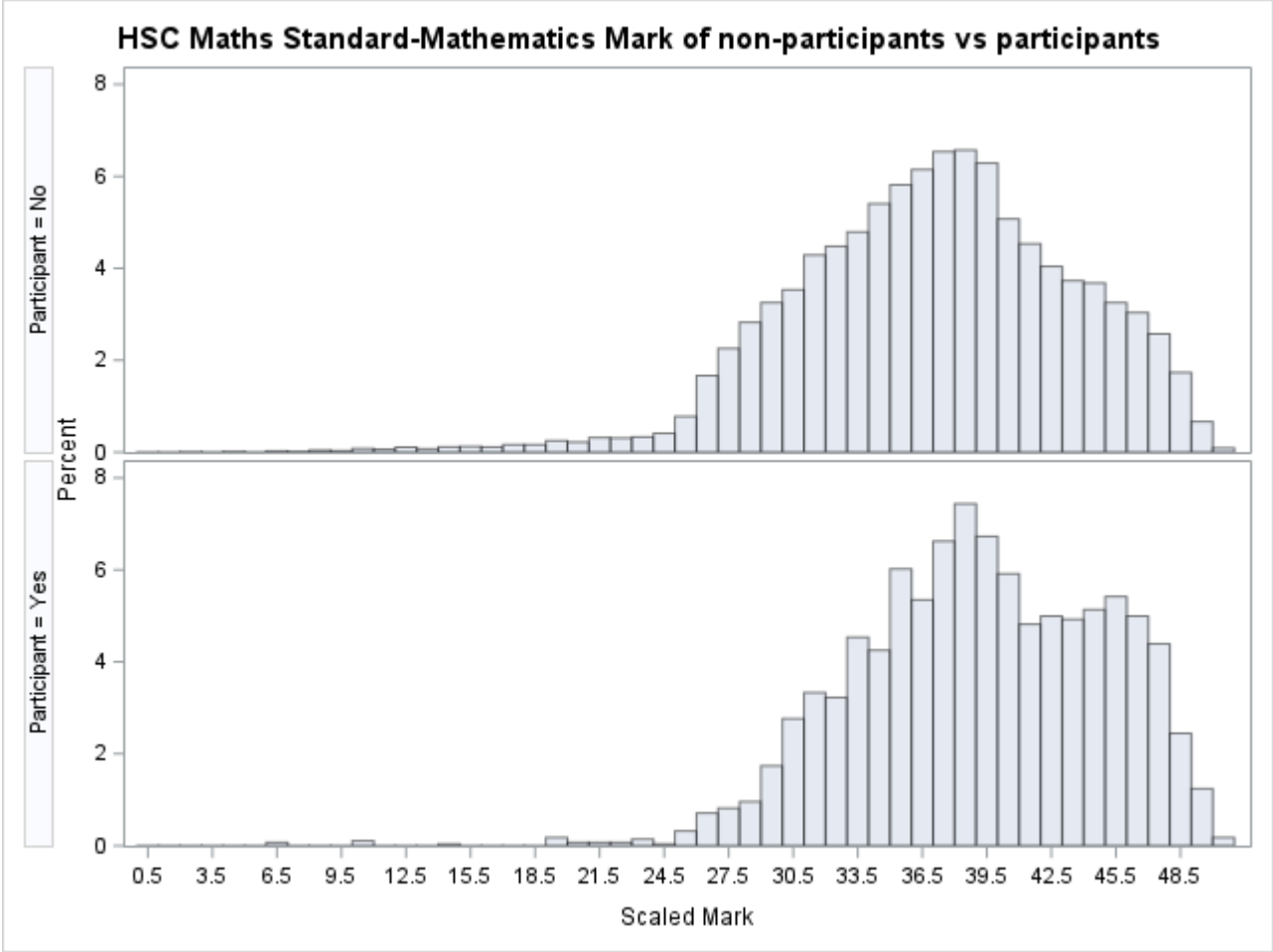
- *“The stress placed on students. Everyone I've met who has completed their HSC talks about how in hindsight they should have stressed less. The other pathways to university should be emphasised more and the pressure of the HSC should be minimised.”*
- *“Less highly stressful exam periods, exams need to be spread further and each individual's exam timetable has a large influence on their results and performance in the exams which is highly unfair for many who have squished or many exams close together.”*
- *“The final exam should not count for as significant part of your final result as it currently does. It places too much pressure on students and I don't think that it is a true test of skill. It [only] represents how you perform under pressure”.*
- Following from the previous point, 7% of respondents wanted less weighting on the final exams. Some wanted more varied and externally-marked assessments to allow a greater proportion of students to demonstrate their abilities.
 - *“The major works should be taken into way more consideration. Its quite honestly ridiculous that a student does that much work, and then still have to sit a test like everyone else. The major works did nothing but add more stress and way more workload ...”*
- **Modify or abandon the scaling of marks and ATAR (9%).** Some respondents felt that the marks they achieved should not be affected by variations in peer groups or perceptions of hard vs easy courses which lead to different types of students taking them.
 - *“The ATAR, I would prefer to leave school with individual marks, not a number to define my university entry”*
 - *“I would make sure more emphasis is placed on alternative ways into uni. The HSC is overemphasised as the only pathway and becomes very stressful.”*
 - *“Scrap the ATAR and compulsory courses, if Religion isn't something I need for an IT degree, then I shouldn't be required to take it. Steps should also be taken to ensure that all schools have access to resources for all courses.”*
 - *“Remove stigma (through removal of scaling) towards less intellectual courses such as woodwork and hospitality. As a decently achieving student, I would have loved to have done Hospitality, but only chose not to due to its poor scaling.”*
- **Issues with exams or the general method of examination (8%)** eg, too little time to complete the exam, not all material learnt was covered in the exam, the exam didn't match what was taught during the course, the high pressure situation disadvantaged some otherwise capable students, and that students could memorise essays or even have tutors prepare them.
 - *“I would change the duration of the exam by removing an essay from each subject so there would be one essay instead of two. 3 hours is too long of an examination and the students handwriting becomes extremely hard to read and the quality of the writing [suffers]”*
 - *“subjects that are designed to be more practical such as software should have more practical exams”*
 - *“Increase the amount of time given for the Visual Arts (Art Criticism and History) Exam”*
“the HSC program is fine but the actual exams themselves were mostly terrible and threw many people, even well performing students, off and were very unfair on every student who had to undergo the stress that came with these exams and the anxiety . . .”
- **Have less content in certain syllabuses to allow more in-depth study and time to digest (7%).**

- **The exam timetable is too much of an influence** (6%). Respondents wanted the exams to be spread out more, or to have generally more time to prepare.
 - *"I'd change the way we are assessed. Instead of having one big HSC exam at the end of the year, I'd prefer 4 equally weighted exams for each subject throughout the year that assess us on each topic after we have learnt it."*
 - *"Try not to have exam double ups. Not a major issue but it would be preferable not to do two HSC exams in one day when they are weighted so much. For me personally, the fatigue after sitting a 3hr exam makes it a lot harder to perform at the same standard."*
- A more prominent comment this year was that there should be **more support for courses with a new syllabus** eg, model responses, teacher training and sample exams (6%).
 - *"When there is a new syllabus then have teachers or students post band 6 responses to the NESAs website, as the sample papers didn't really help. "*
 - *"Make more practice papers available when restructuring a syllabus or releasing a new one to allow both students and teachers to understand what depth to cover content."*
 - *"If I could change something, I would definitely want the course changes to be implemented more smoothly as for parts of the year, the changes made it very difficult and stressful for us students, and there was less notes we could inherit from past years."*
- **More study aids for final exams** (4%).
 - *"More assistance with teaching essay writing. If a student can't write essays well then the HSC is much harder for them than for others"*
- **Rewards skills rather than memorisation** (4%).
- **More practical skills/projects/collaboration** (4%).
- **Greater scope for customisation** (3%).
 - *"Ability to do cross-discipline projects"*
 - *"Orientate it around student interest rather than a standardised course that suits no-one"*
 - *"Allowing schools to make particular subjects compulsory"*

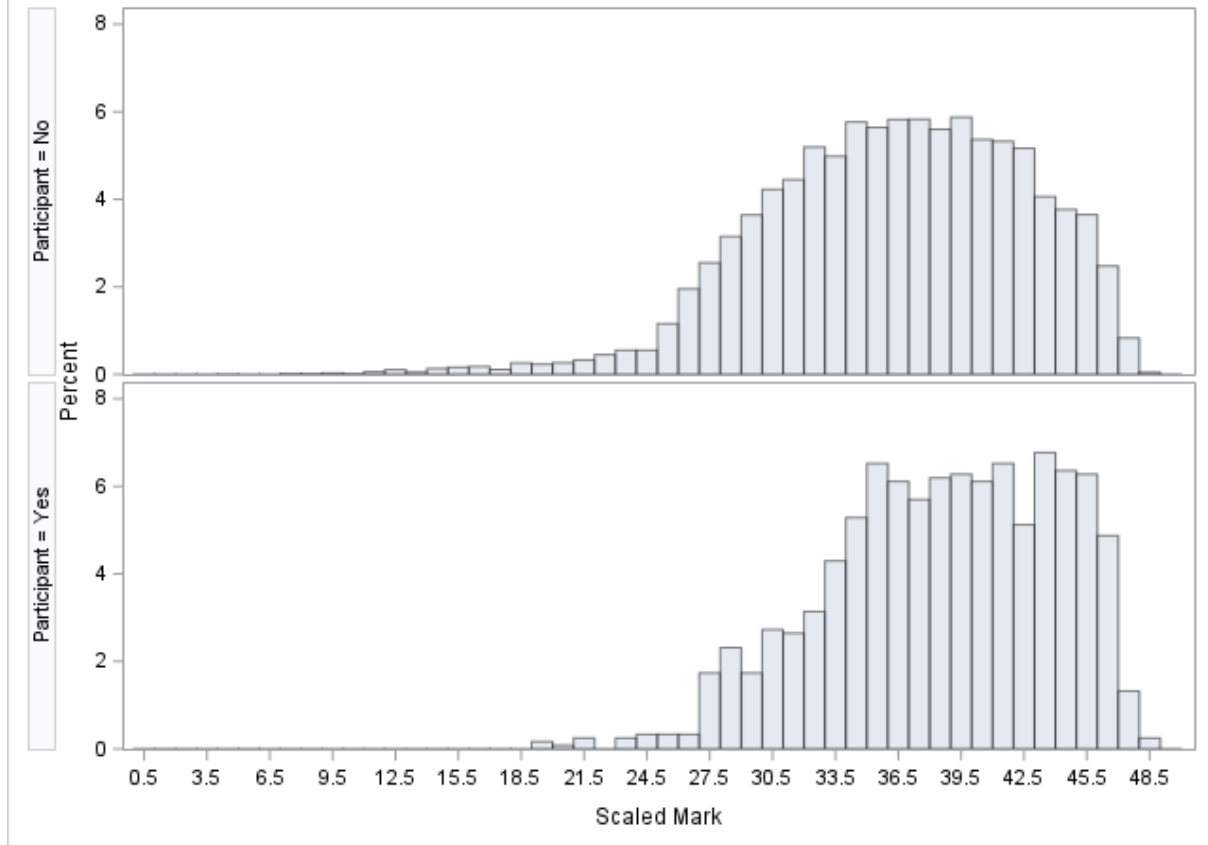
Appendix 1: Mark distributions for survey respondents vs non-respondents

For the largest candidature courses, the HSC mark distribution was similar for survey respondents and non-respondents. The graphs below show these mark distributions for English (combined Standard and Advanced), Mathematics, Mathematics Standard 1 (Exam) and 2, and Biology.





HSC Biology Mark of non-participants vs participants



Appendix 2: The 2019 Survey

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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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"/>
<p>What were the reason(s) you choose this course or course level? Tick as many as apply:</p> <p><i>I was interested in the content</i></p> <p><i>It is an area I want to work in</i></p> <p><i>It was compulsory at my school</i></p> <p><i>It was the way the subject lines worked out</i></p> <p><i>I wanted to maximise my ATAR</i></p> <p><i>Other reason (please specify)</i></p>					
<p>Comment (Optional)</p> <p>You can make a further comment about this HSC course here:</p>					

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:

Last 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: Abbreviations used in graphs

<i>NESA Course/Subject Name</i>	<i>Abbreviation (course evaluation graphs)</i>
Human Society and its Environment (other)	HSIE*
Agriculture	Agri
Ancient History	Ancient Hist
Biology	Bio
Business Studies	Business
Chemistry	Chem
Community and Family Studies	CaFS
Creative Arts (other)	Creative*
Design and Technology	Des & Tech
Drama	Drama
Earth and Environmental Science	Earth & Env
Economics	Econ
Engineering Studies	Engi Stud
English Studies	Studies
English Standard	Standard
English Advanced	Advanced
English as an Additional Language/Dialect	EAL/D
English Extension 1	Ext 1
English Extension 2	Ext 2
Food Technology	Food
Geography	Geog
Industrial Technology	Industrial
Information Processes and Technology	IPT
Investigating Science	Investigating
Legal Studies	Legal
Mathematics Standard 1	Std. 1
Mathematics Standard 2	Std. 2
Mathematics	Maths

<i>NESA Course/Subject Name</i>	<i>Abbreviation (course evaluation graphs)</i>
Mathematics Extension 1	Ext1
Mathematics Extension 2	Ext2
Modern History	Mod Hist
History Extension	Hist Ext
Music 1	Mus 1
Music 2	Mus 2
Personal Development, Health and Physical Education	PDHPE
Physics	Physics
Science Extension	Sci Ext
Society and Culture	Society
Software Design and Development	SDD
Studies of Religion I	Relig 1
Studies of Religion II	Relig 2
Textiles and Design	Textiles
Visual Arts	Vis Art
Languages Other Than English (other)	LOTE*
Japanese Continuers	Jap Cont
Vocational Education & Training (other)	VET*
Business Services	Bus. Serv
Hospitality	Hosp.
PDHPE (other)	PDHPE*
Catholic Studies	Catholic

<i>NESA Course/Subject Name</i>	<i>Abbreviation (Motivations graphs)</i>
Agriculture	Agri
Ancient History	Anc Hist
Biology	Bio
Business Services - Subject	Bus Srv

<i>NESA Course/Subject Name</i>	<i>Abbreviation (Motivations graphs)</i>
Business Studies	Bus Stud
Chemistry	Chem
Community and Family Studies	CaFS
Construction	Construction
Dance	Dance
Design and Technology	Des & Tech
Drama - Subject	Drama
Economics	Econ
Earth and Environmental Science	Earth & Env
English Advanced	Advanced
English EAL/D	EAL/D
English Extension 1	Ext. 1
English Extension 2	Ext. 2
English Standard	Standard
English Studies	Studies
English Studies Examination	Stud. Exam
Engineering Studies	Engi
Entertainment Industry	Entertain
Food Technology	Food
French Beginners	French B
French Continuers	French C
Geography	Geog
History Extension	Hist Ext.
Hospitality - Subject	Hosp
Human Services - Subject	Human Serv
Industrial Technology	Indust Tech
Information Processes and Technology	IPT
Italian - Subject	Italian
Japanese Beginners	Jap. B

<i>NESA Course/Subject Name</i>	<i>Abbreviation (Motivations graphs)</i>
Japanese Continuers	Jap. C
Legal Studies	Legal
Mathematics	Mathematics
Mathematics Extension 1	Ext. 1
Mathematics Extension 2	Ext. 2
Mathematics Standard 1	Stand. 1
Mathematics Standard 1 Examination	Stand1 Exam
Mathematics Standard 2	Stand. 2
Modern History	Mod Hist
Music 1	Music 1
Music 2	Music 2
Music Extension	Mus Ext
Catholic Studies	Catholic
Photography, Video and Digital Imaging	Photo Vid
Sport, Lifestyle and Recreation Studies	Sport
Personal Development, Health and Physical Education	PDHPE
Physics	Physics
Retail Services - Subject	Retail
Science Extension	Extension
Investigating Science - Subject	Investigating
Software Design and Development	Software
Society and Culture	Soc & Cul
Studies of Religion I	SoR I
Studies of Religion II	SoR II
Textiles and Design	Tex & Des
Visual Arts	Visual