

Advancing futures

New senior assessment and tertiary entrance systems in Queensland



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The Queensland Government is introducing new senior assessment and tertiary entrance arrangements, which will commence for students who enter Year 11 in 2019. This timeframe will ensure that teachers, students and parents have time to understand and familiarise themselves with the new arrangements. It will also ensure that students are aware of the new arrangements as they plan their senior subjects and pathways.

The new senior assessment system will build on the strengths of Queensland's current school-based assessment approach. Teachers will continue to exercise their professional judgement in designing and administering school-based senior assessment. Senior students will continue to be provided with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Under the new arrangements, these features will also be complemented by subject-based external assessment and new processes to support and promote high-quality assessment practice.

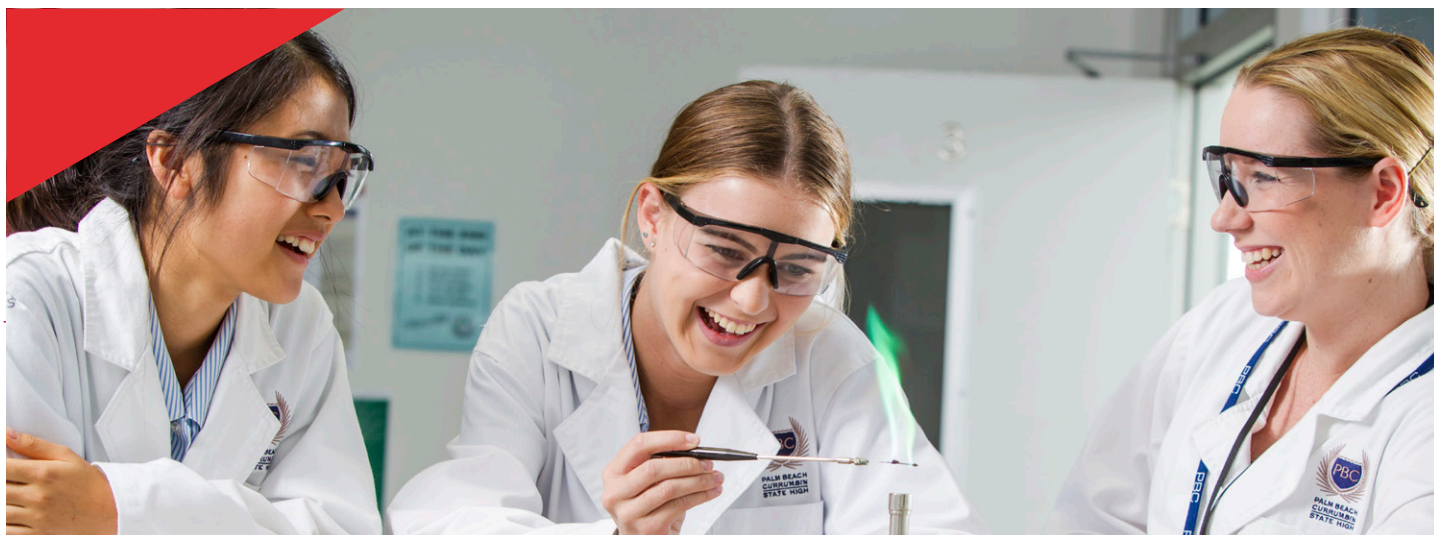
A new tertiary entrance system will move from the current Overall Position (OP) tertiary rank – based on results in five senior Authority subjects – to a more inclusive rank which may also include a Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification or Subject Area Syllabus (SAS) subject. The new rank will take the form of an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), as used in other Australian states and territories.

Developing the new systems

The Queensland Government initially announced the introduction of new assessment and tertiary entrance systems on 25 August 2015. Since then, development of the new systems has been guided by a Senior Secondary Assessment Taskforce. The Taskforce is chaired by the Honourable Kate Jones MP, Minister for Education, with representatives from schooling sectors, parent groups, secondary principal associations, teacher unions and tertiary institutions. It also includes the entities that will administer the new systems – the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) and the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC).

Outcomes from each Taskforce meeting have been published in a series of communiqués. These are available on the Department of Education and Training website at: www.det.qld.gov.au/programs-initiatives/education/queensland-senior-assessment-and-tertiary-entrance-systems.





Senior Assessment

The new senior assessment system recognises assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It combines the flexibility and authenticity of school-based assessment, developed and marked by classroom teachers, with the additional rigour of a common external assessment set and marked by the QCAA.

Reducing the number of assessments

The new model will involve four final assessments that will count towards the final grade in each senior subject. This reflects a reduction in many existing senior syllabus requirements, which typically require up to seven assessments. A reduction in final assessment requirements should provide additional time for other important aspects of teaching and learning.

Strengthening school-based assessment

A range of new processes will be adopted to strengthen the quality and comparability of school-based assessment. Under these arrangements, Queensland's school-based assessment will have the most rigorous quality assurance in Australia. This will include:

- **Common assessment parameters** – Senior teachers currently develop school-based assessments based on broad syllabus requirements. Under the new system, QCAA will provide more specific parameters for developing school-based assessments in each subject. This will include the type of assessment, the conditions under which it should be administered and a common marking scheme.
- **Endorsement** – Existing moderation processes are conducted after assessments have been completed by students. Under the new system, all school-based assessments will be subject to endorsement by the QCAA prior to use.

- **Confirmation** – Under existing moderation processes, schools select samples of completed student work and submit them to QCAA moderation panels. The panels then consider whether the overall subject grades given to students are consistent with the work samples provided. Under a new confirmation process, the QCAA will select representative samples of completed student responses from each school. Expert assessment supervisors will then consider whether the QCAA marking scheme has been correctly applied for each school-based assessment.
- **Ratification** – QCAA will administer a final ratification process in which patterns of results in school-based and external assessment activities will be analysed to detect issues or anomalies. This may include patterns of results between school-based and external assessment. It may also include anomalies in school, class or student results due to external circumstances such as illness or traumatic events.

Introducing external assessment

The introduction of a common external assessment in each senior subject will also help to ensure subject results are comparable across teachers and schools. While this will commonly involve a written examination, other forms of external assessment may also be used depending on the requirements of a given subject.

Unless there are strong educational reasons to the contrary, external assessment will contribute 25% of the overall subject result in most subjects. In mathematics and science subjects, it will contribute 50% of the overall subject result. External assessment will contribute more in mathematics and science subjects because the type of skills and knowledge found in these subjects are more readily assessed through common external assessment.



Judging and reporting student achievement

Existing senior assessment arrangements require teachers to judge student work based on a matrix of syllabus standards. Teachers award an overall grade (ranging from A–E) for each standard. Rules outlined in each syllabus are then used to convert these grades to an overall subject result. The subject result is provided as a five point scale, from Very High Achievement (VHA) to Very Limited Achievement (VLA).

Under the new system, syllabus objectives and standards for making judgments will be incorporated into a common marking scheme for each school-based assessment activity. In each senior subject, scores from the three school-based assessments will be added to the external assessment score to provide a final subject result. Students will be provided with an overall numerical score as well as a level of achievement.

School-based assessment results will not be statistically adjusted ('scaled') against the results of the external assessment. While this process is used in some Australian jurisdictions, new processes to ensure the comparability and quality of school-based assessment in Queensland will make this unnecessary.

Building assessment expertise

The QCAA is already trialling new accreditation modules which will help senior secondary teachers and curriculum leaders build on their existing knowledge of assessment practice. A similar process will be used to formally accredit experienced senior teachers who will administer endorsement and confirmation processes under the new system.

Additional QCAA officers with subject-based expertise in curriculum development and all forms of assessment will provide schools and teachers with regular advice on teaching, learning and assessment. These officers will also help to manage ongoing syllabus revision and the annual development of new subject-based external assessments.

Tertiary Entrance

Under the new system, responsibility for generating a common Year 12 tertiary entrance rank will be transferred from the QCAA to QTAC. QTAC will administer this process on behalf of Queensland tertiary institutions.

Moving from the OP to an ATAR

Students completing Year 12 in 2019 will be the last group of senior students to receive an OP tertiary entrance rank. From 2020, eligible students completing Year 12 will receive an ATAR. While the OP ranks students in 25 bands of achievement (with OP1 as the highest rank), an ATAR ranks students from 99.95 in steps of 0.05. This provides a much 'finer-grained' rank, which can help to differentiate students who seek entry to high-demand tertiary courses.

The use of an ATAR will also simplify administrative processes for Queensland students who wish to apply for interstate courses, as well as interstate students who wish to apply for Queensland courses.

Calculating student ATARs

QTAC will generate student ATARs through a statistical process known as 'inter-subject scaling'. Under this process, patterns of student results across different subjects are mathematically compared and adjusted to enable students with different combinations of results to be compared in a single rank order. A similar process is used to support ATAR calculations in most other Australian jurisdictions.

The use of inter-subject scaling will mean that existing school-based processes are no longer required to support the calculation of a common Year 12 tertiary entrance rank. In particular, the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test will no longer be used. This will help to free time and resources for subject-based learning and assessment activities.

A more inclusive tertiary entrance rank

The current OP tertiary entrance rank is based on a student's best five results in QCAA Authority subjects. This includes 20 semester units of Authority subjects, with at least three subjects having been taken for all four semesters.

The new Queensland ATAR will include a broader range of student learning. This may include either:

- a student's best five Authority subject results, OR;
- a student's best results in a combination of four Authority subject results plus:
 - a result from a completed VET qualification at Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate III or above; or
 - a result from a subject based on a QCAA Subject Area Syllabus – commonly referred to as a SAS subject.

This approach recognises the role that VET plays in senior studies, while also ensuring that students have a sufficient breadth of academic subjects to cope with the demands of tertiary study. New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia also allow students to include VET subjects as part of their ATAR calculation.

In calculating an ATAR, Queensland Year 12 students with completed VET qualifications at a particular AQF level will be provided with a common scaled subject result. This

result will take account of the comparative performance of Year 12 students undertaking VET at that AQF Level, based on the results they achieve in their other Authority subjects.

English as a requirement for ATAR eligibility

Under the new arrangements, eligibility for an ATAR will be subject to satisfactory completion of a QCAA English subject. This is a new requirement, which reflects the fundamental importance of English as a foundation for tertiary study.

Satisfactory completion would require students to attain a result that is equivalent to a Sound Level of Achievement in one of five QCAA English subjects – English, Essential English, Literature, English Extension or English as an Additional Language. While students must meet this standard to be eligible to receive an ATAR, a student's English result will not be a mandatory inclusion in the calculation of their ATAR.

Other tertiary entrance pathways

In order to be eligible for the current OP rank, students must currently complete the equivalent of five QCAA Authority subjects, and undertake the QCS Test¹. Students who do not meet these eligibility requirements may lodge an application to QTAC, and be considered for admission to some tertiary courses, through a process commonly referred to as the 'OP-ineligible schedule'. The OP-ineligible schedule enables students to be ranked for tertiary entrance based on a combination of senior studies, including QCAA subjects, VET modules and, where applicable, the results of the QCS Test².

The new tertiary entrance system will not include an equivalent 'ATAR-ineligible schedule' for students who do not meet the eligibility requirements of the new Queensland ATAR. Instead, the new ATAR will operate as a more inclusive single rank that may take account of learning across Authority subjects, SAS subjects and completed VET qualifications.

Under the new tertiary entrance system, QTAC will no longer operate a central process where applicants with VET qualifications are ranked for tertiary entrance based on a 'VET schedule'. Instead, individual tertiary institutions will nominate whether, and how, VET qualifications may be used as a basis for entry to the courses they offer. QTAC and tertiary institutions will publish information on individual course entry requirements to ensure these pathways are clear and transparent.

1 Students in exceptional circumstances may be exempted from the requirement to undertake the QCS Test.

2 Under current processes, students who are not OP eligible may still elect to undertake the QCS Test.





Moving to the new systems

The Queensland Government is committed to ensuring that teachers, students and parents are well prepared for these changes. This will involve trialling new senior assessment processes, redevelopment of senior syllabus documents, initial development of subject-based external assessments and communication and professional development for teachers and curriculum leaders.

The QCAA has already begun to trial a range of new senior assessment processes, including the use of subject-based external assessment. As part of this process, over 20,000 Year 11 students from over 300 state and non-state schools recently undertook trials of external assessment across seven senior subjects. Preliminary trialling of new endorsement and quality assurance processes for school-based assessment commenced in the second half of 2015, and will continue in 2016 and 2017.

The QCAA will continue to provide teachers, schools and students with the opportunity to be involved in trials and evaluations. In addition, the initial cohort of Year 11 students, who will enter senior schooling in 2019, will be able to undertake practice external assessments in each of their senior subjects.

The QCAA has also commenced redevelopment of senior syllabuses. When syllabuses are redeveloped, QCAA consults with teachers and other experts in each learning area to gather views on the current curriculum offerings. Writing teams produce drafts of a syllabus informed by feedback from Learning Area Reference Groups. These Groups include subject experts and representatives from education stakeholder groups. Drafts of each syllabus are published online for further feedback by the wider education community.

An initial 35 draft senior syllabuses were released for comment in May and September 2016. Further draft syllabuses will be released for comment in 2017. This process will involve the redevelopment of at least 70 senior syllabuses through a highly collaborative process. Expert writing teams – made up of QCAA officers, experienced senior teachers and academics – will consult with senior secondary teachers and discipline experts in each learning area. The new senior syllabuses will provide more detailed coverage of syllabus content. They will also contain clear common requirements for the development of the three school-based assessments.

The new senior syllabuses and assessment requirements will be the subject of an extensive professional development program. This will cover over 16,700 Queensland senior secondary school teachers and school leadership teams. Professional development activities will include face-to-face workshops across the state, as well as complementary on-line webinars, information and curriculum resources.

