

BSSS Student Newsletter

Semester Two 2024



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Acknowledgements

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True Blue, painting on canvas

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Wireframe diagrams from the Student App development team.

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Would you like to see your work in this publication? Talk with your teachers, or email bsssenquiries@act.gov.au



The ACT Board of Senior Secondary studies acknowledges Country and the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which we live, learn and work; the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and other families and groups who have an ongoing connection to the land.

Oh no, I think I might need to change my academic package!

If you think you need to change your academic package, talk with your school's pastoral care or certification team ASAP. They are best placed to help you out and plan your package so that you can make changes but still fulfil the requirements of the certificate. Here's some ideas to get you started with that conversation.

So, you may have picked the wrong academic package. There are lots of reasons why students might need to change their academic package. Such as:

- Unrealistic subject choices
- Changing your goal or planned endpoint
- Mental or physical wellbeing
- Changes in your circumstances, like where you live and who you live with
- Pregnancy or childbirth

There are different rules for changes to your package based on when you want to make the change, and what type of package you are studying.

The good news:

- The ACT works on a semesterised system. This means that you can move classes each semester, or even each term if your school has the resources to facilitate this.
- You can build courses at different times in your senior secondary study. For example, if you studied English and Literature in the same semester, you will receive 2.0 points at the end of the semester – an English/Literature minor. If you studied Physics at the start of Year 11, gave it a rest and then decided to pick it back up at the end of Year 12, you will receive 2.0 points as well – a minor. The time gap doesn't matter.
- If everything doesn't work out, there are flexible package options. For instance, you can study the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate over 5 years if you need to.
- If you don't graduate with your cohort (the people in your year group), you can go to CIT and apply for an abridged ACT Senior Secondary Certificate over a year.

The caveats:

- You need a set combination of course types and points to get a senior secondary certificate. You may be able to change classes each term, but you might not be able to get a senior secondary certificate or a TES if you don't have the right number and arrangement of units and courses.
- You need to do at least half of your package at the school where you intend to graduate from.
- Your school is allowed to say you need to do certain courses to study with them.
- If you are trying to start a new major, you need time to complete it.

If you think you need to change your academic package, talk with your school's pastoral care or certification team ASAP. They are best placed to help you out and plan your package. It can be harder to change if you have gone a long way down a particular path.

How can I help reduce stress about needing to change my academic package?

One way to help reduce stress is to make a realistic plan for what you might do if you don't achieve your main goal. You might start by checking what UAC has to say about pathways, <https://www.uac.edu.au/media-centre/news/pathways-to-your-dream-degree>, or googling "what if I don't get into [course name]" and you'll find a lot of resources – for example, many universities offer alternative entry pathways into law. Your careers team can help you start this, or you can use resources on the internet such as those provided by UAC or Year 13 to see what programs are available.

A realistic plan might start from points like these:

- I didn't get the ATAR to get into my chosen degree. I will start an alternative degree and transfer.

- I didn't get an ATAR at all. I'll keep working towards my VET diploma and use that to apply for university.
- I could do a pathways course into university, rather than a traditional ATAR route. (Want to see what a pathways course is? UAC explains it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7i9JF6qo_4)
- I've decided that I'm going to explore working in my chosen career field (e.g., you might be a support staff member), and then if I like what I'm doing, I'll apply for university as a mature age student.
- I could apply to the Australian Government School Leaver Program and try out different roles: <https://www.apsjobs.gov.au/s/career-pathways-home/career-pathways-program/australian-government-school-leaver-program-MCQZ3PDAQUWNGNJC7EGC5JLS4I3Y>

Another way to reduce stress is to talk with trusted adults in your life about their pathways to their careers. You will most likely find at least one person you know who didn't get into their first choice of further education but still love what they do.

You might even find people who are in jobs that didn't exist when they were in school – for example, social media managers, app developers, UX designers, drone operators, sustainability consultants, cloud computing specialists, eSports players, or even genetic counsellors.

In the office of the BSSS, we all made our way to education by different pathways – from astrophysicists to actors, police and army, trade, researchers, and even working in a flour factory! Keep looking; you'll find a path that suits you.

From the Student Forum: A summary of Package Types

TES = Tertiary Entrance Statement

Everyone gets the same certificate, TES students receive an extra qualification.

You can do T subjects as an A student. For example someone doing an electrical ASBA can do a T math class to aid their course.

T Package

T Package + AST gets you an ATAR/Tertiary Admission.

If you start a T package you can change to an accredited package.

If you are thinking about university (even if it is a small option) choose a T Package.

If unsure about what university degree to do, do a wide range of classes to cover university prerequisites.

If you are aiming for a certain degree/career choose courses that will help you get there.

A T package is not heaps harder than an accredited package, and you may be in the same class as people doing a different package.






A Package

Gets you a year 12 certificate but not an admission rank into university.

Once started it is near impossible to 'catch up' (while still in college) to gain an ATAR (going from A to T is very difficult).

Is there a way to move to a T package from an A package while still graduating on time? Yes, but by the beginning of Term 2 of Year 11.

Academic Options that you might choose

 <p>A course: a course for anyone studying Year 11 and 12</p> <p>T course: a course for anyone studying Year 11 and 12 who wants to go to university</p> <p>M course: a course for anyone studying Year 11 and 12 who meets specific intellectual disability criteria</p>	 <p>E unit credit: vocational education that is studied separately to A/T/M courses, often through an external provider or an Australian School-based Apprenticeship.</p> <p>W unit: units that recognise time spent on the job when completing an ASbA or some other external vocational qualifications.</p> <p>V: an A, T or M course which includes optional vocational competencies will have a V next to the course name.</p>	 <p>R unit: study that is recreational or community based</p>  <p>H course: a course studied through a university while you are still at school.</p>	<p>Certification</p> <p>Senior Secondary Certificate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 units of study • a minimum of 4 A, T, M, H or E courses • 3 different course areas • an English course <p>Senior Secondary Certificate with an ATAR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 units of study • At least 3 majors and 3 minors or four majors and 1 minor • at least 3 majors and 1 minor classified T or H • an English course • 3 different course areas • undertake the AST 				
 <p>Course Patterns</p> <table> <tr> <td>● Minor: 2 semesters of an A, T, M, H or E course</td> <td>● Major: 3.5 semesters of an A, T, M or E course</td> <td>● Major-Minor: 5.5 semesters of an A, T, M or E course</td> <td>● Double Major: 7 semesters of an A, T, M or E course</td> </tr> </table>				● Minor: 2 semesters of an A, T, M, H or E course	● Major: 3.5 semesters of an A, T, M or E course	● Major-Minor: 5.5 semesters of an A, T, M or E course	● Double Major: 7 semesters of an A, T, M or E course
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What's this VET credit thing and how does it work?

If you're in Year 11 and completing an Australian School-based Apprenticeship (ASbA), you may have seen the credit for your achieved competencies start to show up on your academic record.

How does it get there? If you are employed by an ACT business, Skills Canberra tells the Office of the BSSS what competencies you've achieved, the nominal hours for these competencies are worked out, and then for every 100 nominal hours, you will be awarded 1.0 External VET Credit (E) units. If you are employed by an NSW business, you will need to provide a transcript of your achieved competencies from your RTO to your school who will apply for your credit.

Nominal hours

VET hours are worked out differently to the way we work out A and T course hours. In A and T courses, you must account for/be present for 55 hours of study to be eligible to receive a 1.0 unit.

VET courses have lots of different patterns of study, and different face-to-face engagement. To account fairly for these differences, we use nominal hours.

Nominal means "in name only". These hours are hours that you are *assumed* to have spent in learning a competency, and they were worked out by specialists and are used in contexts where it's important to have a standard of how many hours someone spends on a competency. Nominal hours are listed in the Victorian Purchasing Guide.

Nominal hours cover things like time you spend thinking, studying, or practicing that are hard to keep a log of, but that are necessary in building your skills. They aren't "real" hours in the sense that they're not timetabled and you didn't have to keep an attendance record, but they are "real" in the sense that you likely took this time to learn the competency. There will be slight differences between different people, which is why this single standard is used.

Who do I speak with about my VET study?

You can speak with your RTO, or your school's VET coordinator.

The BSSS Student Forum on Feedback

The BSSS Student Forum is a group of student representatives from each senior secondary school in the ACT who give feedback and advice to the Office of the BSSS. In the latest meeting, we asked students for their thoughts about the feedback that they get in their classes, and we thought we'd share this with you, and some policy guidance to help you!

Most of the forum preferred individual, written feedback, with detailed comments. Some also liked individual verbal feedback, finding that they engaged more with it. Very few people find general comments, or whole-class only feedback to be helpful.

What the forum said: how you use your feedback

We have reproduced some of the answers from the student forum so you can compare how you use your feedback to how students in other schools use theirs.

- I just read and reflect on it.
- Preferably I am able to discuss an annotated copy of my completed assignment which I can then refer back to for structural or ideological notes.
- I use it when doing my following assessments.
- I use my feedback to better improve my performance in the upcoming assignments and help understand what I might've done wrong.
- I use feedback in order to improve in similar tasks. When I look back on my feedback I try to look at the structural and general feedback for overall improvement.
- I read over it a few times while I do my other assignments so I can try avoid what I did wrong.
- I apply my feedback to further learning, study habits, and methodology in tackling tasks and assessments.
- I take out key points made about my work (positive and constructive) and apply it to the next assignment.
- to learn and use in my future assessments, improve my work -structure, language etc.
- I use to it change how I will do the next assessment. It helps me learn how to improve.
- I apply it to future assignments and refer back to it when I need motivation.
- Look over it and see as to what part of the assessment did not go so well. As well as how to improve before the next assessment task is due.

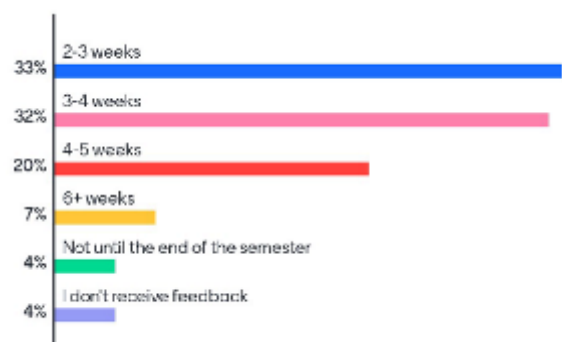
- To correct mistakes made in previous assessment tasks and to improve the overall quality of my work.
- To apply that feedback into further improvement. To gain a picture of how I'm tracking and performing in the subject. To understand what I need to do to reach my goals in that subject.
- I use feed back to see what I've done well but also to see where i need to be more specific/ improve which is where detailed feedback helps.

There's some great ideas here. Things you might like to consider doing with your feedback:

- Look for common themes. Do you see the same types of comment in your work across a subject, or across different subjects?
- Look at the positive feedback as well as the constructive feedback, so that you know what you should replicate in future tasks.
- If you don't understand some of the feedback you got, make an appointment to talk with the teacher, or with your teacher librarian. They can help explain the feedback.

What did the forum say:

How long are you waiting for your feedback?



It's great to see that most people are getting their work back within a month. What is not ok is never getting feedback or not until after the end of the semester.

What does policy say?

Policy says:

Under normal circumstances, schools are expected to enter the data and return marked and moderated assessment items, including feedback, to students in a timely way and generally within three weeks of the due date. This does not apply in the context of end of semester timelines. (p.32)

What can you do about it?

Your teacher can explain to you why something has taken longer than usual. Usually there's a very good reason for it. It might be that a teacher in the moderation group was sick across a week or more (covid is still a thing...). It might be that faculty moderation showed that an assessment needed to be revisited to make sure that students were fairly ranked.

There are lots of reasons, and marking with comments takes a long time – for instance, if a teacher spends 20 minutes on each paper, a class of 25 students' results takes more than eight hours – and that's not counting breaks, disruptions, or that a teacher might have more than one class.

If the work hasn't been returned after a month, talk with the head of faculty, head of assessment, or deputy principal in the school and let them know your concerns. They can check in about what's going on, and help the faculty get the work back to you so you can use the feedback.

What does the student forum wish their teachers knew about feedback?

- Constructive feedback is generally more useful and provides me with more points of improvement. I wish the feedback I received was formatted more clearly and consistently between my courses.
- That specific examples are extremely helpful and general statements often more harm than good.
- Its more important to get feedback before the next assessment than for it to be in lots of detail.
- I wish they gave me some helpful advice on how to do better other than a pretty standard response. e.g. "this is good" "this needs improving".

- Individual is way better and talking through it helps students understand it better.
- Some teachers offer shallow feedback and while it is nice to know you have done well, I believe it is more essential to know how you can improve.
- I wish they would give suggestions on how to improve, not just saying it's wrong.
- I'd like them to give us multiple examples of improvement.
- Specific comments on what I did well and could have improved. generalised comments on structure and language.
- Feedback is most useful when it's specific and when it's given before we have to do the next assessment.
- Just because I'm high-achieving doesn't mean I don't still want advice on how to improve.
- That we find it useful and need it to be able to improve our work before the next task. It also allows for us to tell what parts of the assessment didn't do well.
- The feedback they provide can be very convoluted and difficult to comprehend. It is also very generalisable around the whole course with minimal differences in feedback between students.
- I wish they were more detailed with how I could improve, and on the specific mistakes or errors that I made which resulted in deductions in my scores. This is particularly for subjective assessment
- That '?' is not a proper response.

What can you do to help your teachers know what works?

Let them know! Seriously, if you really like how a teacher has given you feedback, tell them what you liked and why it was helpful. As much as they'd like to be, teachers aren't mind readers, and positive feedback is helpful for everyone.

If your school has a student council or other student representative group, feedback could be one of the topics you discuss, to provide feedback on the feedback you receive from teachers. Keep it friendly, though – remember that your teachers are people, too, and like all of us, they deserve a safe and pleasant workplace.

What will I get at the end of the year?

Year 12

ACT Senior Secondary Certificate

The ACT Senior Secondary Certificate (ACT SSC) consists of the certificate, detailing your years of attendance and the college you are graduating from, and the Record of Achievement, that details your studies throughout senior secondary. They are awarded to all senior secondary students who have successfully met the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (ACT BSSS) requirements. Your ACT SSC is a very important document. Keep it in a safe place and always supply a certified copy to interested people, never the original.

The Tertiary Entrance Statement

The ACT Tertiary Entrance Statement (TES) is awarded to all students who meet the ACT BSSS' requirements. It reports information used in the calculation of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), which is required for admission into universities in Australia. On this document, you will see your scaled scores, your weighting, your aggregate score, and your ATAR. This is also available through Profiles Online.

Statement of Achievement

The Statement of Achievement is available for students who have not achieved the requirements for an ACT SSC. You could ask your college to print a Statement of Achievement if you were completing your year 11 and year 12 studies, leaving school to seek employment or moving interstate. It lists the units and courses you studied during years 11 and 12 up to the time you leave.

Vocational Certificates

Students who have achieved VET competencies and achieved a Certificate will receive their Certificate and Statement of Attainment showing these competencies. Students who have VET competencies but not a Certificate will receive a Statement of Attainment showing these competencies.

Year 11

If you elect to leave your school in Year 11, you may be able to get the following from your school:

Statement of Achievement

The Statement of Achievement is available for students who have not achieved the requirements for an ACT SSC. You could ask your college to print a Statement of Achievement if you were completing your year 11 studies, leaving school to seek employment or moving interstate. It lists the units and courses you studied during year 11 up to the time you leave.

Vocational Certificates

Students who have achieved VET competencies and achieved a Certificate will receive their Certificate and Statement of Attainment showing these competencies. Students who have VET competencies but not a Certificate will receive a Statement of Attainment showing these competencies.

Student Profiles Online

If you are a Year 12 student, you will lose access to Student Profiles Online early in 2025. Make sure you've saved anything you want from there! If you are a Year 11 T student, your z-scores from the previous year will not show in Student Profiles Online. You will see z-scores from the current assessment period as you move into Year 12.

What if I lose my Year 12 Certificate?

We replace lost documents for a small fee. You will need to fill in a form, pay the fee, and provide certified copies of identification. We have transcripts going all the way back to the 1970s! Keep in mind, though that we cannot replace the original certificate if you lose it, because we print it on special paper each year. If you get a transcript, all the information will be there, including your ATAR (if you got one).



Keep your Senior Secondary Certificate in a safe place where you know you won't lose it. It is a valuable, irreplaceable document.

Questions from Students

These questions came from students. If you have a question you'd like us to answer, please email bsssenquiries@act.gov.au.

What is meshing?

The student forum can answer that!

This response comes from the students in the student forum.

The main aim of meshing is to make results/rankings comparable between different subjects and groups of students.

Meshing aims to make groups big enough to make statistical comparisons.

Meshing is required in order to create a scaling group with 30+ students, as anything smaller cannot be used later on in the scaling process. Your scaling group and therefore everyone you will be meshed with can be found on BSSS student profiles under Unit Scores.

Students' marks are saved in databases called markbooks, and these markbooks are combined to do a process called meshing.

Meshing aims to determine how students in each markbook compare which is done through comparative tests and assignments. Scaling groups, and the courses within them and the meshing plan is dependent on cohort size, school and the tertiary cohort.

It is important to convey that students have the right to know a school's meshing process and to contest unit scores/meshing outcomes.

Assessment is written so that marks between different subjects' assessments are comparable or a common task is given to determine the relative performance of groups

Moderation allows multiple different classes to be combined into one markbook by creating assessment scores which are equal. Moderation is when teachers compare students results for one assessment piece to ensure attaining a certain mark is the same for all assessments across the classes, e.g. an A in class 1 is equivalent to an A in class 2. This is an alternative to meshing.

Does the 90% attendance rule take into account classes that have been cancelled?

Hmmm, this is a tricky one! What policy says is that you need to have undertaken scheduled or structured learning activities. So if the class was cancelled but there was work and you did it, then you are all good.

If the class was cancelled and there was no work and no structured learning activity, you need to check in with your teacher to make sure you'll meet your 55 hours for a 1.0 unit. A structured learning activity might be a worksheet, watching a video lesson, reading some important readings and taking notes, rehearsing, or other things that your teacher sets for you when a class is cancelled.

Here's the relevant part of policy:

Any student whose attendance falls below 90% of the scheduled classes/contact time or 90% participation in structured learning activities in a unit, without having due cause with adequate documentary evidence will be deemed to have voided the unit. (page 34)

Can I be v-graded for not participating?

This is completely possible within policy – see the last answer. If you don't participate, even if you're in the room, then you can be v-graded.

There is a caveat here, though; there would need to be evidence of you not participating; for instance, the teacher keeping records of the lessons that you don't participate in. This might also include non-submission of lessons delivered flexibly or asynchronously – such as not doing the quizzes when your in-person class is cancelled.

You'd need to be told that you were at risk of v-grading due to non-participation in lessons, but it is possible... and the easiest way to avoid it is to participate!

IF YOU KNOW NOW THAT YOU'LL NEED THE AST SECOND SITTING, LET US KNOW!

TALK WITH YOUR AST COORDINATOR FOR EARLY ACCESS SECOND SITTING FORMS.

PLEASE NOTE SECOND SITTING IS NOT AVAILABLE FOR FAMILY HOLIDAYS OR SCHEDULED TRAVEL.



Reminder: AI Advice

AI continues to be a hot topic in education and society at large; here at the Office of the BSSS, we have been working with a principles-based approach to advise teachers and students about the use of AI.

You can find lots of advice and information on our website: bsss.act.edu.au



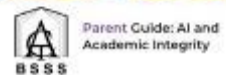
[Guide to the Australian AI Framework](#)

This is a general guide to the Australian Framework for Generative AI in

Education. It explains some of the things that AI can do, some of the risks, and how the Framework is supposed to work.

[Student Guide to AI and Academic Integrity](#)

Got questions? Been accused of inappropriate use of AI and you want to know what to do next? There's information here that can help you.



[Parent and Carer Guide to AI and Academic Integrity](#)

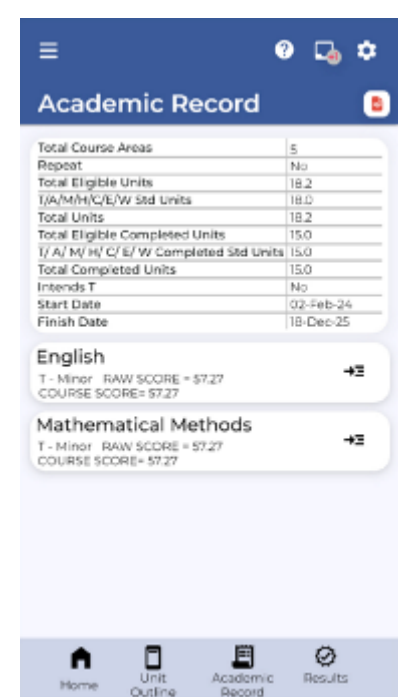
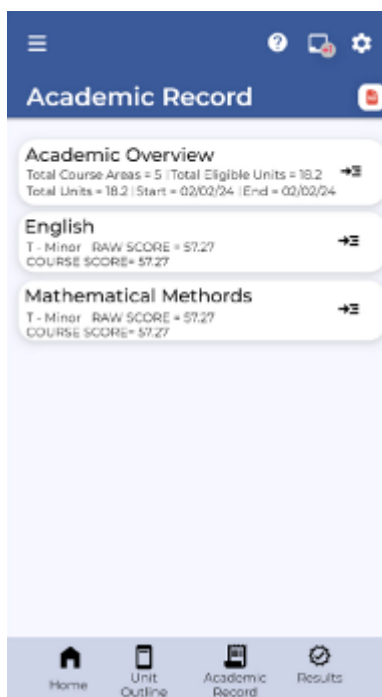
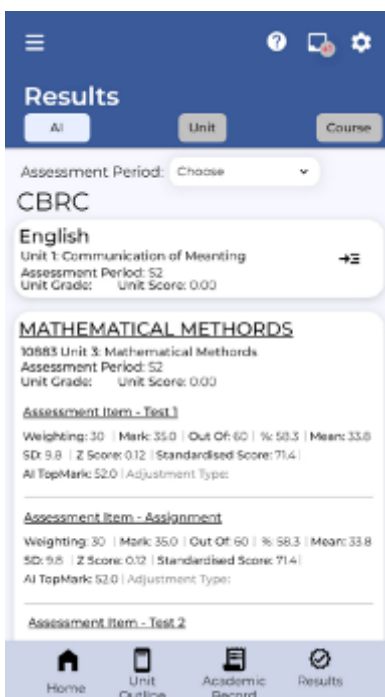
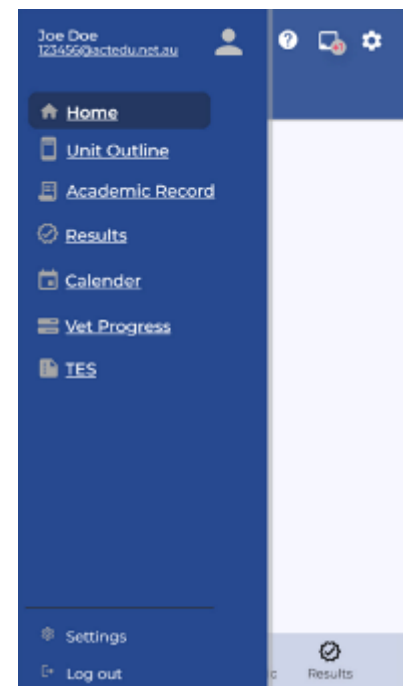
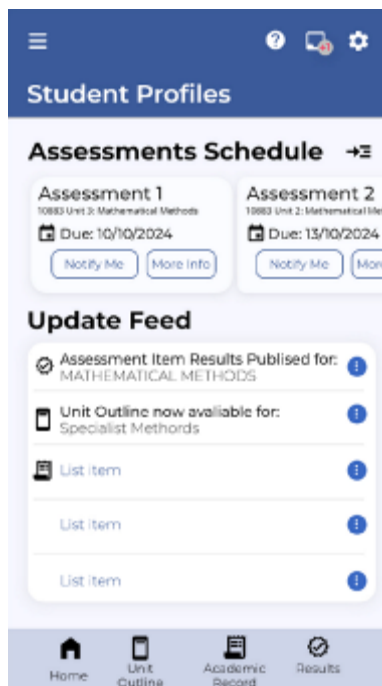
Parents got questions? Parents keep asking you questions about AI and plagiarism that you don't know the answers to? Give them this.



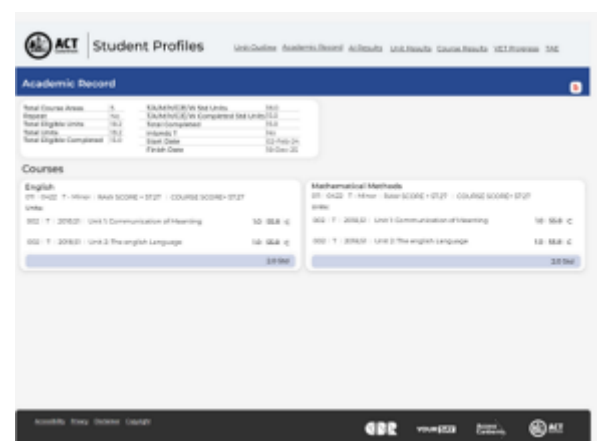
Coming soon: a Student App

Exciting news – the development team are working on making a web-based student app so that you can access due dates, results, notifications, information and unit data in the one place! We hope to launch next year.

The team has given us some ‘wireframe’ diagrams – check it out! Please note that the text in the diagrams is placeholder text and does not reflect the names of BSSS courses and units.



These images show what the app might look like on your phone — because it is a web-based app, it will work on all major phone systems without needing a download from the app stores. We are currently working on calendar functionality (i.e., exporting due dates into your calendar) and other options for push notifications. This app would replace Student Profiles Online, and you will still be able to download PDFs or other documents, and access your information on a computer as well as a mobile device (computer view is left).





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