



VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

1. What do you believe should be the three most important elements of standardised testing in Australia?

The VATE members surveyed believe standardised testing should be constructed in ways that recognise the diversity of the student cohort and equity issues involved in that. It should provide schools with meaningful data in a timely fashion to enable them to improve student learning. It should be promoted as a form of formative assessment, part of a rich matrix of assessments for measuring student growth, improvement and achievement

1. What is your response to staging NAPLAN reporting to allow for a faster return of results for components other than writing (which would come at a later time)?

Thirty-seven submissions expressed views that, in some way, supported staging NAPLAN reporting. A number of respondees, however, suggested that the issue is largely with the tests themselves and how they are used. Irritation was expressed at the disruption to students caused by internet problems. Other views reflected concerns that this proposal could de-emphasise the importance of writing as a key skill (important given the way VCE exams and much internal assessment are conducted at present). There was concern that staging suggests this whole thing is a competition; the emphasis should be less on results and more on overall growth.

2. Currently, NAPLAN tests are sat in May each year. The interim report suggested that one possible change would be to shift the test to earlier in the year. In your view, would this be a positive change?

Thirty-one respondents agreed that testing earlier would be a positive change. Six of these added a variety of qualifications to their agreements with the proposal. Thirteen respondents said that this would not be a positive change. A number from the latter group expressed concern about an already busy, and often short Term 1 which primarily focuses on transition matters. Those who agreed with the proposal largely embraced the opportunities to know earlier where students sit academically in class and to have a better time frame to respond to this data. Other comments suggested that testing earlier is not where the focus should be. Making the writing task's purpose clearer and meaningful, in particular, is more important. Assessment here should reflect a more holistic approach and reward student approaches and efforts in a much more differentiating fashion.

3. One area they are particularly looking at is the writing component. What improvements would you suggest be made to the writing component of NAPLAN and why?

Respondents want a less formulaic, less artificial and more "natural" writing task. They call for a greater range of topics and styles/forms of writing, to reduce teaching to the test. They argue for topics that are topical, relevant to students' lives and age-appropriate. Choice is of utmost importance. They require good writing to be rewarded, not "convoluted words" and desire a holistic approach to marking that captures the strength of a piece overall. Tasks and assessment need to be meaningful and aligned



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with “real” good writing. Students should demonstrate 21st century learning, not merely the skills in grammar and spelling privileged in the current closed and limited task. Writing should be valued for its power to communicate, and for the development of students’ own voices; NAPLAN, in contrast, values technical detail and “odd” structures that then need to be unlearned.

4. From your perspective, what should NAPLAN data be used for, who should it be reported to and how should this happen?

The respondents believe that there needs to be a significant cultural shift in the way that NAPLAN data is used and reported. The data should be reported to schools and systems, but should be decoupled from performance reviews for all educators. Using NAPLAN data to review staff performance creates a climate that pressures educators to teach to the test. Data should not be publicly reported through My School, as it can be readily misinterpreted and used to make ill-informed judgements about schools and further entrenching social stratifications. NAPLAN data should also only ever be presented alongside other data sets in order to triangulate the results. Primacy should always be given to the richest data source – teacher judgement – as it is informed by close, ongoing contact with students.

5. From your perspective, what benefits and disadvantages do you see with moving to a sample approach?

Respondents were split on the concept of sampling. Those who saw the advantage of sampling stated that, as not every student would need to participate in every round of testing, sampling would be cheaper, easier and less disruptive to the teaching and learning program; that it would lessen the burden on schools; that it would provide a necessary snapshot of the cohort's skills, knowledge and abilities. Those opposed to sampling tended to be those philosophically opposed to NAPLAN itself, although a core who held this view tended to state 'one in all in' approach. That NAPLAN is only effective if everyone is tested. Further to this, a few respondents felt that the present universal testing regime should remain in place as the data was used to inform teaching and drive the curriculum.

6. If a sampling approach was adopted, should schools who are not in the sample be able to opt-in to participate?

“What's the point of a national test that isn't national?” Respondents heavily favoured the ability of schools to opt-in, by more than 2:1. Those in favour of opting-in again cited the fact that available data may inform teaching. This seemed to be a recurring theme. Despite the perceived limitations of NAPLAN, the data can be used to track the progress of students. It must be noted that a few of those opposed to the opt-in clause in fact opposed sampling. “No sampling approach should be used.” Further to this, those opposed to opting-in felt that data could be misapplied in such cases or alternatively or by extension, the ulterior motive would be for school promotion rather than to improve student outcomes.



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7. If you could make only one improvement to standardised testing in Australia, what would it be?

The VATE responses suggest that there are many specific ways VATE members feel the standardised testing such as NAPLAN could be improved, especially a reconsideration of the writing task. The overriding concern was that there needs to be a promotional strategy which emphasises the 'low stakes' intention of the testing, that is to assist schools to develop programs to improve performance in literacy and numeracy and not to offer a definitive assessment of school individual student performance. Publishing results on the MySchool website, school advertising and 'league tables' in the media should be curtailed or prohibited.