

NATIONAL

This was published 15 years ago

Students' raw scores seen as threat to HSC

March 12, 2005 – 11.00am



The NSW Board of Studies has rejected a student's request for his raw Higher School Certificate exam results, saying unscaled marks could compromise the integrity of the marking program.

The federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, yesterday criticised the decision, saying that "as a matter of principle ... students do have the right to receive their own scores".

The board's decision to deny a freedom of information application from Bill Kanafani, 18, is despite six HSC students over the past 12 months being able to find out what markers awarded their efforts before the scaling process began - often revealing a massive increase to the raw results that appeared to make failure most unlikely.

When HSC results are released each December, students receive their scaled examination marks, their assessment marks, an average of the two, and a list of performance bands that they have fallen into for each subject.

There are six performance bands under the HSC introduced in 2001. Band 1 covers scaled marks ranging between zero and 49 per cent and includes work where "the student has achieved below the minimum standard expected".

The next five bands each cover 10 percentile points and climbing levels of academic performance.

The Board of Studies does not make public what level of raw marks will, after scaling, become borderline scores between bands.

In its rejection letter to Mr Kanafani, the board said granting him access to his raw score would "assist in the determination and then public disclosure" of what raw marks would land students in what bands.

"The disclosure of this information is contrary to the public interest," it said.

James King, 21, an HSC student from 2001 who administers the unofficial Bored of Studies website, was the first student of the new HSC to lodge a freedom of information application for his raw marks.

It took nine months and a visit to the Administrative Decisions Tribunal before he got his raw marks last March, and he was shocked by the difference from his final marks.

"I was expecting them to be a bit lower, but the raw marks were substantially lower," said Mr King, whose marks for English extension 1 leapt from 66 per cent to 92 per cent, and in advanced English jumped from 64 per cent to 84 per cent.

As others successfully lodged freedom of information applications and shared their results, Mr King said it appeared hard to fail the HSC and easy to do well.

It was revealed earlier this year that about 99 per cent of students passed last year's standard English exam.

Asked how many students of last year's HSC received raw marks below 50 per cent but landed in band 2 or above, the Board of Studies issued a statement saying "it is not possible, or relevant, to answer this question".

As part of the new HSC the Board of Studies distributes "Standards Packages" that give schools samples of work "typical of students at the borderlines". One sample essay from the 2001 advanced English paper is a 64-word response to a question with 40 minutes allocated to it.

Dr Nelson said: "I challenge anybody with an open mind who is literate to read this and then tell me with a straight face this is a minimum passing standard."