

The Queensland Certificate of Education: Strong, fair and working well

What an independent evaluation found about
Queensland's senior secondary system



The University of Melbourne’s evaluation found the Queensland Certificate of Education system is high quality, strong, fair and working well, while identifying opportunities for continued improvement.

Background

The Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) is Queensland’s senior secondary schooling qualification. It is the qualification most Queensland students work towards as they prepare for **university, vocational education and training (VET), or the workforce**.

The QCE system was substantially redesigned from 2019 following an earlier independent review. The changes kept the flexibility of bringing traditional senior subjects, VET and other recognised learning together in one qualification, while placing greater emphasis on strengthening assessment processes.

The QCAA commissioned the University of Melbourne’s Assessment & Evaluation Research Centre (AERC) to independently evaluate whether these changes are working as intended.

The overall finding

The evaluation found that the QCAA has established a **high-quality curriculum, assessment and certification system**. It also found that confidence in the QCE system has grown since the changes were introduced.

The evaluation identifies areas where the system can continue to improve. Together, the findings provide **reassurance about the strengths of the QCE system and clear opportunities to make it even stronger**.

76

Findings in the
evaluation report

90%+

Provisional
agreement
between school
marking and QCAA
checks

76%

School leaders
agree that the
current system is
stronger

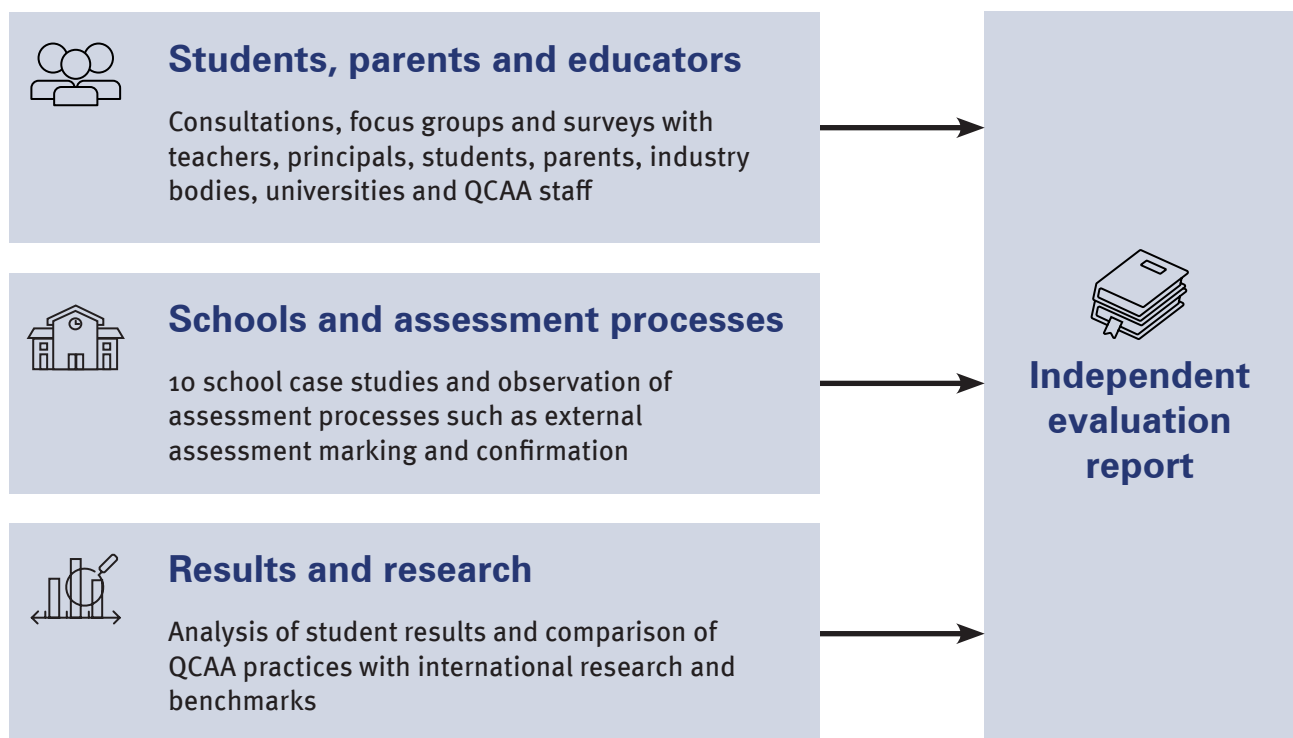
6

Broad areas for
improvement



How was the QCE system evaluated?

The evaluation was based on a wide range of evidence gathered over an extended period.



Why this matters

The findings are based on different kinds of evidence. Similar themes emerged across what people experience in schools and what the data shows.



A strong foundation for senior schooling

A curriculum that balances flexibility with consistency

The evaluators found that QCAA syllabuses achieve an important balance.

The syllabuses set clear standards, learning objectives and assessment criteria. This helps ensure results are comparable across Queensland. At the same time, schools and teachers have flexibility in how they teach the content in their own context.

Syllabuses use a cognitive verb framework, with instructions such as analyse, evaluate and justify. This supports students to develop higher-order thinking rather than simply relying on rote learning.

Teachers can also contribute to curriculum and assessment development through roles on subject expert panels and as assessors. This helps build a strong sense of professional ownership.

The QCAA's approach to developing and reviewing syllabuses meets international benchmarks, including OECD curriculum quality criteria.

Rigorous and clearly documented assessment

Internal assessment is supported by a series of checks designed to help ensure assessments are fair and consistent.

Each internal assessment task used in a school must be endorsed by the QCAA before it is given to students. A sample of student work marked by schools is then checked against common marking guides through a process called confirmation.

The evaluators found high and improving levels of agreement between school marking and the QCAA's checks.

Reliable student results

Because the QCE has important implications for young people's futures, results need to be reliable and fair.

The evaluation included detailed analysis of student assessments. It found that most assessments produce consistent and trusted results, meeting the standards expected for important assessments in senior secondary.



A system that supports students and schools

Equitable outcomes

The evaluators looked at student results across different groups, including gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, language background, school sector, location and access arrangements for students.

Positively, they found only minimal differences between these groups, **providing evidence that the QCE system is delivering broadly equitable outcomes.**

They also found no meaningful difference in outcomes between students who receive assessment adjustments and those who do not.

Strong support and growing confidence

The QCAA provides resources to help teachers and school leaders understand and work in the QCE system. These include detailed documentation, professional learning modules and apps in a secure online portal.

Stakeholders generally rated these resources highly.

School leaders, parents and employers also reported solid confidence in the new QCE system, and the evaluators found that **public confidence has grown since the reforms were introduced.**

Governance that supports ongoing improvement

The evaluators found that the QCAA Board and its committees are effectively monitoring and refining the QCE system.

They also noted that changes had already been made where issues emerged during implementation.

This indicates an organisation that is **learning from experience and continuing to improve the system**, rather than treating the 2019 reforms as a finished product.

Six ways to keep strengthening the QCE system

The QCE system supports thousands of students and teachers, and many subjects across a large and diverse state. The evaluation recognises that the system is complex and will continue to evolve.

The evaluators grouped their recommendations into **six broad areas for improvement**.

1

Make the QCE system easier to understand

The evaluators found that the QCAA's information works well for teachers and school leaders, but can be harder for parents, students and the wider community to understand.

They recommend creating information for different audiences, including simple explanations for families and more detailed guidance for professionals. They also recommend considering how information reaches people in regional and remote communities.

2

Strengthen independent oversight

The evaluators recommend broader external representation to bring a wider range of expertise and perspectives to decision-making.

They also recommend establishing a specialist research advisory committee, including experts in assessment, measurement and statistics. This would provide additional independent advice as the QCE system continues to develop.

3

Keep researching and reviewing the system

The evaluation identifies areas where further research and review could help strengthen the QCE system. This includes reviewing the way learning options contribute to the QCE to help ensure different learning pathways continue to be recognised meaningfully.

The evaluators also recommend reviewing the QCAA Portal systems and apps that support assessment.



4

Support teachers and assessors

Assessors are teachers who take on additional roles, such as marking external exams. The evaluation found that assessors generally feel well prepared and supported in these roles.

Some stakeholders raised concerns about sustainability. This can be particularly challenging in smaller subject areas, where there may be fewer assessors available. The evaluators recommend monitoring assessor recruitment and retention and using more flexible scheduling to help manage workloads.

5

Help teachers design better assessment

The QCAA provides online training to help teachers develop high-quality assessments, and the evaluation found these resources are valued.

The evaluators recommend updating the training and making it more practical and relevant to teachers' needs. They also recommend including **universal design principles** in the core training — i.e. designing assessments to be accessible to as many students as possible from the outset.

6

Keep strengthening the reliability of results

The evaluators identified some opportunities to strengthen how assessments distinguish between students at the highest and lowest levels of achievement. They also found that some marking guides could be improved.

The evaluators found that the process for setting grade boundaries is generally sound, but they recommend greater use of statistical evidence in decision-making. They also recommend regular independent review and continued monitoring to make sure assessment standards remain consistent over time.



A strong system that will keep improving

Overall, the evaluation describes a **young system that is continuing to mature and improve.**

The evidence indicates that the current QCE system has delivered on its founding goals.

It provides a **flexible and inclusive qualification**, supported by assessment processes that are reliable and fair.

The evaluation also provides an independent view of where the system can continue to improve.

Our priorities include:



Making information easier to understand

for families, students and the wider community.



Supporting a sustainable assessment workforce

so teachers and assessors can continue to support the system.



Strengthening monitoring and research

to keep assessment and results reliable.



Addressing specific areas where the system could work better

as the QCE system continues to evolve.

More information

myQCE website

Information for senior students about subjects and courses, pathways planning, study tips and more is available on the myQCE website <https://myqce.qcaa.qld.edu.au>.

QCAA website

More information about senior secondary curriculum and assessment, including syllabuses for QCAA subjects, is available on the QCAA website www.qcaa.qld.edu.au.