

Student assessment and reporting

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The direction of assessment and reporting policies has long been influenced by political imperatives, many of which are not always linked to sound educational principles. The Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania believes that assessment and reporting policies and practices must be developed by education authorities in consultation with the teaching profession to ensure that such practices are valid, reliable, fair, equitable, and motivate students to further develop their learning.
- 1.2 The current environment in which assessment and reporting changes are occurring is characterised by a number of major aspects. These include:
 - increasing federal government intervention by linking compliance with government agendas to funding;
 - a significantly increased expectation of continuous assessment and reporting and individualisation of student learning programs;
 - increased focus on reporting on school performance and school improvement data;
 - misuse of data by the media;
 - criticisms of teachers as part of political agendas;
 - increased focus on national testing.
- 1.3 IEU Victoria Tasmania believes that it is important that approaches to assessment aim to achieve a systematic and integrated model that links assessment with curriculum and pedagogy based on contemporary theories of learning and cognition. The assessment of students should entail a multi-faceted approach which combines a number of alternatives in a variety of configurations. No single instrument of assessment can yield an adequate evaluation outcome.
- 1.4 The central role of teachers must be respected in the development and implementation of changes

of assessment and reporting. Systems and schools must ensure that there are adequate resources devoted to developing and maintaining best practice in assessment and reporting. This must include appropriate time and access to quality professional development to enable teachers to continue to develop skills in assessment.

- 1.5 The workload implications of assessment and reporting policies and practices, including the collection and recording of data must be central to the resourcing of schools and the allocation of individual teacher release time and other support. Testing, recording of data and reporting must not impact in a negative way on the time available for quality teaching and learning.

2. Assessment

2.1 Purposes of Assessment

- 2.1.1 The central purpose of student assessment in schools is to gather, analyse and reflect on evidence in order to make informed and consistent judgements aimed at bringing about improvement in student learning.
- 2.1.2 In education there are a number of specific purposes for which assessment is used, which include:
 - (i) individual student reporting to parents and students, and through them to potential employers and other education providers;
 - (ii) for diagnostic purposes within the school;
 - (iii) to inform curriculum development and programs;
 - (iv) for system self-monitoring aimed at improving educational provision and outcomes;
 - (v) national and international comparisons.

2.1.3 Whatever the purposes of particular assessments are, the methods used and the analysis of the assessment information must meet tests of reliability, validity and fairness. Data collected for one purpose is often inappropriate for another purpose. The Union does not accept that there can be one generalised test or any single assessment instrument that can achieve several evaluation purposes simultaneously. The purpose of any assessment or test must be clearly specified and evaluated in the light of that purpose and the results used only for the stated purpose.

2.2 Principles for Assessment

2.2.1 IEU Victoria Tasmania believes that the following principles should guide the development and use of assessment instruments:

- (i) Planning - Assessment methods should be planned as an integral part of course developments and be undertaken in a manner which is supportive of the learning process;
- (ii) Assessment processes must be reliable, fair and equitable - which includes catering for a range of student learning styles and removing cultural bias;
- (iii) Authenticity – based on an understanding of how students learn and requiring them to apply their relevant skills, knowledge and understanding to real-world challenges. Assessment must involve the examination of the processes as well as the products of learning;
- (iv) Alignment with the curriculum and, over a set of assessments, representative of the full curriculum. Assessment practices are integral to the teaching and learning process and must be matched to the teaching and learning goals;
- (v) Relevance - the assessment ensures that tasks are realistic, meaningful and worthwhile;
- (vi) Diversity – effective assessment practices involve a range of measures and provide students with opportunities to display their knowledge, skills, understandings and attitudes.

2.3 Standardised Testing

2.3.1 IEU Victoria Tasmania expresses major concerns about mass standardised testing of student achievement such as

through basic skills tests. In the light of international and national research, IEU Victoria Tasmania remains opposed to such practices because they lead to a lowering of the quality of education and the overall level of student achievement; and because of the dubious educational validity of the instruments of testing.

2.3.2 The union's specific concerns in relation to standardised testing include:

- (i) Reliance on external testing as a measure of school performance of efficiency negates the principle of accountability to parents and to the local community;
- (ii) In turn, this is likely to produce a narrowing of the curriculum with less emphasis on curriculum content; and less consideration of such functions as creativity, problem-solving, personal development and social development which are socially and individually beneficial;
- (iii) A focus on minimum levels of competency tends to lead to a neglect of efforts to achieve the highest possible standard of achievement;
- (iv) An emphasis on externally-based testing can deskill teachers by downgrading the need for, and the value of, professional judgements;
- (v) The public availability of a bank of test results creates the possibility of invidious and inaccurate comparisons between schools, sectors, regions, states/territories and different socio-economic groups;
- (vi) The funding of standardised testing is a questionable use of resources;
- (vii) Test results do not measure the overall effectiveness of schooling.

2.4 Assessment and Post School Selection Procedures

2.4.1 IEU Victoria Tasmania supports the use of a broader range of information for selection for tertiary entrance rather than the sole reliance on examination scores. Such scores cannot accurately measure the overall level of individual student achievement in a complex learning program; nor can they provide an accurate guide to future potential.

2.4.2 Examination scores indicate little about a student's capacity or willingness to work in a specific occupation and are thus unsuitable as devices for selection into employment.

3. Reporting

3.1 The primary purpose of reporting

The primary purpose of reporting is to provide meaningful information so as to improve student learning. To do this the reporting process must be an integral part of the teaching and learning process. These processes must enable effective monitoring of student learning and provide ongoing, constructive feedback to students and their parents about progress. Reporting process should enhance students' own capacities to reflect on their learning, their successes and areas for further learning.

3.2 Teacher judgement and expertise

Reporting should be based on teacher judgements which are themselves based on sound evidence and teachers' shared understanding of the standards that apply. The development of reporting policies and practices must involve teachers and value their professional expertise and experience. Schools and systems must allocate sufficient resources to both adequate time release for reporting and for professional development to enhance teachers' skills and knowledge.

3.3 Reporting Frameworks

Reporting mechanisms which are used to allocate student gradings or achievement levels must be linked cohesively to the specific curriculum and student learning goals (including curriculum standards and outcome statements), which have been the basis for the teaching and learning program for that student.

The reporting framework must enable the most accurate and clear picture of the student's progress to be reported and allow for a variety of reporting methods.

IEU Victoria Tasmania does not believe that student cohort ranking/quartile reporting provides appropriate and meaningful information about a student's performance or achievement of learning goals and outcomes.

3.4 Involvement of parents

IEU Victoria Tasmania believes that parents should have access to timely, meaningful information about their children's progress and are entitled to comprehensive and accessible reports.

Parents should have the opportunity to be involved in the development of reporting processes within their schools. Reporting processes in schools should facilitate the involvement and understanding of their parents from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

3.5 The collection and reporting of general student performance data

- 3.5.1 The principal objective in collecting data on student performance must be to improve information and knowledge available in order to enhance the teaching and learning of students and the allocation of resources to achieve equitable outcomes in education.
- 3.5.2 Educational data is collected for a range of purposes, including:
- (i) for diagnostic purposes within a class or school;
 - (ii) for reporting to students and parents;
 - (iii) for monitoring the distribution of educational resources;
 - (iv) to facilitate effective planning of educational resources including monitoring participation of different groups of students, by specific groupings;
 - (v) to develop educational targets and priorities;
 - (vi) for other purposes related to system accountability;
 - (vii) to monitor the post school destinations of students;
 - (viii) to establish longitudinal data of student participation and outcomes.
- 3.5.3 Notwithstanding the various purposes stated above, the collection of students' individual, class and school performance data must:
- (i) normally be based on sample and not on census if used for state and national monitoring purposes;
 - (ii) not use any instrument that is not demonstrably equitable, fair, reliable and valid;
 - (iii) not put undue stress on students through time or pressure;
 - (iv) not be overly intrusive into classroom teaching time or the school curriculum;
 - (v) require minimum impact on teacher workload. Any increase in workload must be compensated for by additional teacher release time and other support;
 - (vi) not be released to others without permission of parents;
 - (vii) be confidential. There must be no publication of results in ways which allow comparison of individuals or schools in league tables or other inappropriate, misleading and invalid ways;
 - (viii) not be used in isolation for school monitoring;

- (ix) not be used for teacher evaluation nor performance payment;
- (x) not be used to reward those schools which scored highly or to direct punitive measures against those which do poorly;
- (xi) be agreed to by the relevant education unions, schools and teachers generally.

4. Teacher consultation and involvement

- 4.1 The development and implementation of assessment and reporting policies and practices must:
- (i) Respect and involve the expertise of teachers and have their support and full confidence;
 - (ii) Allocate appropriate timelines and resources for consultation and implementation of any changes in policy and practice.

5. Resourcing and professional development

- 5.1 The capacity and skill of teachers to provide fair, consistent and accurate assessments of student achievement is central to effective classroom teaching and to the reporting and monitoring of educational outcomes for students.
- 5.2 Education systems and schools must provide ongoing resourced opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively together and have access to quality professional development.
- 5.3 Education authorities and systems must ensure that teachers have access to quality assessment and reporting resources and materials.

6. Teacher workload

- 6.1 The effective management of reasonable teacher workloads is central to the provision of quality teaching, assessment and reporting. New approaches in planning, assessment and reporting must not increase the workload of teachers. It is incumbent on school authorities to resource and integrate new approaches without causing increases in overall in teacher workload and /or subsequent reductions in teaching and learning time in the classroom.
- 6.2 IEU Victoria Tasmania believes that there must be a systematic review of the growing requirements around individual student programming. The current expectations are leading to excessive testing, data collection and reporting. This is reducing the time available for teaching and increasing the stress and workload of teachers.

Endorsed by Annual Conference November 2006