

Report about the ESSA 2007 teacher survey

In November 2007, 59 315 Year 8 students in New South Wales participated in the Essential Secondary Science Assessment (ESSA). These students were drawn from 466 government schools; 62 Catholic sector schools and 55 independent sector schools.

Teachers from participating schools were asked to complete a survey. The following pages provide a summary of the results and comments received from over 300 teachers, together with some responses from the ESSA Unit (provided in blue).

For further information regarding the ESSA 2007 teacher survey, please contact:

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ESSA 2007 teacher survey results		Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Percentages have been adjusted for responses of 'no opinion'.					
These results were collected between December 2007 and February 2008, following the ESSA 2007 test.					
1	The ESSA test related to the science teaching programs in my school.	31	66	2	0
2	The ESSA test related to Stage 4 of the <i>Science Years 7–10 Syllabus</i> .	37	60	2	0
3	The ESSA test was different from tests I use with my classes.	18	54	23	4
4	The ESSA test covered a range of difficulty appropriate for Year 8 students.	22	67	8	2
5	The stimulus magazine provided suitable contexts for Year 8 students.	31	64	3	1
6	The extended response tasks capture important information about students' understandings.	19	71	7	1
7	The test length of 80 minutes was appropriate for Year 8 students to complete the tasks.	21	57	16	4
8	The type and number of tasks in the ESSA test were appropriate for Year 8 students.	17	63	14	2
9	The results from the test will provide important information for students and parents.	26	61	9	2
10	The results from the test will provide useful information for faculty programs.	33	56	9	2
11	The results from the test will provide useful information for planning classroom and other assessment.	28	59	10	2
12	The test and the results from the test will provide useful information for improving my classroom practice.	24	61	11	2
13	I intend to use the stimulus magazine articles as a classroom resource.	34	54	9	1
14	I will look for curriculum support resources and professional learning activities related to ESSA.	31	55	11	2

Summary of teacher comments and ESSA responses

15 *Did you experience any administrative problems in the test? Yes/no/comments*

Most of the respondents did not have administrative problems. Of those respondents who had problems, most referred to the resources required such as the availability of the *School Manual of Administrative Procedures and Teacher Handbook*. Other comments referred to the administration surrounding special provisions.

At least one School Manual of Administrative Procedures and Teacher Handbook is forwarded to all government schools and other registered participating schools in August. The package is addressed to the principal. The number of copies sent is determined by the size of the school's Year 8 cohort. The manual is also available on the ESSA Internet website and the ESSA intranet website.

The School Manual of Administrative Procedures and Teacher Handbook also includes detailed information about the administration surrounding special provisions. A form is provided in the manual for ordering special test materials in September. It is important to mention that late receipt of special provisions requests from schools, particularly related to the visually impaired, increases the risk of late arrival of test materials to schools.

Questions regarding students requiring special provisions that cannot be resolved by the school's Learning Support Team should be referred to Louise Cullen, Coordinator Sensory Programs, 9244 5587.

16 *Was the timing of the ESSA test (27 November 2007) appropriate? Yes/no/comments*

Many of the respondents agreed that the timing was appropriate. Comments varied and included reference to the lateness of the test in terms of the school year and that some students would be on holidays or that the school would have completed all their testing and that this might mean students would not take it seriously. Concerns raised were completion of the syllabus, hot weather, yearly exams, closeness to holidays and other school activities or clashes. Others commented that the later the test, the better to ensure that students had completed the Stage 4 programs.

The timing of the release of the reports raised comment. Suggestions were made to run the test early in the school year for the Year 9 cohort.

If the test is to be conducted at the end of Year 8 (last week of November or later), to capture student achievement of all of the Stage 4 syllabus outcomes, it is not possible to complete the marking process, data capture, and analysis and conversion to a software package, then release the data before March of the following year. The timing of these processes is affected by the two to three week break over Christmas when contractors are unavailable.

Some alternatives include having the test even later, for example the first week in December with marking taking place in the January holidays, or having the test in late February or early March for the Year 9 cohort.

17 *When should marking occur? a) month b) time and comment*

Most of the respondents selected December as the month that marking should occur. Many selected after school hours as the time for marking to occur. Comments included reference to the timing of the release of the reports and suggestions that marking in school hours with teacher relief should be considered as an option. Comments were also received regarding the issue of remote marking being available for teachers outside the Sydney metropolitan area.

December marking seems to be the option of preference. Marking during school hours is not possible for December 2008. Marking outside the metropolitan area was trialled in December 2006 and has been proposed in a small number of regional areas for December 2008. We are more confident that the issues of OHS have been overcome. Invitations to participate will be sent to schools by the contractor, ACER, in the middle of the year.

18 *Any other comments?*

Comments regarding the length of the test varied but most expressed that students completed the test in plenty of time. However, a significant number believed that the time was too short.

The test length is currently 80 minutes with a discretionary period of 5 minutes more or less. It is important to note that this time period should not include any time taken for the teacher to give instructions (which are included in the School Manual of Administrative Procedures and Teacher Handbook) or for the time taken for students to do the practice items. Similarly, time can be taken after the 80 minute period for the students to do the survey. It is also important to note that an extra 5 minutes per half hour may be given to students accessing special provisions such as a reader or large print. The ESSA Unit will give careful consideration to the time provided for the test during the trial process in March 2008.

Curriculum concerns raised by teachers included: that some questions were too specific; that it was assessing two years' worth of work; some definitions and words within items were not appropriate; that the level of understanding was higher than Stage 4 level and that some stimulus material was focused on Stage 5 content.

The stimulus material is providing context and it is the intention to include material that is appropriate for students around fourteen years of age. The items have been selected as appropriate for students at the end of Year 8. All the items have been reviewed by teachers. Some items are at a high level of difficulty, just as some are at a low level but they are at a level considered by the teachers who write the items and those who review them as appropriate for Year 8.

One of the purposes of ESSA is to inform teaching and learning. Teaching programs that provide students with an opportunity to achieve all the outcomes in Stage 4 of the science syllabus would provide appropriate preparation for the ESSA test. The ESSA test is intended to provide data to teachers about their students' learning. In this way, it can support programming and provide critical feedback to assessment for learning practices.

Many teachers expressed concern about the literacy level of ESSA. These concerns included that having a low level of literacy would affect a student's ability to do the test. Some teachers commented that there was too much reading and that the articles were too long. They felt that ESSA was testing science through literacy and that high levels of literacy were required to do the test.

Syllabus outcomes include accessing information from identified secondary sources (ESSA magazine) as well as evaluating the relevance of data and information (ESSA magazine) and drawing conclusions based on information available (ESSA magazine). These outcomes are, for example, as much part of the syllabus as observing properties of substances using scientific models and theories or describing energy changes and the action of forces. Assessing these outcomes must therefore be as relevant and important.

There is no doubt that a student's literacy level will impact on their learning in science. The science concepts that form the basis of the syllabus are described and explained using the specific (technical) language of science. While students can engage with these concepts at an iconic or sensory level to assist, support and develop their understandings, performance at the Stage 4 level requires that students demonstrate their understanding at the concrete symbolic level using the scientific or technical language as described in the syllabus. Students who have difficulty demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of science concepts and the processes of science using written scientific language will no doubt show low level of achievement on ESSA. These students will be assessed at the school level using a variety of tasks and their performance on these tasks will be reported appropriately.

Students for whom English is a second language (ESL) and who are recent arrivals will experience difficulty with the literacy but it is important to note that, in general, their level of performance on ESSA (as it is on ELLA) improves after the first ESL stage to higher performance levels than students from an English speaking background (ESB). It is also important to note that very recent arrivals can be exempt from participating in ESSA.

The level of literacy required to participate in the test is considered appropriate for students aged about thirteen to fourteen years, after two years of secondary schooling. This is determined by experts in the field of test development and literacy. The mentor to the ESSA program in this area is Professor Len Unsworth, Professor in English and Literacies Education, School of Education Director, Centre for Research in English and Multiliteracies Education, University of New England.

A number of teachers commented that students enjoyed the test, that the stimulus was well presented and that the test gave a more prescriptive direction to teachers. Teachers stated that students were engaged, that some material was challenging and that the test was fair and appropriate.

One of the purposes of ESSA is to raise the profile of science in the school community and the community beyond school.