Rich Tasks 2005

An analysis of the Rich Task Reports data 2005

including comparisons
2003–2005

Rich Task Team
Office of Curriculum
Education Queensland
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1. Snapshot: context, data, conclusions

Context

2005 was the second year since the conclusion of the New Basics trial.

In 2005, schools and teachers had less centrally based mandation, surveillance and support, and more localised advice from fellow teachers.

It was the first year in which

- it was not mandated that all participating schools would offer entire suites of Rich Tasks
- teachers' grading of student performances in Rich Tasks were not submitted for ratification by centrally-based moderators, but were validated at Local Consensus Events, where advice about grades was obtained from teachers from other schools
- reports could be issued to students in any year level from 1 to 10, rather than only in Years 3, 6 or 9
- grades for which work had not been presented for scrutiny, or about which consensus had not been reached, could be included on the reports.

Data

More students from more schools received Rich Task reports in 2005 than in 2003 or 2004. In 2005, 9825 students in 59 schools received a Rich Task Report, an increase of 2354 students and 6 schools from 2004.

In addition to the 6592 reports issued to students in Years 3, 6 and 9 in 2005, 3233 reports were issued to students in year levels in which reports were not formerly available, mainly in Years 4, 5 and 7. The number of reports in Years 3, 6 and 9 fell by 879 in 2005, about the same number of reports as had been issued in 2004 by 2 high schools that did not issue reports in 2005.

In 2003 and 2004 not all participating schools had offered the mandatory suites of tasks in their entirety. In 2005, the end of mandation did not result in students in Years 3, 6 and 9 undertaking, on average, fewer Rich Tasks. The average number of grades in Rich Tasks appearing on students' reports remained steady for Years 6 and 9, and fell slightly for Year 3, compared with 2004.

Schools and students are taking up the opportunity for varied selections of Rich Tasks. In 2005, schools reported on 31 combinations of Rich Tasks in Year 3, 100 combinations in Year 6, and 121 combinations in Year 9. The most common combination of Rich Tasks in Years 3, 6 and 9 was *all* tasks in a suite.

Each Rich Task was undertaken by at least (and usually many more than) half the students in Years 3, 6 or 9.

School size may be a factor in the number of Rich Tasks schools offer in Suite 2, with smaller schools tending to offer fewer tasks than larger schools.

The proportions of the various grades awarded by schools in 2005 were generally comparable to those awarded in 2004, but Suite 1 results tended to show an increase in the awarding of the higher grades.

Few *A*-grades were awarded in any task; very few students received an *A* in more than one task; no students received an *A* in every task in a suite.

While in some tasks, especially in Suite 3, the proportion of students who received a *U* was high, the proportion of students in each suite who received more than a couple of *U*s was low.

Conclusions

Students are undertaking Rich Tasks in more year levels than they have before. This change in curriculum and assessment practices is apparently in response to more flexible reporting arrangements, and points to the influence that reporting arrangements can have in schools.

Some schools continue to offer entire suites of Rich Tasks, in keeping with the original New Basics vision. Other schools that have decided not to do so evidently consider that various subsets of the available Rich Tasks constitute a valuable curriculum and assessment option.

No single Rich Task was omitted to an extent that would suggest it was being generally found unacceptable by schools.

Each suite of Rich Tasks, in its range and depth, both challenges multi-talented students and affords opportunities to succeed (which are taken) for students who would normally not experience success in formal assessment. The higher grades of Rich Tasks, however, are in general more accessible to girls than to boys.

The proportions of the various grades awarded are consistent with the view that teachers in 2005 were generally judging student performance in keeping with the standards established in 2003 and 2004.

These findings represent an endorsement of the professionalism and expertise of the teachers involved in enacting and grading Rich Tasks, as developed over the past five years. The literature on cultural change within institutions strongly suggests that multi-level support within the system would be necessary to ensure the maintenance and continuing development of these achievements.

2. Introduction

The national education agenda is strongly influenced by concerns about reportable standards, while in Queensland the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework is developing "strategies to define essential learnings and set new standards for assessing and reporting student achievement in the early and middle years of schooling." (*Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework*, 2005, p. 2) Grades awarded on Rich Task Reports since 2003 constitute a developing dataset of immediate (and potentially continuing) relevance to these initiatives.

This dataset derives from information provided by schools for the purpose of issuing Rich Task Reports. It provides insights both into student performance in real-world, intellectually challenging tasks, and into schools' and teachers' practices in implementing curriculum and assessment. It is a unique dataset in the years of compulsory schooling in the Queensland system, and its richness and usefulness are increasing: the data from 2006 will allow, for the first time, the tracking of individual students' performances in Rich Tasks over time.

The existence of the dataset depends on an important chain of consequences. It exists only because schools submit students' grades in Rich Tasks to central office for processing, after which reports bearing the Director-General's signature are printed. The justification for this signature appearing on these reports, and not others, is that the results reported on them are subject to a documented process of standards validation. In turn, the recognition afforded by these reports is a driver of schools' commitment to standards validation. Finally, the standards validation process itself needs to be subject to continual evaluation, based on analysis of the reporting dataset in conjunction with scrutiny of student work.

This chain of consequences is in keeping with the original Research Premise of the New Basics: "Reconstruction of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment needs to be explicitly guided by documented analysis and rigorous discussion of current school practices." (*New Basics Project Technical Paper*, 2000, p. 6)

3. The changing context, 2003–2005

The conditions under which schools enacted Rich Tasks changed between 2003 and 2005, in ways that would be expected to have an effect on the number of Rich Tasks offered by schools and undertaken by students, and on the grades awarded to students. These changes include the following.

The range of schools

In 2003 the only schools that could report on Rich Tasks were the original 38 New Basics trial schools ("Phase I schools"). In 2004 the Phase II New Basics schools also reported on Rich Tasks. [1] In 2005 50 of the Phase I and Phase II schools reported on Rich Tasks, together with an additional 8 schools from Cape York as part of the Bound for Success initiative, and 1 additional special school.

The level of central office support provided to teachers

New Basics schools received considerable support, starting in 1999 (Phase I) and 2001 (Phase II) and continuing at a high level until the end of 2004. This support consisted of school visits by New Basics officers,[2] extensive telephone and email contact, and many meetings and workshops involving contact with other teachers and exposure to student work from other schools. In the early years of the project

[1] Counting schools is not always straightforward. In 2003, Western Cape College (Aurukun Campus) was a Phase I "school", while the other three campuses (Weipa, Mapoon and Napranum) were Phase II "schools". In the 2003 data, Western Cape College (Aurukun campus) counts as a school; in the 2004 and 2005 data, Western Cape College (all four campuses) counts as a single school.

[2] Originally a small group of school implementation officers, then in 2003 21 moderators, and in 2004 an additional 7 Local Associates based in regions.

the New Basics discussion lists were active, allowing electronic discussion to take place between teachers, central office staff and other interested members of the education community.

In the first half of 2005, essentially the same team of moderators as had worked in 2004 remained, but with reduced funding and reduced contact with schools. In the second half of 2005, the team was reduced to 3 full-time professional officers in central office and 1 part-time officer in a district, with the continued support of 5 Local Associates and 6 part-time contractors.

The Cape schools that reported on Rich Tasks for the first time in 2005 received Rich Task support from Education Queensland officers based in Cairns, but less from central office than Phase I and II New Basics schools had received.

On the other hand, schools received a new kind of support in 2005: written advice from teachers from other schools about each collection of student work in each Rich Task submitted to a Local Consensus Event.

The nature of moderation / standards validation

In 2003 and 2004 moderation was a 4-round process. In Round 1, moderators presented workshops on the curriculum intent of each task. In Round 2, teachers presented completed and provisionally graded student work at meetings attended by teachers from a range of schools, and received advice from moderators and the other teachers. In Round 3, schools contacted the moderators in preparation for final grading. In Round 4 (ratification), schools submitted a sample of work from each grade awarded, to be scrutinised by moderators expert in the particular task.

In 2005, the 4 rounds of moderation were replaced by Local Consensus Events, at which schools presented graded samples of student performances in Rich Tasks, and received written advice about the grades from teachers from other schools. “Joint collections” of student demonstrations about whose grade the school and the Local Consensus Event agreed were assembled, to be scrutinised centrally as an after-the-fact quality assurance mechanism in 2006, not as a contribution to the actual grades to be awarded in 2005. A further after-the-fact mechanism was “Light sampling”, in which schools were required to submit an *A*-grade and *C*-grade sample of work that had not been presented at a Local Consensus Event, in a nominated Rich Task.

The year levels in which reports may be issued

Until 2005, New Basics Reports were issued to students only at the end of the “juncture years”, Years 3, 6 or 9. Tasks undertaken in previous years were included in the juncture year reports. In 2005, Rich Task Reports could be issued to students at the end of any year from Year 1 to Year 10.[3]

The extent of central mandation

Until 2005, there was an expectation that New Basics schools would report on all Rich Tasks for all students (as appropriate to the year levels present in each school). In 2005, schools enacting Rich Tasks were allowed to choose which (and how many) Rich Tasks they offered, and the number of students to whom each task was offered.

The year levels in which a task may be offered

In 2003 and 2004, Rich Tasks were restricted to discrete 3-year spans:

- Suite 1: Years 1–3
- Suite 2: Years 4–6
- Suite 3: Years 7–9.

[3] Reports on students’ grades in Rich Tasks were called New Basics Reports in 2003 and 2004, and Rich Task Reports in 2005.

In 2005, Rich Tasks could be implemented (and reported on) in overlapping 4-year spans:

- Suite 1: Years 1–4
- Suite 2: Years 4–7
- Suite 3: Years 7–10.

The grades that may be awarded

In 2003 and 2004, in addition to the grades on each Rich Task's Grading Master (from *A* to *C*), a grade of *C-minus* was allowed, to signify work with aspects at *C*-standard or above, but not meeting the task specifications in full. This grade was not intended to be a permanent feature of the system, and in 2005 it ceased to be available.

Also in 2003 and 2004, the result of *N* was recorded to signify that the student had not been given the opportunity to undertake a task. This was in response to the fact that schools were expected to offer all tasks to all students. In 2005, when this was no longer an expectation, students who did not undertake a task did not have an *N* recorded; rather, the task they did not undertake simply did not appear on the report.

These changes are represented in Table 1. Shaded cells indicate features that remained essentially unchanged across years.

	2003	**2004**	**2005**
Schools	38 New Basics Phase I schools	53 schools from New Basics, Phase I & II	59 schools: 50 schools from New Basics Phase I & II, & 9 new schools
Central office support	High	High	Low (but more advice from fellow-teachers)
Type of moderation	Moderators, ratification	Moderators, ratification	Consensus
Choice of tasks	No	No	Yes
Rich Task spans	1–3, 4–6, 7–9	1–3, 4–6, 7–9	1–4, 4–7, 7–10
Possible reporting years	3, 6, 9	3, 6, 9	1–10
Use of the *C-minus* grade, and the *N*	Yes	Yes	No

Table 1. Conditions for enacting Rich Tasks, 2003–05

It is evident that the conditions changed the most in 2005. In the light of these changes, the two most pressing questions about Rich Task implementation throughout 2005 were:

- Will students continue to undertake as many tasks, when offering all Rich Tasks in a suite is no longer mandated?
- Will schools continue to apply standards in a similar way, when centrally-based ratification of grades is replaced by locally-based standards validation?

This report helps provide answers to these questions.

Patterns in grades awarded under changing conditions have the potential to provide the system with data-driven insights into the practices and performance of students, teachers and schools, in matters such as:

- curriculum choices made by schools
- the maintenance of standards in a framework of diminishing surveillance
- the development of teacher expertise in applying standards
- practices in different stages of schooling.

The 2005 data are of particular importance, because they offer the first opportunity to gain a data-driven insight into what happened in schools enacting Rich Tasks immediately after the 2005 shift towards greater flexibility in Rich Task choice and a consensus model of standards validation.

4. How many reports?

In 2005, 9825 Rich Task Reports were issued, compared with 7471 in 2004 and 4656 in 2003.

In 2003 and 2004 New Basics schools were required to issue a New Basics Report to every student in the juncture years of 3, 6 or 9, so the increase in reports across those years can be attributed directly to an increased number of schools issuing reports (38 in 2003, 53 in 2004). Although still more schools issued reports in 2005 (the number increased by 6, after 3 schools ceased to report on Rich Tasks and 9 began), the 2005 increase cannot be attributed simply to this: only 369 reports were issued by the 9 new schools.

Rather, the increase is due largely to schools taking advantage of being able to issue reports to students in any year level from Year 1 to 10. 3233 of the 9825 reports issued in 2005 were to students not in the former juncture years, while the number of reports issued to students in the former juncture years fell by 879 from 2004 to 2005. (This decline can be largely attributed to 2 high schools that issued reports in 2004 but not in 2005: these schools had issued 843 reports in 2004.)

Information about the number of reports issued is summarised in Table 2.

Year	Schools issuing reports	Reports		
		Years 3, 6, 9	Not Years 3, 6, 9	Total
2003	36	4656	0	4656
2004	53	7471	0	7471
2005	59	6592	3233	9825

Table 2. Number of schools issuing reports, and number of reports issued, by year

From the start of New Basics, it has been possible for Rich Tasks undertaken in any year level within a suite to be reported on, but it was only in 2005 that tasks undertaken outside of the former juncture years could be reported on *in the same year*.

While Table 2 records a shift in the reporting of tasks in 2005, it does not by itself establish whether this shift points to a change in when tasks were *implemented*, or just when they were reported on. There are no precise data available on the number of students who in 2003 and 2004 received grades for tasks they had undertaken in previous years, but the experience of moderators in those years would strongly suggest that nearly all tasks reported on in a particular year were in fact undertaken by the students in that same year. If that is the case, what is evident here is a noteworthy change in schools' curriculum and assessment practices — apparently driven, or at least enabled, by a change in permitted reporting practices. Increased flexibility in reporting practices seems to have led to increased flexibility in curriculum and assessment practices. In an educational climate of reporting agendas seemingly not always characterised by flexibility, this is a significant observation.

It would seem that even after changes in the number of schools enacting Rich Tasks are taken into account, more students, in more year levels, are undertaking Rich Tasks. Flexibility of implementation schedules would seem to be a factor in this increase.

Figure 1 shows the number of students in each year level who received a Rich Task Report in 2005. Figures 2–4 break this information down by suite, because overlapping of suites could occur in Years 4 and 7.

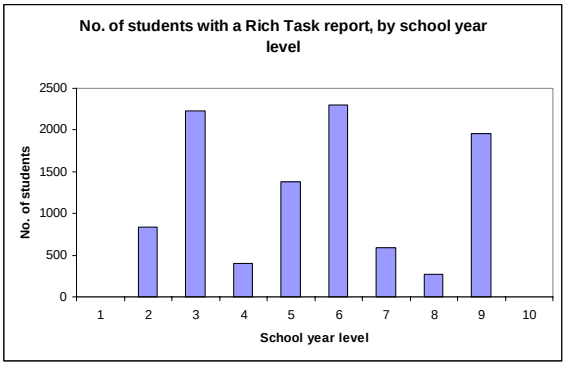

Figure 1. Number of students receiving a Rich Task Report, by year level, 2005

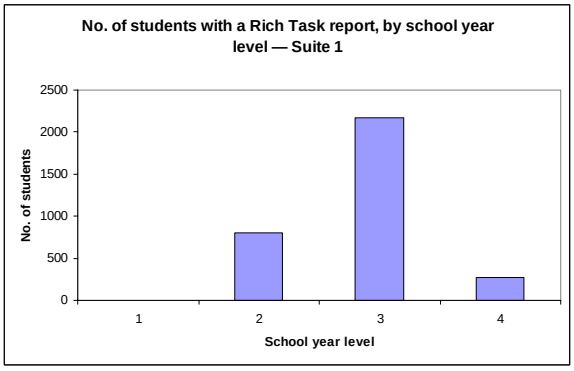

Figure 2. Number of students receiving a Rich Task Report, by year level, 2005 — Suite 1

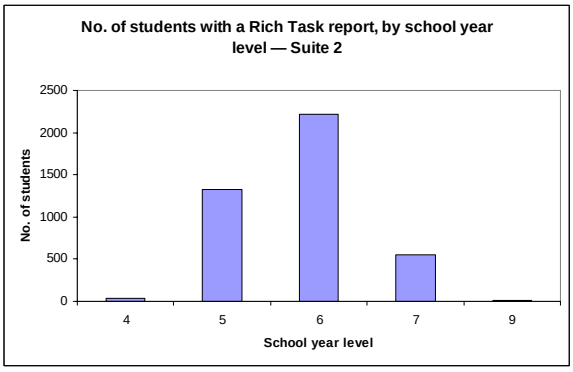

Figure 3. Number of students receiving a Rich Task Report, by year level, 2005 — Suite 2

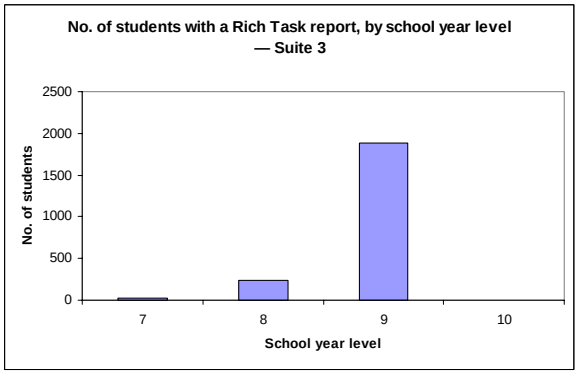

Figure 4. Number of students receiving a Rich Task Report, by year level, 2005 — Suite 3

It can be seen that issuing reports in years other than the former juncture years occurred to very different extents in the different suites. In Suite 2, nearly as many reports were issued in Years 5 and 7 together as in Year 6, while in Suite 3 few reports were issued in any year other than Year 9. It is possible that high schools offer less flexibility in this regard than primary schools or P–10 or P–12 schools: all of the non Year 9 Suite 3 reports were in fact issued by three schools that were either P–10 or P–12.

The extent to which schools utilised the introduction of overlapping suites in 2005 is shown in Table 3, which provides the number of students in the shared years (Years 4 and 7) who received a report, and the suite that the reported tasks belonged to; it also shows the number of schools these students came from. “Earlier suite” refers to, for example, a Suite 1 task being undertaken in Year 4, while “Later suite” refers to, for example, a Suite 2 task being undertaken in Year 4.

	Students		Schools	
Shared year	Earlier suite	Later suite	Earlier suite	Later suite
4	271	34	9	6
7	547	19	20	1

Table 3. Number of students (and the number of their schools) receiving a Rich Task Report in Years 4 or 7, by suite

Table 3 indicates that only very rarely did schools use the new flexibility of overlapping suites to offer tasks from a higher-suite in the first available year level; rather they tended to offer lower-suite tasks in the last available year level. This would be consistent with the view that the tasks are difficult rather than easy. The relatively high figures for students in Years 4 and 7 receiving grades from Suites 1 and 2 respectively, however, may be inflated to some extent by grades that derive from tasks that were completed too late in Years 3 or 6 in 2004 to be included on the 2004 reports.

In 2005, schools generally did not take up the new opportunity to offer Suite 3 Rich Tasks to students in Year 10. Only four Year 10 students, from two schools, received a Rich Task Report.

5. How many Rich Tasks?

Since it seems that in 2005 schools began offering Rich Tasks in a greater range of year levels, and since students' results in these tasks were reported on immediately and were not accumulated until a juncture year, this will affect how comparisons across years may be made. It is to be expected that with reports in 2005 being issued for individual year levels rather than suites, the *average* number of tasks appearing on a report would be less than that in previous years. The measure of a student's participation in a suite of Rich Tasks, in fact, began to change in 2005 from how many tasks are reported in a particular year to how many are reported in the suite's allowed *four* years (or more likely, in practice, two or three years). Students who received a report after completing Year 2, 5 or 8 in 2005 may yet receive additional reports in the same suite for the next two years. A single report, then, may no longer capture performance in a whole suite.

Nevertheless, a direct comparison can still be made of reports issued to students in Years 3, 6 and 9 over the years 2003–2005. Students who completed Year 3, 6 or 9 in 2005, like their predecessors in 2003 and 2004, received a report that largely represented their entire Rich Task achievements in a particular suite.[4] (One effect of reports being issued in all year levels will be to make such a comparison more problematic for the 2006 data.)

It should be noted that students who received an *N* in 2003 or 2004 have been excluded from the dataset, to enable comparisons with 2005, when *N*s were not recorded. For all 3 years (2003–05), then, the only tasks that are counted are those in which the student received a *U* or higher.

Table 4 makes the comparison for 2003-2005.[5]

[4] "Largely" but not necessarily wholly: some students may have completed tasks too late for their grades to appear on their Year 3, 6 or 9 report, and the 2005 students may yet complete further tasks in the suite in 2006.

[5] The process by which the proportion was arrived at in each case is illustrated below, using Year 3 in 2005 as an example.

Year level	Tasks reported	Reports issued	Average tasks on report	Available tasks for suite	Proportion of available tasks reported (average)
3	8243	2164	3.8	5	.8

Year level	Proportion of available tasks reported (average)		
	2003	2004	2005
3	.8	.9	.8
6	.6	.7	.7
9	.8	.8	.8

Table 4. Proportion of available tasks appearing, on average, on Rich Task Reports in Year 3, 6 or 9, 2003–2005

The pattern is essentially a stable one, with minor differences between the suites. Only in the first suite was there any decline in 2005.

This is a particularly noteworthy finding. In 2003 and 2004, when it was notionally obligatory for New Basics schools to offer all tasks in a suite to all students in the appropriate years, teachers quite frequently expressed the opinion that enacting the full suite of Rich Tasks constituted an unrealistic expectation of teachers and students. In 2005, when this was no longer even a notional obligation, it was to be expected that some schools would take advantage of the change that they had called for, and actually offer fewer tasks to students. In Suite 1, the average number of tasks reported in 2005 for Year 3 students declined by .1 from 2004 to 2005 (the equivalent of half a task, in a suite of five tasks), to return to the 2003 level. In Suites 2 and 3, the average number of tasks appearing on a report did not decline from 2004 to 2005, and in Suite 2, it actually rose overall by .1 between 2003 and 2005.

These figures represent an adherence to offering a wide range of Rich Tasks that, given some teachers' expressed concerns about the excessive demands imposed by a full suite of Rich Tasks in 2003 and 2004, exceeds expectations.

At the same time as these concerns were being expressed, so were other concerns from other quarters — in particular, that the Rich Tasks were meant to represent a balanced curriculum, and that a decline in the number of tasks being completed by students within a suite would jeopardise the fullness and balance of their learning. The figures for 2005 indicate that this concern — however justified it may be in principle — was unfounded in practice in 2005, in relation to the educational experiences of the general body of students undertaking Rich Tasks.

Aggregate figures such as these, however, may mask the reality of what students in individual schools experienced. The number of reports issued by schools in 2005 varied from 2 to 327 in Suite 1, from 1 to 421 in Suite 2, and from 17 to 395 in Suite 3, so averages based on students without reference to schools will be influenced by choices made by the larger schools. Accordingly, it is useful to consider not just the average number of tasks undertaken by students, but the actual number of tasks offered by individual schools.

Schools could offer more tasks in a suite than a student could undertake, because a school could offer 2 or 3 alternative tasks (perhaps to different classes), of which an individual student could only undertake one. For example, a school could offer 8 tasks in Suite 2 in 2005 if they offered both *Space Futures* and *Found in Space*, but a student could undertake only one (or neither) of *Space Futures* and *Found in Space*, and undertake a maximum of 7 tasks.. Table 5 provides the maximum number of tasks a school could offer in a suite in 2005, and the maximum number of tasks a student could undertake.

Suite	Maximum tasks	
	School	Student
1	6	5
2	8	7
3	10	8

Table 5. Maximum Rich Tasks for students and schools, by suite, 2005

Figures 5 to 7 show the number of schools in each suite reporting grades in various *numbers* of tasks ("4", for example, on the X-axis means "4 tasks", not "Task #4"). The graphs include information about:

- the number of tasks in which grades were reported regardless of the year level
- the number of tasks in which grades were reported in Year 3, 6 or 9.

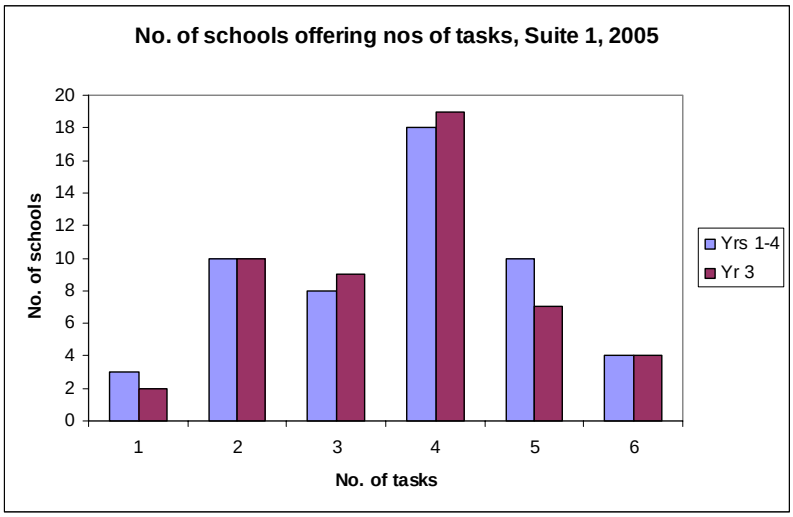

Figure 5. Number of schools offering numbers of Rich Tasks, Suite 1, 2005

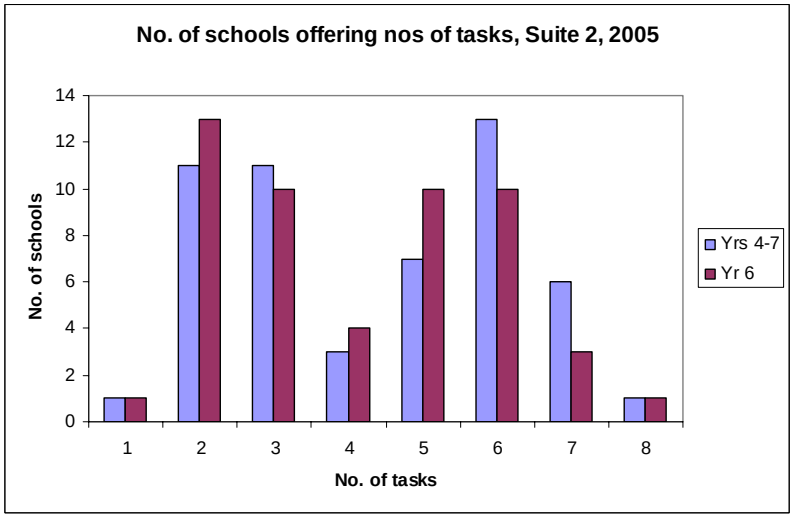

Figure 6. Number of schools offering numbers of Rich Tasks, Suite 2, 2005

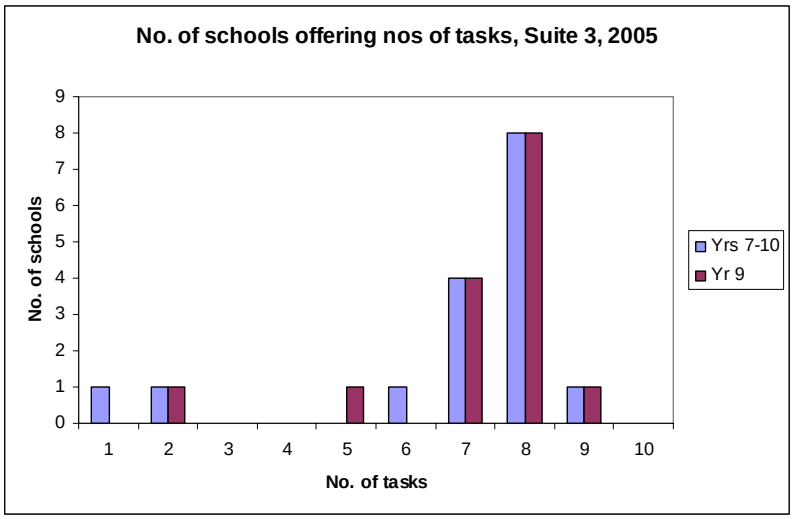

Figure 7. Number of schools offering numbers of Rich Tasks, Suite 3, 2005

Figures 5 to 7 reveal some noteworthy differences between the suites. In Suite 3, very few schools offered fewer than 7 tasks (either in Year 9 or across the suite), so the high participation rate among students noted above cannot be attributed to the influence of just a few schools and is a true reflection of participation in Rich Tasks across the state. (The school that reported grades in only one Rich Task in Suite 3 was a special school.)

There is greater variation in the numbers of Rich Tasks reported within both Suite 1 and Suite 2. In Suite 2, for example, just over half the schools reported 4 or fewer tasks (from a possible 8) in Year 6, while in Suite 1, well over a third of schools reported 3 or fewer tasks (from a possible 6) in Year 3. It seems, then, that in Suite 1 and to a greater extent in Suite 2, schools are choosing a more flexible approach to Rich Task selection. That this is not as evident in the data for students (Table 4) as it is in the data for schools may be due to some large schools offering most or all of the tasks and some small schools offering only a few.

Table 6 juxtaposes the average proportion of tasks reported for students and the average proportion of tasks reported by schools.

	Proportion of available tasks reported (average)	
Suite	**Students**	**Schools**
1	.8	.7
2	.7	.6
3	.8	.9

Table 6. Average proportion of Rich Tasks undertaken by students and offered by schools, 2005

The average is lower for schools than students in Suites 1 and 2, suggesting again that some smaller schools may be offering fewer tasks in these suites than some larger ones.

Table 7 presents the correlation between the number of reports issued by a school in each suite and the number of tasks reported on by the school in that suite.

Suite	Correlation
1	.47
2	.7
3	.23

Table 7. Correlations of numbers of Rich Task Reports issued and Rich Tasks reported on, by suite, 2005

A low correlation, as in Suite 1 and especially Suite 3, would suggest that the size of a school is not a major factor in the number of tasks offered by a school in that suite. The correlation for Suite 2, however, is reasonably high, suggesting that school size is a factor in that suite. Suites 1 and 2, however, are always implemented in the same school, which suggests that there might be something specific to Suite 2 Rich Tasks that makes them difficult for smaller schools to implement as a set.

A tentative explanation of these figures may be that:

- in both Suites 1 and 2, a single teacher will often be responsible for taking on all Rich Tasks, particularly in smaller schools
- with the higher number of tasks in Suite 2 than Suite 1, and the greater range and level of expertise required of a single teacher, it may be harder for all Suite 2 tasks to be offered than all Suite 1 tasks in smaller schools
- in secondary schools, each Suite 3 task may be allocated to a particular specialist teacher, making the entire suite more likely to be implemented (but possibly undermining the transdisciplinary nature of particular tasks).

A comparison of the two sets of columns in Figures 5 to 7 suggests that while schools offered tasks to students in a wider range of year levels in 2005, it was only in Suite 2 that this resulted in a wider range of tasks being offered across the board in more than one or two schools. In Suites 1 and 3, the number of tasks offered to students in the former juncture years was generally similar to that offered to students in all year levels in the suite.

Overall, the data on the number of tasks reported in 2005 point to:

- a high level of participation across *students*
- a variation across *schools* in the selection of Rich Tasks being offered, especially in Suite 2.

6. Which Rich Tasks?

It has been seen that despite the offering of all Rich Tasks being no longer mandated in 2005, the overall rate of task completion in Years 6 and 9 did not fall, while in Year 3 it fell by the equivalent of half a task. Such overall figures, however, do not reveal the extent to which particular tasks have been undertaken. More detailed information about particular task uptake rates may offer important insights into the reception of tasks by teachers and students.

Again, the most important points of comparison occur in Years 3, 6 and 9, because it is only in these years that the entire achievements of students in a suite can be compared. Figures 8–10 compare the percentage of students in Years 3, 6 or 9 who received a result in each task in 2003–2005. Again, students who received an *N* in 2003 or 2004 have been excluded from the dataset. Alternative tasks are treated as one task, so that, for example, the figures for S2-7 are combined figures for *Space Futures* and *Found in Space*.

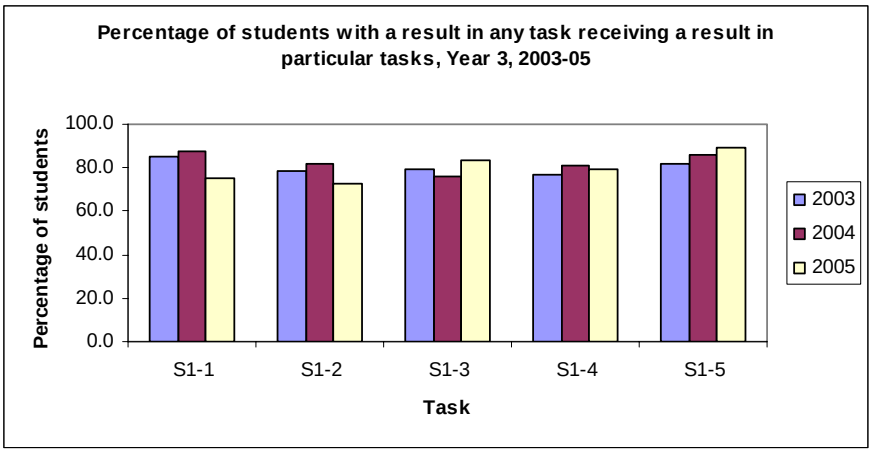

Figure 8. Percentage of students with a result in any task receiving a result in particular tasks, Year 3, 2005

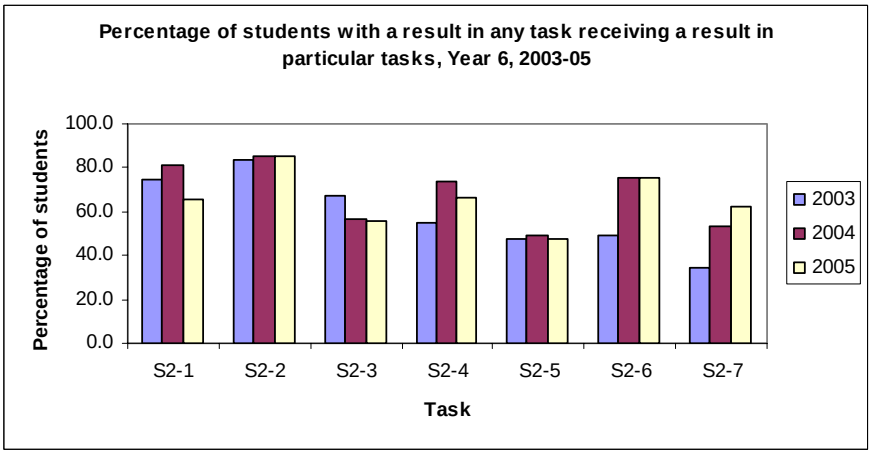

Figure 9. Percentage of students with a result in any task receiving a result in particular tasks, Year 6, 2005

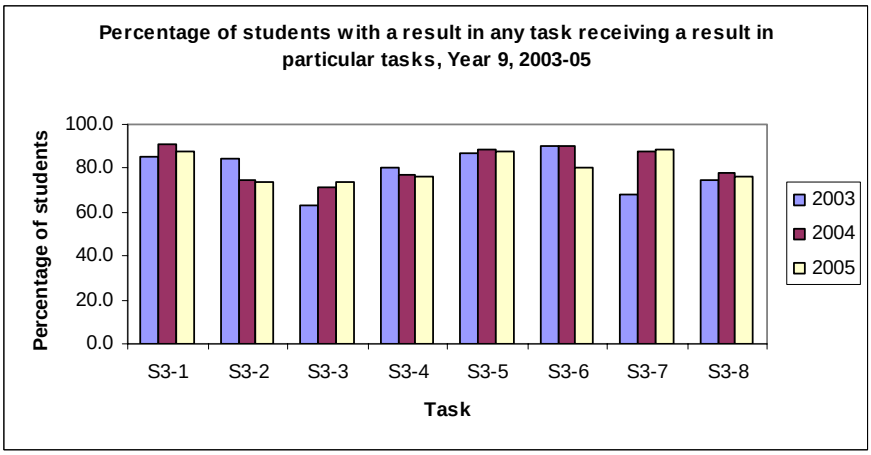

Figure 10. Percentage of students with a result in any task receiving a result in particular tasks, Year 9, 2005

There is not a uniform picture within or across suites. Some tasks have experienced an increase in uptake rates over the three years (such as S1-5 *Historical and Social Aspects of Craft*, S2-7 and S2-7b combined — the alternative Space tasks in Suite 2 — and S3-3 *The Built Environment: Designing a Structure*). Some have remained quite steady (such as S1-4 *Read and Talk about Stories*, S2-2

Narrative Text: Away with Words, and S3-8 *International Trade*). Some have declined (such as S3-2 *Improving Wellbeing in the Community*). Some have experienced irregular uptake rates. The largest decline from 2004 to 2005 occurred in S2-1 *Travel Itineraries* (from 81% to 65%). The largest increase from 2004 to 2005 was in S2-7 *Space Futures* and its alternative S2-7b *Found in Space* combined (from 53% to 62%).

While there is variation, the overall impression is one of stability rather than sudden change. Anecdotal evidence has at times suggested that teachers were turning away from certain tasks, but in fact no task shows signs of being effectively discarded by schools. (Two alternative tasks, S1-2b *Multimedia Presentation on an Introduced Plant or Animal* and S-7b2 *The Shape of Things to Come*, were made available after school started in 2005 and should probably not be judged on the number of schools that immediately took them up.)

The figures for several tasks suggest areas for more directed research; in particular, *Built Environment* (with its steady increase in completion) and S2-5 *Oral Histories and Diverse and Changing Lifestyles* (which has been consistently the least often undertaken task).

The 2005 data in above discussion derive from Years 3, 6 and 9 only. These are the only 2005 data that can be validly compared with 2003 and 2004 data, but they do not constitute the whole of the 2005 dataset. The uptake of tasks in year levels other than Year 3, 6 or 9 is demonstrated in Figures 11 to 13.

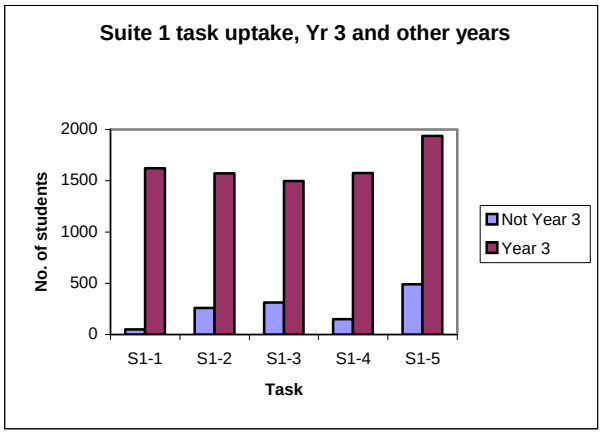

Figure 11. Students undertaking Suite 1 tasks in Year 3 / other year levels, 2005

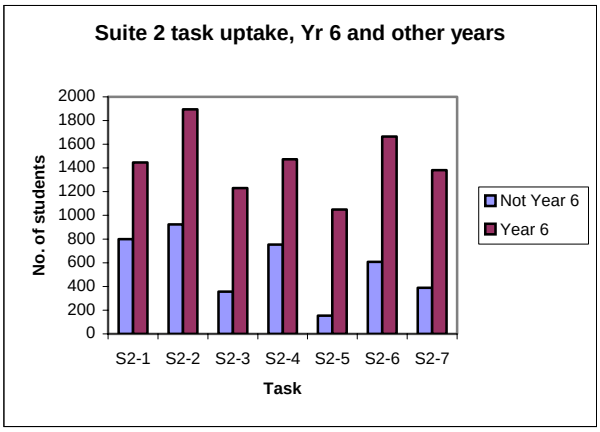

Figure 12. Students undertaking Suite 2 tasks in Year 6 / other year levels, 2005

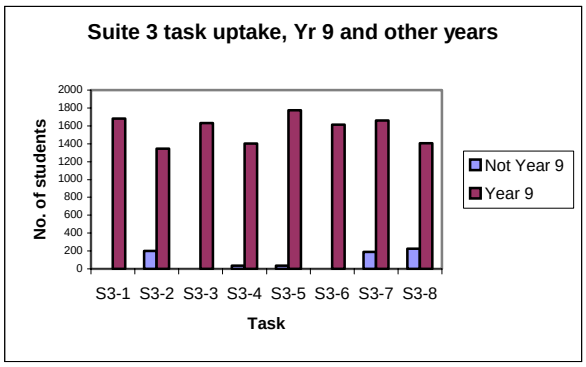

Figure 13. Students undertaking Suite 3 tasks in Year 9 / other year levels, 2005

It is clearly in Suite 2 that tasks were undertaken outside of the former juncture year to the greatest extent, while in Suite 3 the practice was very restricted.

7. Which combinations of Rich Tasks?

With schools able to offer Rich Tasks in a suite in any combination, very large numbers of combinations of Rich Tasks are possible. In fact, in 2005 schools reported on 31 combinations of Rich Tasks in Suite 1, 100 combinations in Suite 2, and 121 combinations in Suite 3. Most of these combinations were undertaken by only a very few students. Table 9 shows the 10 most frequently undertaken combinations in Years 3, 6 and 9. In this table, a task is represented by its number in the suite if it was part of the combination, and by a zero if it was not. Alternative tasks are treated as one task.

Suite 1, Year 3		Suite 2, Year 6		Suite 3, Year 9	
Pattern	Students	Pattern	Students	Pattern	Students
1-2-3-4-5	536	1-2-3-4-5-6-7	305	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8	919
1-2-0-4-5	293	0-2-3-4-0-6-7	151	0-0-0-4-5-0-0-0	674
1-0-3-4-5	221	1-2-3-4-5-6-0	148	1-2-3-0-5-6-7-8	155
1-2-3-4-0	137	1-2-3-4-0-6-7	146	1-0-3-4-5-6-7-0	145
0-2-3-0-0	107	1-2-0-4-0-6-7	145	1-0-0-4-5-0-0-0	107
1-0-3-0-5	106	1-2-0-0-5-0-0	137	0-0-0-4-0-0-0-0	76
0-2-3-4-5	92	1-2-0-4-0-6-0	91	1-0-0-4-5-0-0-8	70
0-2-3-0-5	84	0-2-3-4-5-6-7	91	1-0-3-0-5-6-7-8	68
1-2-0-0-5	81	0-0-0-0-0-6-7	69	1-2-3-0-5-6-7-0	61
1-2-0-4-0	63	0-2-0-0-5-6-7	59	1-0-3-4-5-6-7-8	41

Table 8. Ten most frequently undertaken combinations of Rich Tasks, 2005, Years 3, 6 and 9

It is noteworthy that in each of these years, the most frequent combination of Rich Tasks was the entire suite.

The first of the questions posed on p. 7 of this report — *Will students continue to undertake as many tasks, when offering all Rich Tasks in a suite is no longer mandated?* — can be answered positively. In general, students did not undertake markedly fewer tasks than in 2004, and they did not, to a great extent, undertake particular tasks less often; some tasks, in fact, were undertaken more often in 2005 than in previous years.

8. Which grades?

The number of tasks appearing on reports provides information about the tasks undertaken by students and implemented by schools, but not about *how well* the students performed on these tasks or *how appropriately* the teachers graded these performances. For this it is necessary to examine the actual grades awarded in each task. Figures 14–16 provide this information. The following points should be borne in mind:

- the *C-minus* grade could be used only in 2003 and 2004
- the *B* grade in S2-6 *Design, Make and Display a Product* was not available after 2003
- the following alternative Rich Tasks were available for the first time in 2005:
    - S1-2b *Multimedia Presentation on an Introduced Plant or Animal*
    - S2-7b *Found in Space*
    - S3-7b2 *The Shape of Things to Come* (not undertaken by any student, so not included below).

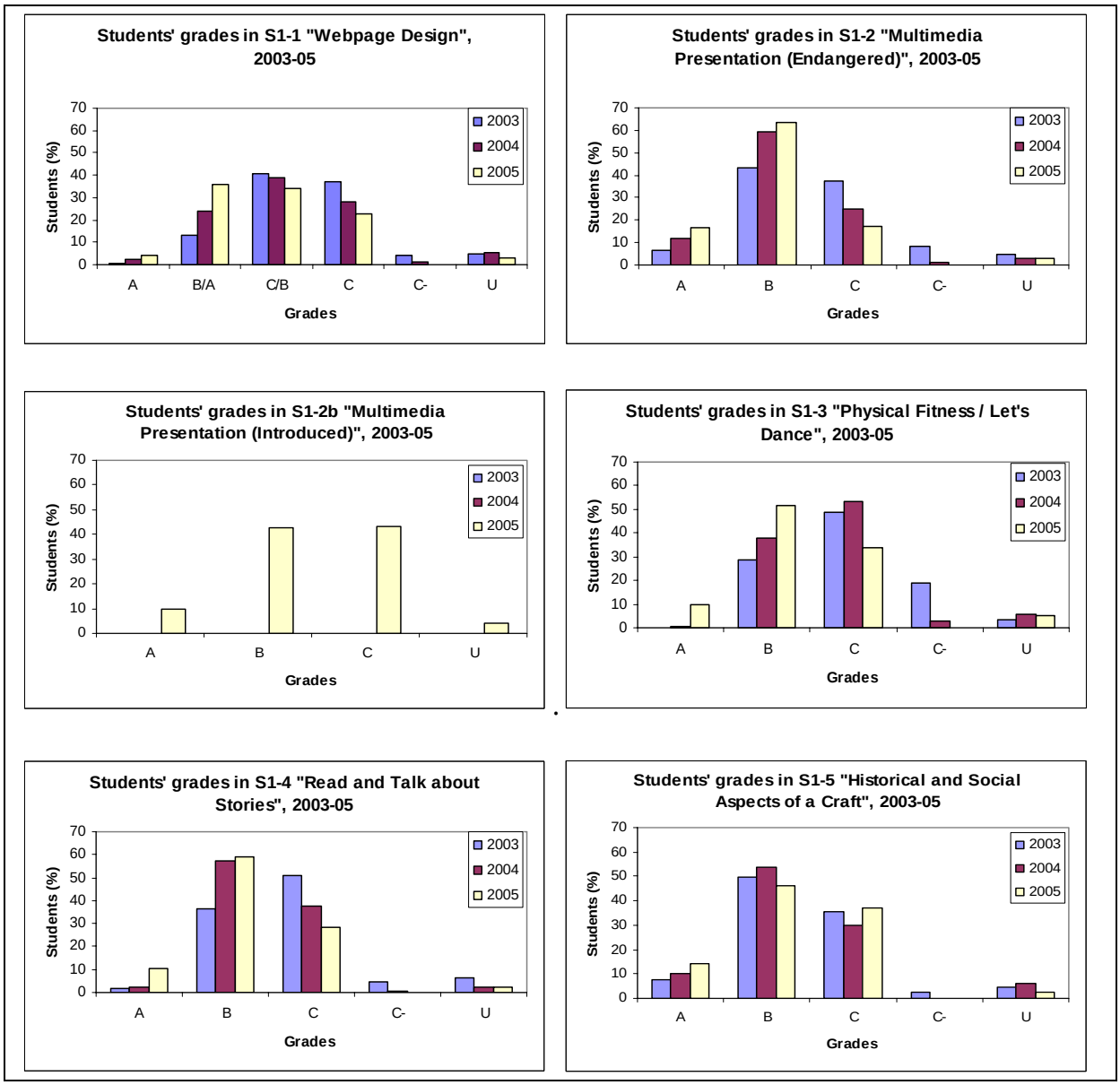

Figure 14. Students' grades in Suite 1 Rich Tasks, Year 3, 2003–2005

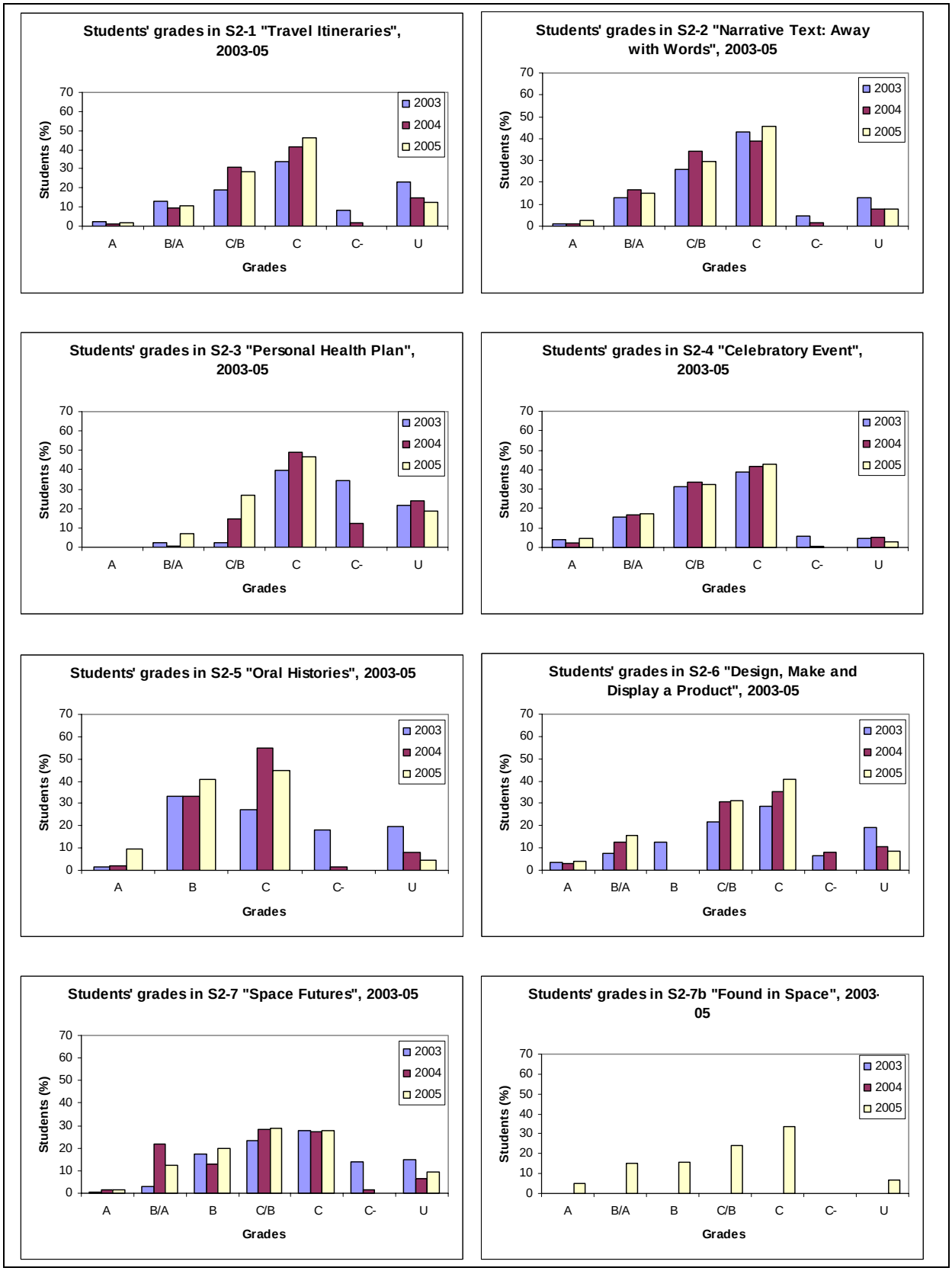

Figure 15. Students' grades in Suite 2 Rich Tasks, Year 6, 2003–2005

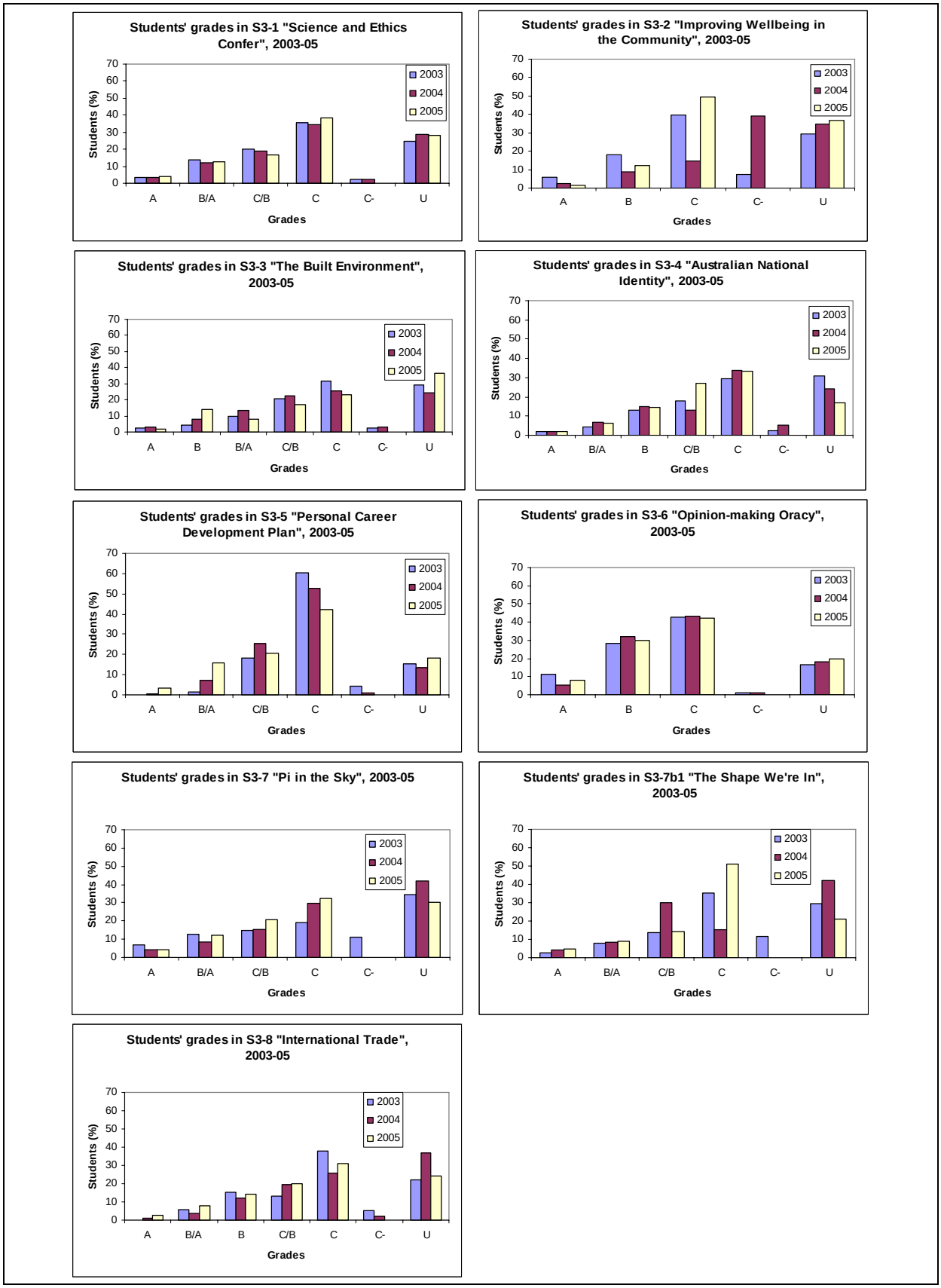

Figure 16. Students' grades in Suite 3 Rich tasks, Year 9, 2003–2005

While these figures potentially convey valuable information about both student performance and teacher judgment-making in relation to standards, the quality of the judgment-making needs to be investigated before significance is found in the information about student performance: if the judgments are not in keeping with the standards, they will obviously provide poor information about the actual standard of the performances.

Some tentative conclusions about teacher judgment-making can be made from these data. More confident conclusions will be possible when these data are considered in relation to actual student work and the grades that were awarded to students on the basis of this work — the subject of a forthcoming report based on Joint Collections from 2005 Local Consensus Events and other student work collected as part of Light Sampling.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the figures above are based on a comparison of the grades awarded in 2003 and 2004 with those awarded in 2005. In the former two years, a process of ratification of student grades was in place:

- schools submitted samples of work from each grade they intended to award for each Rich Task
- these samples were scrutinised by moderators expert in the particular task, in relation to the provisional grade decided upon by the school
- where there was disagreement between moderators and the school about the grade, discussion occurred until consensus was reached
- in each task, schools could award only those grades about which consensus had been reached (for example, if a school had not submitted a student demonstration in a particular task that schools and moderators agreed was of *A*-standard, no *A*s would be reported for that task for that school).

In 2005, central ratification was replaced by standards validation at Local Consensus Events, where advice about provisional grades was obtained from teachers from other schools, not from moderators. Also, grades for which work had not been presented, or about which consensus had not been reached, could be included on the reports.

In these changing circumstances, some indication of standards being maintained could be found in a pattern of awarded grades in 2005 that was not markedly dissimilar to the patterns in 2003 and 2004. Total consistency of grades is not to be expected or desired. It is not assumed that the quality of student work will remain constant from year to year (as teachers, it is hoped, develop a fuller understanding of the potentialities of the tasks), and it is not the case that the standards had been established once and for all by the end of 2004. Furthermore, broad consistency in the grades awarded across years is no proof of maintained standards, if there is no corresponding evidence of the actual quality of the student work. Nevertheless, a major *change* in the pattern of grades awarded from one year to the next could be taken to indicate a major, sudden change in either the quality of the student work or the way many teachers were applying the standards in their assessment judgments — or, confoundingly, in both.

Figures 14–16 indicate stability rather than major change in the grades awarded in 2003–2005, without, in general, greater change between 2004 and 2005 than between 2003 and 2004. There is a tendency for more higher grades to be awarded in some tasks, especially in Year 3, but this increase (where it occurs, as in S1-1 and S1-2) seems to match a previous increase between 2003 and 2004. The earlier increases in higher grades, which occurred under the same form of ratification, could best be attributed to improved quality of student work, itself attributable to increased teacher understanding of the tasks. Such an improvement may or may not have continued at the same rate into the following year (2005), but there seems no reason to rule out the possibility that at least some of the increase in higher grades in some tasks is attributable to higher-quality student work rather than to a slackening of standards in grading.

The suite in which there is least change in 2005 is Suite 3.

At this stage, without as yet a consideration of the quality of the decisions made about the student work collected in 2005, the evidence suggests that the more teacher-directed, decentralised standards validation process in 2005 did not lead to marked changes in how standards were applied in the grading of student work in Rich Tasks.

With the judgment-making tentatively accepted, then, to be of equivalent quality to that which occurred under the former system of ratification, consideration can turn to the grades awarded as an indicator of the actual quality of student performances in particular Rich Tasks. Observations about grades in particular tasks will be of interest to teachers of those tasks, but a few more general observations can be made here.

Each available grade was used for each Rich Task, supporting the view that the standards incorporated in the Grading Masters correspond to kinds of performance actually produced by students.

In all suites, even after the observed increase in the awarding of higher grades in some tasks, the *A*-grade was awarded sparingly, to an extent that would still warrant the observation made in *The New Basics Research Report* about the 2003 data, "The small proportion of ratified *A*-grades served to uphold the value of the *A*-grade as an indicator of excellence." (p. 33)

Such consistency across the suites in the awarding of a particular grade is not evident, however, for the result of *U*. In *every* Suite 3 task in 2005, a higher proportion of students received a *U* than in *any* of the tasks from Suites 1 and 2. In one Suite 3 task — S3-3, *The Built Environment* — the proportion of students receiving a particular result rose progressively from lowest for *A* to highest for *U*. Research may be justified into whether the work awarded a *U* in Suite 3 tasks encompasses a range of performance that would warrant some way of differentiating within the *U* range.

Clearly, each of the Rich Tasks, *as* a discrete task, is challenging. The extent of the challenge posed collectively by a suite of Rich Tasks is suggested by Figures 17–19, which show the percentage of students in Years 3, 6 and 9 in 2005 who received *numbers* of *A*s.

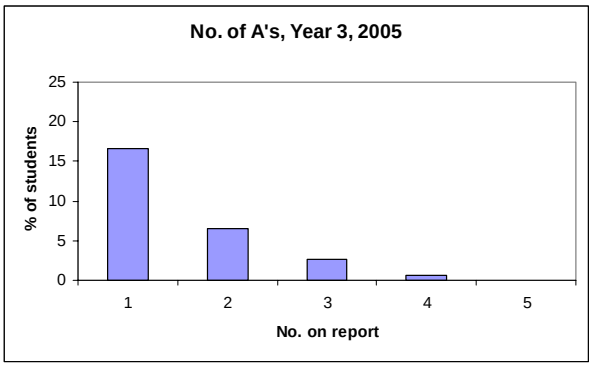

Figure 17. Students receiving numbers of *A*s, Year 3, 2005

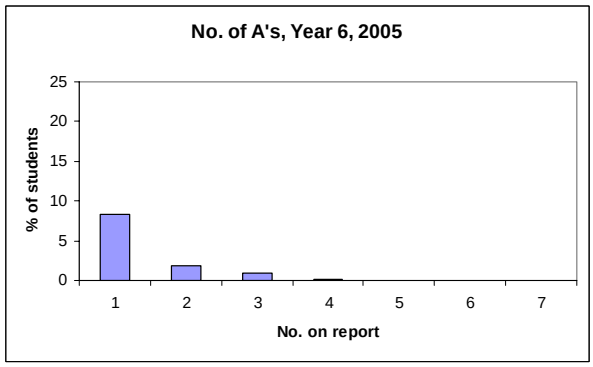

Figure 18. Students receiving numbers of *A*s, Year 6, 2005

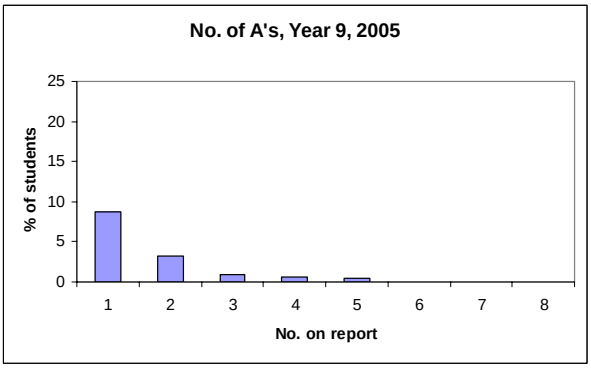

Figure 19. Students receiving numbers of *A*s, Year 9, 2005

The frequency of multiple *A*-grades is very low. In fact, no student in Years 3, 6 or 9 received an *A* in every task in the suite. A very small number of students received an *A* in every task they undertook, but none of these undertook every task in the suite. Table 9 shows the number of students who received each of the "top 3" possible combinations of "straight *A*s". In this table, "5/5", for example, indicates that the student undertook 5 tasks and received an *A* in all of them.

	Year 3			Year 6			Year 9		
Straight A combination	5/5	4/4	3/3	7/7	6/6	5/5	8/8	7/7	6/6
No. of students	0	9	13	0	0	1	0	0	0

Table 9. Students receiving one of the "top 3" combinations of straight *A*s, 2005

This suggests something more than that each task is challenging, with its own operational fields of knowledge and targeted repertoires of practices. It suggests also that the *range* of tasks in any suite is such that even those students capable of demonstrating excellence in one or two tasks will probably not demonstrate comparable excellence in the remaining tasks. Anecdotal evidence — the only sort of accessible evidence that currently exists on such matters — suggests that there are many students in the compulsory years of schooling who routinely achieve straight *A*s on their internal school reports. That students with straight *A*s in Rich Tasks are so much rarer suggests that Rich Tasks call for a wider range of aptitudes and accomplishments than conventional curriculum offerings — and at a higher standard.

To enable an investigation of how this apparent variety of demands affects the results of *lower*-achieving students, Figures 20 to 22 show the percentage of students in Years 3, 6 and 9 in 2005 who received *numbers* of *U*s.

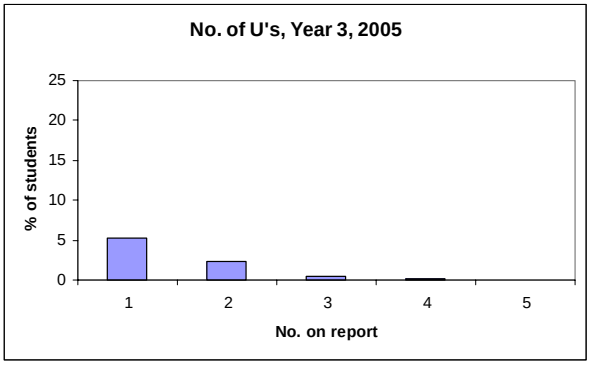

Figure 20.. Students receiving numbers of *U*s, Year 3, 2005

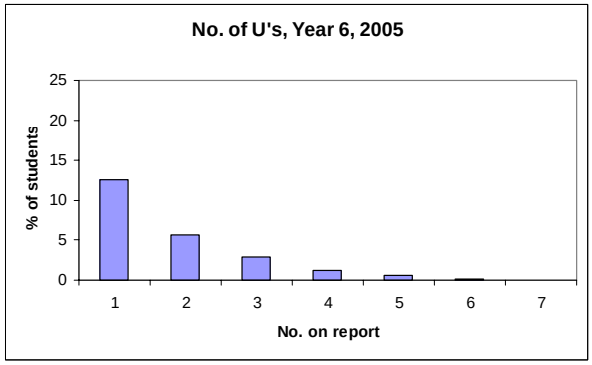

Figure 21. Students receiving numbers of *U*s, Year 6, 2005

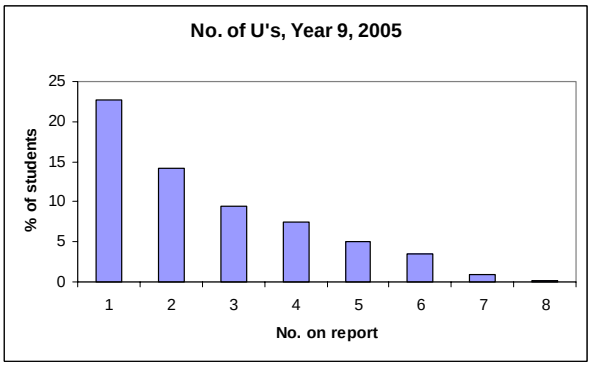

Figure 22. Students receiving numbers of *U*s, Year 9, 2005

In these graphs, as in the graphs for the number of *A*s received by students, there is a progressive decline in numbers of students who are awarded more than one *U*. Even in Suite 3, in which many students did not achieve to a commendable standard (*C*) on *each* task, there are few students who did not achieve to a commendable standard on *any* task. This shows that many students who are awarded a *U* in a particular task, or even in a number of tasks, are capable of achieving (and do achieve) a *C* or above in other tasks. It would seem that the same *variety* of the tasks that keeps higher-achieving students from getting straight *A*s also keeps lower-achieving students from getting straight *U*s, that is, it enables them to find some tasks in which they can perform to a *C*-standard.

This finding suggests that a suite of the Rich Tasks, in its range and depth, challenges even the most multi-talented, highly-achieving student, but also enables all but a very few students to demonstrate a commendable standard of performance in at least (and usually more than) one task. Importantly, even in Suite 3, with its high rate of *U*s, it is not a *particular* "easy" task that allows nearly everyone to obtain a *C* or above. Nearly all students, when presented with a suite of tasks that will challenge even the most gifted, seem to be finding that at least one of these tasks demands skills and knowledges that they have at their command or are able (and interested) to acquire. Anecdotal evidence, again, would suggest that (particularly in Year 9, perhaps) there is a sizeable proportion of students who consistently "fail" in all their subjects on internal school reports.

The fact that few students are receiving straight *A*s or straight *U*s in Rich Tasks may provide further support to the view that teachers are in fact deciding grades with reference to the task-specific standards, or at least that they are not deciding them on spurious grounds such as preconceived notions of the student's ability or academic "worth": *different* students are obtaining the *A*s in the various tasks, and *different* students are obtaining the *U*s in the various tasks.

Another equity-related issue is the relative performance on Rich Tasks of boys and girls, as summarised in Table 10.

In this table, each lightly shaded cell represents a task grade that was awarded to more girls than boys; each heavily shaded cell represents a task grade that was awarded to more boys than girls; each unshaded cell represents a grade that was not available in that task. The number in each "available" cell is the difference between the percentage of students who received an *A* in that task who were boys and those who were girls; for example, for the *A*-grade cell for S1-1 *Webpage Design*, 14 is the difference between the girls (57% of the students who received an *A*) and the boys (43%). Where the difference is more than 30, the number is in bold type.

	Grade					
Task	**A**	**B/A**	**B**	**C/B**	**C**	**U**
S1-1	14	14		8	19	9
S1-2	3		1		16	**50**
S1-2b	**43**		2		19	**33**
S1-3	24		6		22	24
S1-4	15		1		21	30
S1-5	25		9		23	25
S2-1	20	25		29	26	21
S2-2	**40**	19		5	18	**42**
S2-3	**33**	23		16	8	**31**
S2-4	10	27		10	21	**51**
S2-5	5		12		14	2
S2-6	28	24		5	22	**33**
S2-7	8	5	7	2	10	17
S2-7b	9	6	14	3	16	**43**
S3-1	**38**	**31**		6	0	17
S3-2	**56**		**40**		3	21
S3-3	**53**	**40**	24	3	3	9
S3-4	15	**43**	13	3	7	4
S3-5	**41**	28		23	9	**33**
S3-6	**54**		**31**		13	23
S3-7	26	9		**31**	14	12
S3-7b1	**34**	25		21	6	15
S3-8	**43**	**35**	28	13	11	26

Table 10. Gender differences in Rich Task grades, 2005

It is clear that in nearly all tasks girls predominated in the higher grades and boys in the lower. Despite the positive equity-related finding that the variety of the tasks in a suite seem to offer the opportunity for nearly all students to achieve at least a *C*-grade on at least one task, it would seem that the variety is not of a kind that guarantees the *higher* grades of the Rich Tasks will, across a suite, be equally accessible to girls and boys.

The second question posed on p. 7 of this report — *Will schools continue to apply standards in a similar way, when centrally-based ratification of grades is replaced by locally-based standards validation?* — may also be answered positively, with a proviso that this finding will be either strengthened or weakened by upcoming scrutiny of student work.

9. Conclusions

The data for 2005, when compared with the data for 2003–2004, indicate that in a context of greater flexibility in the scheduling of Rich Task reporting, an end to mandation, and a shift towards a more teacher-directed, decentralised standards validation process, Rich Tasks have continued to present a viable and challenging curriculum and assessment opportunity. Most schools who have implemented Rich Tasks at any time have continued to do so, and more schools have started to implement them.

Rich Tasks are being undertaken in a wider range of year levels

In 2005 — the second year after the conclusion of the New Basics trial — more students received a Rich Task Report than in either of the previous two years, largely because reports could be issued to students in any year level from 1 to 10. This represents a change not just in when reports were issued but in when the tasks themselves were made available to students. The increase in the number of reports is of less significance than the increased flexibility of task implementation that it points to.

Schools are generally continuing to offer a wide range of Rich Tasks

In 2005 — the first year in which it was not mandated that schools report on all tasks — schools in general continued to offer about as many tasks as in 2004, with some smaller schools offering fewer tasks than some larger schools (especially in Suite 2). Students undertook, on average, the same number of tasks in Suites 2 and 3 as in 2004, and slightly fewer in Suite 1. Each Rich Task was undertaken by at least (and usually many more than) half the students in Years 3, 6 or 9. The most common combination of Rich Tasks for students to undertake in each suite was *all* Rich Tasks. Offering all or nearly all Rich Tasks occurred most often in Suite 3, and least often in Suite 2.

While some schools continue to offer entire suites of Rich Tasks, in keeping with the original New Basics vision, other schools that have decided not to do so evidently consider that various subsets of the available Rich Tasks constitute a valuable curriculum and assessment option.

The suites of Rich Tasks are intellectually challenging and varied, in ways that enhance educational equity

The extreme difficulty of achieving the highest grade across a suite of Rich Tasks, taken together with the fact that few students fail to achieve at least a *C* in at least one task, suggests that the Rich Tasks are capable as a suite of challenging the most multi-talented students and, as individual tasks, of engaging the generally lower-achieving students.

Given that New Basics was established to “up the intellectual ante” *and* to enhance educational equity, this finding is a very positive one.

On the other hand, the higher grades of Rich Tasks are in general more accessible to girls than to boys.

Teachers are grading student work in a way that is consistent with the view that they are continuing to apply the standards established in 2003 and 2004

The proportion of grades awarded in each Rich Task in 2005, under a system of decentralised standards validation, was overall similar to that awarded in 2004 under a system of centralised ratification. This represents an endorsement of the professionalism of the teachers involved in enacting and grading Rich Tasks, and of their expertise in these areas as developed over the past five years. The literature on cultural change within institutions strongly suggests that a supportive system would be necessary to ensure the maintenance and continuing development of these achievements.

The Rich Task Reports dataset provides insights into student performance and schools’ and teachers’ practices

As well as fulfilling its primary function of enabling the issuing of Rich Task Reports, this unique dataset allows investigation into such matters as curriculum choices made by schools and the basis of assessment decision making by teachers. With the addition of the 2006 data, it will allow investigation into patterns of individual student performances in Rich Tasks over time.