

OFFICE OF TASMANIAN ASSESSMENT, STANDARDS AND CERTIFICATION

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT PROCESSES REVIEW

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2018



OFFICE OF TASMANIAN
ASSESSMENT, STANDARDS
& CERTIFICATION

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT PROCESSES REVIEW 2018

The Office of Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification (TASC) has undertaken an independent review of 2017 external assessment processes.

Following a Request for Quote process, independent consultant, John Firth from Victoria and Wise Lord Ferguson Accounting & Advisory (WLF) were appointed to conduct the Review. John Firth undertook a holistic review incorporating all Terms of Reference (ToR) with particular focus on recruitment processes for sessional staff, operational logistics and timely communications. WLF specifically worked on the ToR in relation to determination of what constitutes a marking load and payment rates for sessional staff (Markers).

Both independent consultants provided reports for my consideration which included 20 recommendations from John Firth's and four recommendations from WLF against the ToR.

I accept in full, all 24 recommendations from both independent consultants.

The reports from both consultants and other [Review information](#) can be found on the TASC website.

This document combines the key findings and recommendations from both consultants' reports using the Terms of Reference as a framework and outlines an implementation timeframe for the recommendations.

The scope and [Terms of Reference for the External assessment processes review](#) were determined following consultation between TASC and key stakeholders.

- Recruitment processes for sessional staff (including Marking Coordinators, Markers and Examination Supervisor Coordinators)
- Determination of what constitutes a marking load
- Payment rates for sessional staff
- Operational logistics (catering, venue)
- Timely communications.

The scope of the Review included the requirement to consult with all key stakeholders including those directly involved in the external assessment processes – Marking Coordinators, Markers and Supervisor Coordinators.

These key sessional staff were given the maximum opportunity to contribute through state-wide consultation forums and an online survey. John Firth also conducted a series of meetings with key stakeholders including the Australian Education Union (AEU), Independent Education Union (IEU), Framework Advisory Council, Principals Reference Group, Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations (TASSO), key staff in the Department of Education who provide support for TASC's work, and both current and former key staff from TASC involved in the administration of the external assessment processes. In addition, WLF undertook detailed analysis of historical data and the online survey data in relation to marking loads and payment rates for Markers.

I thank both independent consultants and TASC stakeholders for their time and expertise in assisting with the conduct of this Review.



Katrina Beams
Executive Officer, TASC

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RECRUITMENT PROCESSES FOR SESSIONAL STAFF		
KEY FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME
<p>1. TASC was clearly required to respond to the Audit Report recommendations and those of WLF's report in March 2017. This required design of, and communication about a sensitive change to previous long-established, though technically non-compliant processes.</p>	<p>Recommendations 1 – 5 relate to proposed improvements</p> <p><u>Recommendation 1</u> Move immediately to confirm the appointments of Marking Coordinators for all courses for 2018. If there are any courses with a vacancy, they should be advertised as soon as possible.</p> <p><u>Recommendation 2</u> Refine the application process for new applicants for each of the positions available.</p> <p><u>Recommendation 3</u> Develop and maintain registers of approved Marking Coordinators, Markers and Supervisor Coordinators.</p> <p><u>Recommendation 4</u> Establish a register for Markers once Marking Coordinators are endorsed for 2018 and current Markers be asked to confirm their availability.</p> <p><u>Recommendation 5</u> For 2019 establish a revised timeline for all appointments of sessional staff associated with the external assessment process. This should include Exam Setters and Exam Critics along with all aspects of the marking process.</p>	2018/ 2019
<p>2. The timing of the changes in 2017 caused considerable difficulties for all parties. Potential applicants were faced with a new and unfamiliar process at a busy time of the year which was considerably later than in previous years and required a quick response. Moreover, the rationale for the new process wasn't clear to many, nor the requirement for the particular form of the application. Many experienced Marking Coordinators, Markers and Supervisor Coordinators were unclear about why they were being asked to undergo this new process, more than a few felt that the process wasn't respectful of their previous experience and service.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 2</u> Refine the application process for new applicants for each of the positions available.</p> <p>Specifically, TASC should develop a template which describes the evidence required to support an application especially related to academic qualifications, teaching and marking experience.</p> <p>It should allow teachers to refer to evidence already on the record through, for example, the Teachers Registration Board, Department of Education employment records. Applications from current teachers for the role of Marker should be endorsed by their school principal or equivalent. A similar template should be developed for Supervisor Coordinators and Supervisors.</p>	2018

<p>3. TASC faced resultant difficulties in approving sufficient appointments in time to meet the non-negotiable timelines of the end of year external assessment programs. To do so required TASC to draw on the professional commitment of schools and teachers to ensure that students' interests were paramount. This is true, of course, in any year but the timing of events in 2017 made an additional call on that professional commitment.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 3</u> Develop and maintain registers of approved Marking Coordinators, Markers and Supervisor Coordinators. Approval should be ongoing, subject to annual confirmation of satisfactory performance, such as is done for casual employees of the Australian Electoral Office.</p> <p>Once on the register, teachers should indicate annually their availability for the current year and any change in their qualifications, experience and employment status.</p>	<p>2018</p>
	<p><u>Recommendation 4</u> Establish a register for Markers once Marking Coordinators are endorsed for 2018 and current Markers be asked to confirm their availability.</p> <p>Updating the register and advertising for new applicants should be open by the end of August and confirmation complete by the end of Term 3 (28 September 2018).</p>	<p>2018</p>
<p>4. Supervisor Coordinators take the responsibility for ensuring that their supervisors are aware of their duties as outlined in their handbooks. Many of them conduct their own training sessions before the exam period starts. In 2017, the late appointment process made this more difficult. Restoring a more timely appointment timeline will facilitate this preparation. Consultation with Supervisor Coordinators about the most appropriate preparation of supervisors and providing for recognition of a designated assistant would assist in the smooth conduct of the examinations.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 9</u> Consult with Supervisor Coordinators about the preparation of Supervisors and recognition of a designated assistant in each examination centre.</p> <p>It should schedule a review meeting with Supervisor Coordinators at the conclusion of the examination marking process.</p>	<p>2018</p>
<p>5. Supervisor Coordinators similarly reported a lack of communication about the removal of the category of Deputy Coordinators and the addition of a new category of support supervisors, whose duties weren't clearly delineated or deemed necessary by many Coordinators. There are circumstances that arise during examinations, such as sudden illness, when the Coordinator needs to delegate his/her responsibility to one of the supervisors. In practice, many of the Coordinators informally asked one of their team to take this role.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 9</u></p>	<p>2018</p>

<p>6. The current registration form signed by Principals for the school to be recognised by TASC as an approved provider includes a requirement that the school will “make provision for release of staff as required by TASC to participate in external assessment processes (for example, marking)”.</p> <p>This means that those staff selected by TASC after applying must be released for such events as the compulsory meeting at the start of marking. In discussion on several occasions the issue was raised as to whether this could be expressed a little more directly in terms of an expectation that schools offering a pre-tertiary (Level 3 or Level 4) course should provide a teacher for marking to ensure full representation of all school sectors and all locations.</p> <p>Of course, in any given year there will be legitimate personal and professional reasons why a particular teacher would not be available but a discussion of the mutual expectations of TASC and its providers on this and related matters would be helpful.</p>	<p>Note: a recommendation was not made about this finding, however, TASC has noted the finding.</p>	<p>2019</p>
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DETERMINATION OF WHAT CONSTITUTES A MARKING LOAD

PAYMENT RATES FOR SESSIONAL STAFF

KEY FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME
<p>7. There was a lack of transparency about the move to adjust payments for markers in terms of 'full marking loads.' Maintaining this approach would have led to a number of markers who have ongoing teaching responsibilities during November being unable to participate. It is also unsustainable in terms of getting all the marking done on time and maximising the participation of teachers of these courses in the marking process.</p> <p>In the event, half loads were approved and used in 2017 and an approach that gives flexibility to Marking Coordinators in their use of Markers from varying locations and with varying commitments should be maintained. I note that this flexibility results in there being a spread of markers across the three school sectors which is broadly proportionate with the spread of enrolments. This compares favourably with many other jurisdictions.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 6</u> Draw on the analysis of marking load undertaken by WLF to establish a total workload required to mark each course and associated payment rates. (John Firth note – I have been briefed by WLF about their analysis and proposed recommendations and I believe that they are soundly based on the responses provided to the survey and the consultation meetings.)</p> <p>WLF RECOMMENDATIONS <u>Recommendation 1.1</u> Recruitment Recruitment is designed to consider the experience of the Marker, and there is appropriate testing of the capability of new applicants. A full day of compulsory Marker training is utilised to ensure consistency and quality in the marking process. There should be additional time spent with Marking Coordinators to familiarise them with the responsibilities of allocation of papers in line with the calculated marking load.</p> <p><u>Recommendation 1.2</u> Establishment of the Marking Load The Exam Setter for each course be responsible for determining how long a paper will take to mark. To ensure the reasonableness of the exam marking time, the Critic tests the amount of time taken to mark an exam through the provision of the exam paper and expected answers. Any revision to the time taken should be discussed, and agreed, with the Exam Setter. TASC management should ensure that any marking times greater than 25 minutes are reviewed for appropriateness. This process must be undertaken annually.</p>	2018/ 2019

Recommendation 1.3

Appointment process

Once the exam has been held for each course, the formula is re-run to ensure the number of FTE Marker requirements are accurate.

TASC communicates to Marking Coordinators any revisions to preliminary FTE numbers as soon as practical after the exam has been sat.

TASC make marking applicants aware that their appointment is not confirmed until the number of candidates who have sat the exam is finalised. If this is not suitable, TASC management may need to make an estimate of expected drop out rates to ensure marking positions are not oversubscribed.

Recommendation 1.4

Budgetary control

Setting an overall budget each year for sessional staff based on the Regulations applied to assumptions regarding candidate numbers (minimum and maximum range).

TASC should have the ability within the budget to determine a variable uplift for sessional staff year on year based on the target increase of candidate's year on year.

Individual cost codes should be used for each course to allow for management and monitoring of the sessional staffing budget.

OPERATIONAL LOGISTICS

KEY FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME
<p>8. The use of marking centres in Hobart and Launceston provides an opportunity for enhanced collaboration among marking teams and for greater scrutiny of marking consistency by Marking Coordinators. There were some criticisms of the physical conditions in some parts of one of the centres. Although marking centres cannot be prescribed as being the only place where marking can take place, not least because of the constraints of distance for regional markers and accessibility for teachers with continuing commitments, they do make a substantial contribution to an efficient and effective marking regime.</p> <p>The physical conditions should be conducive to effective work especially in relation to seating, space and lighting. The same comments apply to the logistics for the initial marking meetings. Insufficient catering was supplied to at least one meeting. Mistakes in delivery can happen but it is a legitimate expectation that people who are required to travel and attend an all-day meeting will be supplied with a reasonable, not lavish, standard of catering.</p> <p>The late notification to some people of their selection and scheduling of meetings also created some difficulties in booking accommodation for those who needed it. A more reasonable timeline and notice in future should alleviate this.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 10</u></p> <p>Ensure that the marking centres are appropriately set up with regard to seating, space and lighting and that appropriate catering is provided for markers required to attend all day meetings.</p>	2018
<p>9. In the course of conversations about marking, comments about the potential for greater use of information and communications technology occasionally arose. The possibility of using videoconferencing between the north and south for some training purposes was raised. This is worth exploring but the value of personal interaction especially for the initial markers 'meetings should be recognised.</p> <p>In the medium term, TASC should investigate the potential for investing in some form of online marking system, various forms of which are in use in most other states. Online marking via a form of secure network offers considerable improvements in monitoring of marking for quality</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 19</u></p> <p>In the medium term, investigate options for the introduction of online marking, drawing on the experience of those jurisdictions which are implementing it in various forms.</p>	2019 onwards

assurance, increased security by reducing the physical transportation of papers by private vehicles, enhanced opportunities for regionally located teachers to participate and more efficient processing. It is likely TASC could negotiate an agreement with one of the other members of the Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA) to gain access to an existing system.	<u>Recommendation 20</u> ...my advice would be to integrate the development and implementation plan for TRACS with the full year implementation plan for external assessment processes for 2019.	2018 – 2020
10. The scheduling of marking can be made more flexible. Other than the first three courses, all marking took place within a single week. It should be possible for marking to begin progressively over the examination period as papers are collected and collated. This will give more time for marking of courses with the highest enrolments, alleviating the time constraints of the marking period.	<u>Recommendation 7</u> Allow for the progressive scheduling of marking as papers are collected and collated.	2018
11. A related scheduling issue is the release of the examination timetable. At present, this is finalised following confirmation of final enrolments in pre- tertiary courses in Term 3. The preliminary enrolments in Term 1 could be used equally effectively to schedule examinations to minimise the number of potential clashes. All other states release their examination timetables before the end of Term 2. This provides more time for preparation and greater certainty for students and teachers.	<u>Recommendation 8</u> Finalise and publish the examination timetable before the end of Term 2 2019.	2019
12. As the number of senior secondary providers grows through the Years 11 and 12 Extension Schools initiative, so will the number of examination centres. Students at Extension Schools will expect to sit their examinations at their own schools as do the rest of the cohort. This will add to TASC's requirements to recruit both Supervisor Coordinators and Supervisors. This adds both fixed and variable costs in establishing new centres and ensuring that new Supervisor Coordinators are suitably trained and prepared.	<u>Recommendation 11</u> Confirm with the Department of Education the policy of establishing Years 11 and 12 extension schools as examination centres. Plan for the recruitment, training and support of the requisite Supervisor Coordinators and Supervisors.	2018 on-going
13. The operation of additional examination centres also provides an opportunity for students who currently travel to sit their examinations to do so at a closer location if they choose to do so. Some students will prefer to continue to travel to sit in a familiar setting, others may prefer to reduce their travel time during the examinations. In any case, the establishment of additional centres provides the option.	<u>Recommendation 12</u> Confirm and communicate processes for allowing students to nominate their preferred examination centres.	2019

<p>For this option to be exercised, TASC would need to know well in advance to ensure that the correct papers are packed and delivered to the centre where the student intends to sit the paper. This would require a registration of this intent for the student via their home school by the end of Term 3.</p> <p>The rapid growth in examination centres and, more significantly, the success of recent initiatives in substantially increasing the number of students enrolled in Level 3 and 4 courses in the TCE means that the resources made available to TASC to conduct the external assessment processes should be linked to the number of assessments that need to be administered through the cycle of external assessment.</p>		
<p>14. Notwithstanding the difficulties experienced in 2017, the commitment of all participants at all levels enabled the processing to ultimately proceed successfully. The timelines that applied created considerable stress for both TASC and their key sessional staff and are not sustainable. There is ample opportunity to refine processes and implement legally compliant appointment processes within reasonable timelines for 2018 and beyond.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 1</u> Move immediately to confirm the appointments of Marking Coordinators for all courses for 2018. If there are any courses with a vacancy, they should be advertised as soon as possible.</p>	2018
	<p><u>Recommendation 5</u> For 2019 establish a revised timeline for all appointments of sessional staff associated with the external assessment process. This should include Exam Setters and Exam Critics along with all aspects of the marking process.</p> <p>The exact timeline should be subject to further negotiation with current incumbents but, as indicated in both survey responses and consultation meetings, TASC should aim to have Marking Coordinators confirmed in Term 1, Markers before the end of Term 3 and Supervisor Coordinators by the end of Term 2.</p>	2019
	<p><u>Recommendation 20</u> Develop a two-stage implementation plan to phase in those recommendations that TASC chooses to accept. As indicated above, there is some urgency about actions that need to be taken this year to ensure a substantially smoother process and timely communications.</p>	2018/ 2019/ 2020

TIMELY COMMUNICATIONS

KEY FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME
<p>15. The Office of TASC had undergone considerable staffing changes and a number of key people were new to their roles. This added to the communication difficulties reported by many throughout the 2017 assessment process.</p> <p>A particular concern raised consistently in the survey responses and in most consultation meetings was the lack of effectiveness of the 'enquiries@tasc.tas.gov.au' email being used as the main communication channel. Many respondents reported delays or non-response to queries submitted through this channel together with a sense of anonymity in not knowing who was handling various matters at TASC.</p> <p>The experience of managing the 2017 external assessment process must be built on and lessons learnt incorporated into ongoing practice.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 13</u></p> <p>Confirm ongoing appointments to the key roles that need to be filled in the Office to administer the external assessment process in accordance with its statutory responsibilities. This includes consideration of risks associated with the increasing consultation and communication requirements recommended in this report and the increasing volume of external assessments being undertaken.</p>	2018/ 2019
	<p><u>Recommendation 14</u></p> <p>Communicate clearly to schools about how to contact the appropriate staff member in TASC quickly and effectively concerning issues that may arise related to any aspect of the conduct or marking of the examinations. TASC should clearly identify to schools the names and contact details of the key staff who are responsible for the various elements of the external assessment processes.</p>	2018
<p>16. Besides the timeliness of communications there is a broader issue of the quality and scope of communications. The lack of timely consultation with key stakeholders and key participants in the marking process prior to and during the implementation of the changed appointment processes was as frequently remarked as its timing. I understand that TASC has already moved to improve communication with key stakeholders – this is welcome and needs to be consolidated.</p> <p>As TASC implements any changes arising from this Review, it needs to incorporate more substantial and timely consultation with Marking Coordinators, Markers and Examination Supervisor Coordinators. This will ensure that the processes are appropriately informed by the experience and expertise of the practitioners and that implementation is consistently applied.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 15</u></p> <p>Establish a timely schedule of meetings with Marking Coordinators and Examination Supervisor Coordinators to provide a platform for consultation about implementation of proposed changes to processes arising from this Review. It may be possible to utilise some existing meetings or it may be necessary to schedule an additional meeting.</p> <p>This should include appropriate opportunities for both groups to evaluate their experiences at the end of the annual marking process. It is crucial to reinforce the mutuality of interest and responsibility of the Office of TASC and its key sessional staff in delivering the highest quality external assessment processes.</p>	2018

<p>17. There is ample evidence provided through the Review process of the underlying goodwill and commitment of all participants to the provision of a fair, accurate and reliable external assessment process for all Tasmanian senior secondary students. The Review was welcomed as a recognition by TASC of the need to learn from 2017. This was reinforced by the openness of the responses I received. Nonetheless, this support was accompanied by clear expectations that the Review will lead to TASC making significant response to any recommendations. The good faith exhibited by many in their participation in 2017 and response to the Review is not without limit. There is a widespread understanding that TASC was required to change its appointment processes. This is accompanied by an expectation that both the timeliness and appropriateness of communication will be improved, that the application processes will be streamlined and that TASC will enhance the quality of its collaboration with its key sessional staff.</p>	<p><u>Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 20</u></p>	
<p>18. I received considerable evidence that both Marking Coordinators and Supervisor Coordinators employ innovative and creative responses to work with their teams to ensure quality, within the guidelines provided by TASC. This might include various approaches to inducting new markers, ensuring consistent application of marking guides and dealing with exigencies as they arise during examinations. This is an admirable attribute and one which TASC could make more use of by enabling Marking Coordinators and Supervisor Coordinators greater opportunity to inform each other and TASC of their practice. A common criticism of the events of late 2017 centred on the lack of consultation in shaping and introducing changes. TASC could work more with both groups and markers more generally as they continuously monitor and review their practice. Consultation obviously includes representative stakeholder groups such as unions, principal groups, TASSO but also goes to developing a more collaborative approach in working with key sessional staff involved in and responsible for very important processes.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 15</u></p>	<p>2018/ 2019</p>

<p>19. Related to the issues of consultation and communication that were regularly raised in discussions was the need for greater clarity about roles and responsibilities. Marking Coordinators are generally well known by the teachers of their courses and they can come to take up a de facto 'course adviser' role for teachers seeking advice about a range of matters, sometimes extending beyond the examination marking. There are various responsibilities for course development, changes to courses, examination specifications, examination setting, marking and reporting for both internal and external assessment. Some of these responsibilities are exercised by the Department of Education which, for example manages the moderation processes. This distribution of responsibilities requires close collaboration between TASC and the Department and clear communication from both to schools. From the teacher's perspective, they are teaching a single course and they manage the integration of the various components for their students. It is incumbent on TASC and the Department to coordinate their efforts to ensure that teachers receive complete, accurate and timely information about all aspects of the course they are teaching.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 18</u> Collaborate with the Department of Education to ensure that schools receive clear, consistent, accurate and timely information about all aspects of internal and external assessment for all courses.</p>	<p>2018 onwards</p>
<p>20. Constructive responses to these and other observations are certainly possible and have in some instances already begun. Nonetheless, the sort of collaboration in continuous improvement that I am proposing requires a commitment of resourcing both in financial and personnel terms. The structure and clarification of key roles related to its statutory responsibilities in the Office of TASC need to be consolidated as soon as possible, consistent with best practice appointment processes.</p> <p>As indicated above, transparency with stakeholders about positions of responsibility for key work and effective means of communication by the people in these positions are central to establishing mutual confidence between TASC and its key stakeholders in schools and the community.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 13</u> Confirm ongoing appointments to the key roles that need to be filled in the Office to administer the external assessment process in accordance with its statutory responsibilities. This includes consideration of risks associated with the increasing consultation and communication requirements recommended in this report and the increasing volume of external assessments being undertaken.</p>	<p>2018</p>
	<p><u>Recommendation 16</u> Establish some key performance measures related to key aspects of assessing and certifying students' work such as meeting timelines for appointments, responding to queries, delivering results.</p>	<p>2018/ 2019</p>
	<p><u>Recommendation 17</u> Share its performance on these measures with key stakeholders to deepen the mutual commitments to high quality assessment and certification that underpin its operations.</p>	<p>2018/19</p>



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