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**Student Education Profiles 2005:
Preparation, distribution, appeals**

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Overview

This is a report of activities completed by the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) as part of issuing 40 026 Student Education Profiles (SEPs) to students who completed Year 12 in Queensland in 2005.

An SEP may contain a Senior Certificate, or it may contain a Senior Certificate and a Tertiary Entrance (TE) Statement. The QSA issues the Senior Certificate, and is responsible for rankings derived from school assessments — the Overall Positions and Field Positions (OPs and FPs). The QSA also issues the TE Statement, which informs students about these rankings.

- All students who complete Year 12 with at least one result in an Authority subject, Authority-registered subject, or Recorded subject, receive a Senior Certificate. The Senior Certificate also reports the details of accredited vocational education and training (VET), as well as grades in the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test.
- OP-eligible students receive a TE Statement. It reports overall achievement on a ranking from OP1 (highest) to OP25 (lowest), as well as achievements in a maximum of five fields ranked from FP1 (highest) to FP10 (lowest).

In 2005, the Certificate of Post-compulsory School Education (CPCSE) was in its second year of general implementation. Students are eligible to receive the CPCSE if they have at least 12 years of schooling and are identified by the school as having an impairment or difficulties in learning that are not primarily due to socioeconomic, cultural and/or linguistic factors. In 2005, for the first time, all CPCSE students who completed some form of VET had their achievements reported on their Senior Certificate; incomplete VET was reported on their CPCSEs. The CPCSE adds to the suite of certificates the Queensland Studies Authority issues, and ensures that the educational achievement of all students can be recorded.

Table 1 presents summary information about Year 12 students in 2005.

Table 1: Summary of the Year 12 student population in 2005

<i>Number of Year 12 students (including visa students)</i>	40 026
Number of Year 12 students (excluding visa students)	39 267
Students eligible for an OP or equivalent OP	27 643
Students eligible for an OP (excluding visa students)	27 025
Students ineligible for an OP or equivalent OP (including visa students)	12 383
Students ineligible for an OP (excluding visa students)	12 242
Repeat students (including visa students)	142
Re-entry students	32
Students who completed senior studies over three years	438
Visa students (eligible and ineligible for an equivalent OP)	759

In preparing and distributing SEPs, and during the review period, the QSA:

- continued to develop the format of the Senior Certificate
- made available to schools — via the QSA's schools website — provisional data about their students
- analysed data to produce parameters needed in calculating OPs and FPs
- analysed data from each school looking for possible anomalies

- analysed individual student data to identify possible outliers before finalising OP calculations
- conducted any necessary special-case calculations
- determined OPs and FPs
- produced and dispatched Senior Certificates and TE Statements
- provided OPs and FPs through the QSA's Smart OP website, a freecall interactive-voice-response (IVR) phone service, and a new SMS service
- electronically transmitted tertiary entrance data to all tertiary admissions centres and selected interstate universities
- processed applications for verification (Senior Certificate) and review (TE Statement).

The production of the SEP is increasingly complex and the QSA continues to meet this challenge with new products, processes and practices.

1. What developments were there in the format of the Senior Certificate?

In 2005, as in previous years, development of the format of the Senior Certificate continued.

The vision of the QSA is to be a leading education service for all students in Queensland. The QSA is dedicated to, among other things, issuing certificates that are valued and widely accepted as informative, accurate, and authentic records of students' achievements.

In 2005, for the sixth time, students received Senior Certificates printed on A4 paper with details about vocational education achievements and other Recorded subjects printed on accompanying statements. From 1997 to 1999, students received certificates printed on A3 paper when their achievements did not fit on one piece of A4 paper. The main reason for the format change in 2000 was that there was a strong possibility that the achievements to be reported for some students would not fit onto one piece of folded A3 paper. This was still the case in 2005.

In 2005, certificates printed with accompanying statements reported vocational education in one or more of the following ways:

- as part of Authority subjects or Authority-registered subjects based on QSA syllabuses and study area specifications (SASs)
- as part of Authority-registered subjects the school developed
- as VET subjects
- as studies completed as part of school-based apprenticeships or traineeships (SATs).

Some students' VET achievements were reported on statements that accompanied their Senior Certificates.

In 2005, as in the previous five years, students who completed studies towards a SAT had the opportunity to have these studies reported on their Senior Certificates.

The back of all 2005 certificates gave summary information about:

- levels of achievement in Authority and Authority-registered subjects
- QCS Test grades
- completed VET certificates
- number and type of VET subjects.

The Senior Certificate also included a statement that the certificate is a credential recognised within the Australian Qualifications Training Framework.

Developments of the format and readability of the Senior Certificate were necessary in 2005 (as in previous years) because the senior curriculum continues to develop in response to changes in the senior secondary school population.

Owing to the certificate's developed design, in 2005:

- 40 026 senior students received a Senior Certificate (in 2004 there were 39 468)
- 517 external certificates were issued (in 2004 there were 580)
- 585 CPCSEs were issued (in 2004 there were 485); of the 585 students receiving CPCSEs, 451 received both a Senior Certificate and a CPCSE, and 134 received the CPCSE only
- 21 308 students received a result in one or more Authority subjects or strands of Authority-registered subjects with embedded VET (in 2004 there were 22 616 students with results in embedded VET, and in 1997 there were 2616 students with results in embedded VET undertaken as part of Board (Authority) subjects)
- 309 897 modules and/or competencies were printed for 23 459 students as part of Authority subjects and Authority-registered subjects reported on the Senior Certificate (in 2004 there were 326 593 modules and/or competencies printed for 26 260 students, and in 1997 there were 18 097 modules and/or competencies printed for 2355 students, as part of Authority or Authority-registered subjects)
- the highest number of modules reported for a student studying Authority subjects or Authority-registered subjects with embedded VET was 120 for six subjects (in 2004 the highest was 109 in six subjects and in 1997 the highest was 32 in two subjects)
- 2083 students were recorded as studying under a SAT at 237 schools; of these, 1363 students in 208 schools had completed modules or competencies shown on their Senior Certificate (in 2004 there were 1473 students at 193 schools studying under SATs, 846 of whom, from 154 schools, had modules or competencies reported)
- 21 522 students finished Year 12 with at least one VET result recorded on their Senior Certificate (in 2004 there were 23 253 students with at least one VET result).

Changes to the format and readability of the Senior Certificate were designed to produce useful minor improvements while preserving the continuity of the Senior Certificate.

2. What data did schools receive?

The QSA made data available to schools by publishing them on the QSA's secure schools website, depending on the category of the school and the category of subject-groups within the school (see Tables 2 and 3). The data consisted of information about scaling parameters for large and intermediate subject-groups, scaling information for small groups, provisional second-stage scaling parameters, and provisional QCS Test performance data.

The procedures for calculating OPs and FPs take into account different school sizes as well as differences in the size of school subject-groups. There are also procedures for "visa schools" and "visa subject-groups". The QSA mailed these schools information about special scaling procedures for visa schools, and procedures used for visa subject-groups.

Table 2 lists the different categories of schools involved in the 2005 OP calculations. Table 3 lists the different categories of school subject-groups involved in the 2005 OP calculations.

Table 2: Count of senior schools by category¹

<i>Total number of schools with senior students</i>	404
Number of senior schools with OP-eligible students:	368
• large schools	317
• small schools	53
• intermediate schools	10
Schools with a high proportion of visa students (visa schools)	7
Schools without any OP-eligible students	12

Table 3: Count of school subject-groups in Authority subjects by category

<i>Total number of school subject-groups</i>	8808
Large subject-groups	3951
Small subject-groups	3713
Intermediate subject-groups	1144
Subject-groups with a high proportion of visa students (visa subject-groups)	84
Subject-groups without any OP-eligible students	352

After receiving assessment data from schools (Exchange Disk #5) on 24 November, the QSA made data available to schools on the QSA's secure schools website as follows:

- QCS summary, large group scaling, QCS versus Within-School Measure (WSM) plots for non-visa schools were uploaded on 28 November.
- Small-group boundaries, intermediate-group and second-stage scaling for non-visa schools were uploaded 5 December.
- Large and intermediate groups and second-stage scaling correction factors for visa schools and schools with visa subject-groups were uploaded on 15 December. (These schools were earlier sent a letter alerting them to different procedures for calculating scaling parameters for subject achievement indicators (SAIs) and overall achievement indicators (OAI)².)

This was the fifth time the QSA made these datasets available to schools via the website, rather than by mail. On the day they were uploaded, the QSA emailed schools about the availability of the data. Schools who could not be contacted by email were faxed the following day. More data were uploaded to the website in February. These provide details about aspects of QCS Test performance, OPs, and selected subject results of groups of students at each school. For comparison, the QSA also uploaded state data to the schools website. New graphs and explanatory notes for 2005 Year 12 data were also uploaded to the QSA secure schools website in February 2006. These graphs provide information about performance of schools' Year 12 students in 2005, and over a period of time. The explanatory notes illustrated possible uses of the data, including trends in student performance.

¹ The number of OP-eligible students attending a school can be used as a basis for determining categories: large schools have 20 or more OP-eligible students; small schools have 15 or fewer OP-eligible students; and intermediate schools have 16–19 OP-eligible students.

² Scaled OAIs are the weighted averages of scaled SAIs that are then banded into OPs.

3. How were analyses of data used to produce parameters needed in the calculations?

The QSA analysed data to:

- reduce the effect in the calculation of OPs of the QCS Test performance of students who were very much less or very much more successful in the QCS Test than they were at school
- produce the table of small subject-group achievement band boundaries used to convert small-group SAIs into scaled SAIs
- determine the cutoffs for OP and FP bands.

Students are OP-eligible if they complete at least 20 semester units of Authority subjects (including at least three Authority subjects for all four semesters) and sit the QCS Test. If students provide acceptable documentary evidence, they may be exempted from sitting the QCS Test. Although many OP-ineligible students also sit the QCS Test, these students' results are not used at all in the OP calculations. Table 4 provides a summary of the number of students who sat or did not sit the QCS Test in 2005.

Table 4: Students who sat or did not sit the QCS Test in 2005

<i>Total number of students who sat the QCS Test</i>	29 624
OP-eligible students (excluding visa students)	26 537
OP-ineligible students (excluding visa students)	2345
Visa students	667
Students who sat the QCS Test but did not complete Year 12	76
<i>Total number of students who did not sit the QCS Test</i>	10 477
OP-eligible students who were granted exemption from sitting:	498
• for medical reasons	465
• for bereavement reasons	9
• for cultural reasons	6
• for sporting reasons	4
Students previously eligible who were not granted an exemption from sitting	465

The analysis of data shows that there is a high correlation between the way OP-eligible students perform in the QCS Test and the way they perform in their school assessment. In previous years (1992–2004), the QCS/WSM correlation generally ranged between 0.73 and 0.75. In 2005, this correlation was 0.75. The high correlation of QCS/WSM suggests that the QCS Test is a suitable and accurate scaling instrument.

Approximate year-to-year comparability of OPs was maintained in 2005. This process involved finding cutoffs comparable with the 2004 cutoffs, using a combination of estimates from three methods:

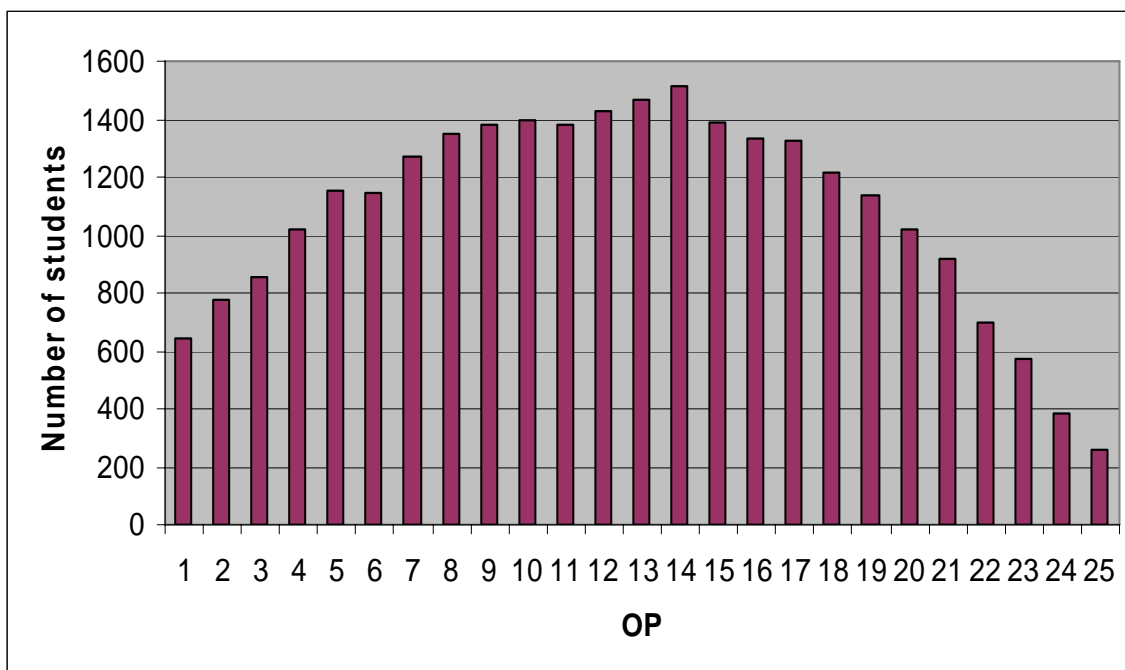
- comparing OAI scales using levels of achievement and multiple regression³

³ Multiple regression is a statistical analysis used to model students' OAIs based on levels of achievement. The results of a multiple regression can be used to examine the relationship between levels of achievement and OAIs.

- comparing the OAIs of students from 2004 who were matched based on subjects and levels of achievement
- comparing OAI scales using QCS Test results.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of OPs in 2005.

Figure 1: 2005 OP distribution



4. How were school datasets analysed for anomalies?

We analysed each dataset before we finalised the OP calculations. We analysed the dataset in three ways to detect possible instances in which one piece of information from a school was grossly inconsistent with other information from the same school.

Statistical analyses of datasets identified cases for which values were outside tolerances for:

- gaps within school subject-group SAI distributions
- relationships of school-group results on the QCS Test and overall achievement indicated by students' levels of achievement
- possible unusual patterns of SAI distributions across subject-groups.

4.1 SAI distributions

We examined all SAI distributions from large school subject-groups as part of the process of checking data supplied by schools. The analysis of SAIs looked for, among other things, unusually large gaps, and unusual consistencies in patterns of SAI decisions across different subjects within a school.

We checked distributions of SAIs against the corresponding Forms R6 (used by schools to propose levels of achievement) for face-value discrepancies among 3956 school subject-groups. We contacted schools when we had questions about the face-value consistency of SAI placements and the relativities

implied by the corresponding Form R6. As a result of these checks we phoned schools, and there were alterations to SAIs for 441 school subject-groups from 191 schools.

Using several mathematical modelling techniques, we identified possible unusual patterns of SAI decisions across subject-groups within a school. This modelling identified schools for which there was an unusual consistency across sets of SAIs and/or an unusual clustering of students. The SAI distributions for the large subject-groups within these schools were scrutinised against Forms R6. We identified patterns in 15 schools and checked all large subject-groups in these schools. This resulted in changes to SAIs for 192 subject-groups from these schools.

The analyses also resulted in the QSA requesting 225 exit folios of work for selected students to provide the evidence on which SAI decisions had been made for 23 subject-groups from one school. For this school there was a pattern of linear translations of SAIs from the Forms R6 with little discrimination among students on the same rung. This suggests that teachers were not making judgments about relativities among their students. However, this school chose to reconsider their decisions and made changes to their SAIs in the 23 subjects.

4.2 School-group data

We checked data for subject-groups and whole school-groups were checked to determine whether mean QCS Test performances were very inconsistent with overall school performances. For each school a polyscore⁴ was estimated for each student. School-groups with large negative mean residual polyscores were selected. (A large negative mean residual suggests that students in this group tend to have an OAI much lower than their polyscore or estimated overall achievement.) Similarly, we selected school-groups with a much larger polyscore spread than OAI spread for further analysis. (In these cases, the students well above the school mean may on average have OAIs much lower than their estimated overall achievement.)

Groups with a sufficient inconsistency of QCS Test and level-of-achievement information were referred to the QSA's Scaling Anomalies Committee for consideration of possible special-case calculations. As a result of the Scaling Anomalies Committee decisions, we changed final-stage parameters for 19 schools. These changes involved raising the mean OAIs at 12 schools and raising the mean-difference at seven schools to bring these parameters to the values whereby they would not have stood out as outliers.

⁴ Note concerning polyscores

A simple mathematical model (Simpson, J. B. & Haladyna, T. M. 1988, *An Evaluation of Polyweighting in Domain-Referenced Testing*, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association, New Orleans, April 1988) can be used to obtain an estimate of each student's overall achievement starting from levels of achievement alone. These estimates are over-simplifications in that they involve ignoring differences between students with the same level of achievement in a given subject; that is, all VHAs in French are treated equally, and so on. As the table below shows, the resulting estimates, "polyscores", of overall achievement correlate very well with OAIs (the finer-grained scale which is cut into OPs).

Correlation	2005 student data N = 27 025
OAI ~ Polyscore	0.953
OAI ~ QCS	0.780
Polyscore ~ QCS	0.745

This procedure provides estimates of overall achievement independently of the procedures used for determining OPs. The estimates are based on treating each level of achievement in each subject as equivalent. They are not based on treating levels of achievement in different subjects as equivalent, nor are they based on assuming that levels of achievement represent an equal interval scale (that SA is to HA, as HA is to VHA, for example). Therefore, polyscores provide more suitable estimates of overall achievement than simple averages of levels of achievement that have been turned into a five-point scale.

Two cases were referred to the Scaling Anomalies Committee because of circumstances experienced by the students that could have had a negative impact on their QCS Test performance. In both cases an examination of the data revealed no evidence for an intervention.

5. What was done to analyse individual student data for anomalies?

For groups of students with similar combinations of subjects, individual checks were based on the relationship between OAI and average levels of achievement (across best five subjects), and OAI and individual polyscore. We also used a multiple regression analysis, which models OAIs in terms of levels of achievement, as an overall check. Unlike analyses based on average levels of achievement, both the polyscore and this analysis have the advantage that they do not involve treating a particular level of achievement in one subject as being the same as the level of achievement in another subject.

Like the polyscore analysis, the multiple regression analysis showed a very good correlation between OAIs and levels of achievement. The strength of these relationships means we can look for outliers — cases in which a student has an OAI much lower than the modelled OAI for that student's particular combination of levels of achievement in particular subjects.

For a substantial proportion of the OP-eligible population, we manually scrutinised data as an extra check of the integrity of OP calculations. First, computer searches of the data identified students with an OAI much lower than the modelled OAI for their particular combination of subjects and achievements. This search was performed for every student in the state and involved comparing them with every other student with a sufficiently similar combination of subjects.

Manual checks of around 7861 plots showing these individual student data indicated that further investigation was warranted for 1533 of these students, on the basis that these students' OAIs were possibly odd. For these students we printed an assessment record that showed semester units, levels of achievement, and SAIs in Authority subjects. We noted the panel comments on the relevant Forms R6, and found the student's approximate place within the achievement band for each subject.

After we analysed the data for these students we found 617 cases for which a change was justified to the student's OAI before the issue of SEPs. The OAIs of these 617 students were increased to the point where they would not be considered outliers. This usually meant a change of one OP band.

6. What special-case calculations were conducted?

We carried out special calculations when:

- a school-group had a high proportion of visa students (see Table 2)
- a school subject-group had a high proportion of visa students (see Table 3).

These calculations followed procedures approved previously by the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies on the recommendation of the Technical Advisory Subcommittee of the Moderation Committee.

7. What was done to print and dispatch SEPs?

Since 1996, we have printed SEPs in-house. This brings advantages of enhanced flexibility and efficiency at a lower cost.

In-house printing provides a number of advantages over external printing. It allows greater flexibility for variable printing of the Senior Certificates, which contained millions of items of information and more permutations of that information than ever before. In-house printing also provides easy access to programmers during the development phase, as well as the printing phase. Programming problems that appear during the printing of SEPs are resolved as they occur.

We extensively checked the quality of all certificates before we dispatched them. We put a quality-control loop in place to scrutinise every SEP printed. We made necessary changes to computer programs. (One aspect that could not be entirely resolved during this quality-control phase was the naming of subjects supplied by TAFE. Some TAFE subjects have names that are abbreviated in a way that readers of the Senior Certificate who are not familiar with these VET terms would find difficult to understand or to differentiate between when names are very similar. Before printing the certificates, QSA staff identified and corrected spelling errors and inconsistencies in abbreviations and punctuation of the names of TAFE subjects.)

All timelines were met.

The scheduled date for posting the SEPs was 16 December 2005. To maximise the probability that all students would receive their certificates on the same day, posting occurred over two days — Thursday 15 December for students living interstate, overseas, and in remote areas of Queensland; and Friday 16 December for the remaining students. In 2005, SEPs were posted to 544 Australian postcodes and five overseas zones.

There were no major problems with the schedule, and 40 026 Senior Certificates and 27 643 TE Statements (including those for visa students) were posted. We used computer programs to ensure that every SEP had a precise known position in the packing production line.

In 2005 the QSA provided Year 12 students with access to their OPs and FPs through the QSA's Smart OP website, a freecall interactive-voice-response (IVR) phone service and a new SMS service. The Smart OP service was available from 9am Saturday 17 December to Sunday 8 January 2006. To ensure that students could access their OPs and FPs from Saturday 17 December, students needed to register between 10 October and 15 December. This year 8380 students registered — an increase of five per cent from 2004. From Saturday 17 December 2005 to Sunday 8 January 2006, there were 37 144 visits to the Smart OP website. The number of visits included successful and unsuccessful logons, as well as multiple visits by the same student. For the same period, 3380 calls were made to the IVR service and 2595 students received their OPs and FPs by SMS. Between Saturday 17 December 2005 and Friday 23 December, more than 900 calls were made to the general enquiry number. QSA staff dealt with various enquiries from students and their parents — issues ranging from lost PIN numbers, to ranks, changing preferences based on the OP received and tertiary entrance. QSA staff answered queries throughout the Christmas and New Year period, except for the public holidays.

As well as the information made available to schools on the website (listed on page 3, section 2, "What data did schools receive?"), on Tuesday 20 December details of students' results for each school — levels of achievement, OPs, FPs, and QCS Test grades — were posted on the QSA's schools website. Because the privacy of students and schools must be safeguarded, it was necessary to maintain security over internet data transfers and to continue to develop the effective use of user identities and secure passwords.

8. What tertiary admissions data were electronically transmitted?

The QSA sent Year 12 and tertiary entrance data electronically to all tertiary admissions centres and interstate universities that had received applications from Queensland students. The interstate admissions centres submitted to the QSA the names of Queensland students who applied through them, and information about these students only was released.

We supplied the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) with a file of Year 12 student results (external and internal) by Friday 16 December 2005. Interstate admission centres were sent data from Tuesday 20 December 2005, and interstate requests for student data are still being made.

In 2005, 1466 Queensland students applied to interstate universities (in 2004 and 1997 there were respectively 1142 and 1275 such students). In 2005, we used the Australian Tertiary Admissions System to convert the OPs of students applying to interstate universities. The system uses the common Interstate Transfer Index (ITI), which is a common scale used to convert the TE rank of one state to that of another. Each state is responsible for the conversion from home state TE rank to ITI. This conversion is based on a nationally approved combination of two methods previously used for interstate equivalences — the candidature method and the age-cohort method. The approved approach is based on principles appropriate to the inherent imprecision of both the starting data and the nature of conversion from one state rank to another.

9. What was done to process applications for verification (Senior Certificate) and review (TE Statement)?

Students had until Monday 9 January 2006 to lodge an application for verification of their Senior Certificate and to seek review of their OPs and FPs. Late applications were accepted on the next day.

In 2005 there were 399 of these applications received, which was a decrease of 87 from the 2004 figure (486).

Students' applications can be classified into five main categories:

A. Requests to change names

We received 10 requests to change names on Senior Certificates.

B. Verification of results in Authority and/or Authority-registered subjects

Fifty-seven applications related to differences between the levels of achievement stated on students' exit statements or school reports and those shown on their Senior Certificates. We asked schools to verify results.

C. Correction of results in Recorded subjects

We received one hundred and eight requests to correct results in Recorded subjects.

D. Review in relation to OP/FPs

Two hundred and eighty-two students applied to have their OPs reviewed (88 fewer than the 370 applications in 2004). In each case, we compared students from across the state who had similar results in a similar combination of subjects. We further checked available information when this

preliminary check showed the student who applied for the review had an OAI apparently much lower than the OAIs of other students with similar results in a similar combination of subjects. A panel of senior QSA officers examined each case and determined whether the calculation of a correction factor (to bring the student's OP into line with those of others with similar results) was warranted. In 2005 there were no successful applications to changes to OPs or FPs.

E. Other

Applications by students for verification of their QCS Test results led to checks that an individual grade was correctly calculated. Since multiple marking of QCS Test papers had already occurred, there was no further re-marking.

A summary of the successful applications for verification and/or review (correct at the time of writing) is given in Table 5 (final figures may be different).

Table 5: Amendments to student results (as of 1 March 2006)

Changes to levels of achievement (number of students)	
• Authority subjects and Authority-registered subjects	24
• Recorded subjects	45
• external subjects	0
Changes to OPs	0
Changes to FPs	0
Changes to QCS grades	0

10. Conclusions

Issuing the SEPs in 2005 was more complex than in 2004. The amount and complexity of the information collected and reported, as well as the quality assurance required, continue to increase. Much of this complexity comes from the reporting of accredited vocational education on Senior Certificates. While the activities involved are diverse and often complex, they share a single aim, which is to provide a high-quality credentialling service to the QSA's most important clients — students.