

Going beyond the board

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By increasing the internal assessment component in PUC, the state govt aims to address the limitations of board exams

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Board examinations in class 12 often receive criticism for assessing only a limited set of skills, primarily those that can be evaluated through written examinations. As a result, the focus of teaching and learning tends to revolve around what is assessed in these exams while neglecting key learning outcomes essential for a well-rounded education. Specific key outcomes of learning that are core and essential for attaining the broader aims of education but cannot be assessed through written examinations remain unaddressed. It is important to recognise these shortcomings and incorporate the essential learning outcomes into the broader educational process, beyond the scope of board exams. The critical question is how teachers and educational institutions can work together to create a balanced learning environment that nurtures these outcomes and prepares students for life beyond examinations.

To address this issue, the Karnataka government has changed the Pre-University (PU) exam pattern for the academic year 2023–24. Now, 20 marks will be allotted to internal assessment, and the final board exam will account for 80 marks for subjects without practical components.

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Internal assessments will offer a holistic way to assess students' overall performance and abilities beyond what written exams can measure. These assessments will also provide an opportunity for continuous and comprehensive assessment of students' progress throughout the academic year, reducing the reliance on a single, high-stakes final exam. More importantly, such an assessment also gives multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning, which helps reduce the pressure associated with a single final exam. This change aims to create a more balanced and stress-free learning environment. Furthermore, they allow teachers greater autonomy to tailor content and instruction to meet individual needs and allow all learners to make the progress they are capable of. In essence, it promotes an equitable and fair learning environment. Being mindful of a few important considerations, such as type and method, duration, scheme of evaluation, and role of the teacher, will also make internal assessment more meaningful.

The type of assessment employed will include authentic methods that assess subject-specific skills such as experimentation, critical reflection on social issues, creative expression, and 21st century skills like collaboration and communication. These skills cannot be assessed merely using written tests. Authentic assessments offer a way to assess competencies through a valid, reliable, and fair assessment of students learning. This approach also goes beyond the simple recall of information and promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and the application of knowledge in relevant contexts.

The method of assessment will vary and may take various forms, including simulations, case studies, practical examinations, internships, oral presentations, and debates. In the context of the PU board in particular, long-term projects will be a valuable way of engaging students in actively investigating real-world problems.

Teachers play a crucial role in planning and executing long-term projects. They should space project work, organise periodic discussions and reviews at different stages, provide necessary guidance, feedback, inputs, and resources, etc., to enrich the subject content, and educate students about plagiarism and the importance of quoting the source of information to ensure the authenticity of the project.

The scheme of evaluation for group projects should involve both a summative assessment of the final product and a formative assessment of the knowledge and skills demonstrated while working on the project. The evaluation scheme should be planned so that rubrics and checklists are created and implemented to assess the process and the final product of learning. In addition to this, specific assessment criteria for individual contributions should be clearly defined for group projects.

The introduction of internal assessments at the PU board signifies a shift towards a more comprehensive assessment of student abilities, including more than one summative assessment. While large class sizes and the limited time available for assessment inhibit teachers from implementing internal assessments, their experience and understanding of the context are invaluable assets for planning effective internal assessments. For such assessments to become a reality in schools in Karnataka, many factors need to be in place. These include a fresh approach to evaluation that is less stressful and top-heavy

so that the focus is on the learning and not on the testing; in-service training for teachers of all grade levels in the domain of assessments; and a system that instills the value of internal assessment in teachers and schools for nurturing holistic education.

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