

New Queensland Certificate of Education system

Post-cycle process review report

August 2021



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Foreword

The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) Board welcomes this report on the post-cycle process review of the new QCE system. The review involved broad consultation and was conducted promptly to ensure that meaningful improvement strategies could be implemented expeditiously.

The Board is pleased with the implementation of the new system and looks forward to further improvements being made progressively. Like any organisation focused on continuous improvement, it understands the need for internal and external scrutiny of its products and services, and is committed to acting on considered feedback.

The first years of the new system have not passed without challenges, and the QCAA would like to express its appreciation to the education community for working with us to adapt to the new processes and providing feedback on how we can do better. The senior assessment reforms require deep cultural change within the education community and more needs to be done before we can confidently claim success.

The QCAA will work with the education community to implement all improvement activities identified in this report.

1. Executive summary

The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) has conducted a post-cycle process review of the new Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) system following its first year of implementation. In advance of an independent evaluation of the new system, the review has enabled the QCAA to look back on its recent performance and identify opportunities for immediate improvement.

The review used focus group meeting, survey data and other feedback to identify the elements of the new system that were implemented effectively and those that experienced challenges, some as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All new QCE system processes have now been developed and implemented:

- The QCAA has delivered four completed endorsement events. Over 54 000 assessments have been reviewed (27 000 for each student cohort), with the overall percentage of assessments endorsed at the first application steadily improving. Schools have progressed in their understanding of the endorsement process, and teachers' assessment literacy has steadily developed.
- The QCAA has completed three confirmation events with 446 schools submitting over 150 000 samples of student work to be reviewed by over 3000 trained assessors. The submission and review processes have generally worked effectively, the recruitment and training of assessors has been successful, and the resources offered to schools have been appreciated.
- In 2020, Queensland's first subject-based external assessments in almost 50 years were delivered effectively to 37 318 students with the support of almost 1000 invigilators. Over 3000 trained assessors subsequently marked 222 000 papers.
- Soon after, subject results were finalised for the 2020 Year 12 cohort and communicated to the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC). Queensland Certificates of Education (QCEs) were awarded to 45 188 students, while another 1003 students received Queensland Certificates of Individual Achievement (QCIAs).

Schools, students, parents/carers and education stakeholders can look forward to some significant improvements to each aspect of the system:

- Endorsement will be improved by the publication of revised assessment samples, revisions to workflow, new functionality and updated user guides for the Endorsement application, and additional professional development and resources for schools.
- The confirmation process will be improved by the development of new supporting resources, revisions to timelines and processes, and the release of new functionality in the Confirmation application. It will also be improved by the QCAA providing additional training for assessors and publishing additional student work samples to demonstrate the qualities of assessment responses at various performance levels.
- For external assessment, there will be new resources for schools and students, professional development for teachers, updates to the External assessment application to streamline processes for schools, and improved recruitment, training and communication processes for markers and invigilators.
- The QCAA's access arrangements and reasonable adjustments (AARA) procedures will be streamlined and supporting resources will be updated.

- The various information and communication technology (ICT) applications that support the new QCE system processes will receive some significant enhancements to improve their useability and effectiveness.
- The casual assessors and external assessment invigilators the QCAA recruits and trains will benefit from a rejuvenated online accreditation program and improved remuneration processes.
- Key communication resources will be updated and the QCAA's main communication channels will be better integrated to improve stakeholder understanding of the new QCE system and to better deliver important messages to schools and other stakeholders. This will include increased support for students through expanded myQCE website content and more active use of the associated social media channels.

The QCAA has developed a plan to guide implementation of the above actions. It will be a standing item on the QCAA Board meeting agenda to ensure appropriate monitoring and accountability.

2. Background

The new QCE system implementation commenced with Year 11 students in 2019. All major assessment and certification processes were successfully delivered in the following year, although they were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Post-cycle process review

Following the initial implementation, the QCAA conducted a post-cycle review of the processes and procedures underpinning the new system to identify strengths, concerns and opportunities for improvement.

The review was not intended to be a formal program evaluation. Independent evaluators will be appointed in 2022 to undertake this important task.

The review was also not meant to replace the scheduled senior syllabus review that commenced in 2020. Relevant feedback gathered during the process review will be referred for consideration in the syllabus review.

The process review focused on:

- the operation of new QCE system's business processes within the QCAA and in schools, including timelines, administrative and logistical procedures, system documentation (e.g. the *QCE and QCIA policy and procedures handbook*), advice and support mechanisms, and ICT applications
- the QCAA's consultation and communication mechanisms
- stakeholder satisfaction.

Data collection occurred during Terms 1 and 2 by:

- convening a series of focus groups via Microsoft Teams during Term 1 on endorsement (3 sessions), confirmation (3 sessions), external assessment (3 sessions) and AARA (1 session). These focus groups collectively involved around 100 school participants who performed relevant roles in the new system
- inviting schools to provide whole-of-school feedback on the core processes of endorsement, confirmation and external assessment, as well as other feedback pertinent to improving QCE systems and processes. A total of 129 schools provided feedback
- surveying markers who participated in the 2020 external assessment marking operation. A total of 962 practising teacher markers and 129 non-school based markers submitted responses
- surveying invigilators who were engaged to assist with the delivery of the 2020 external assessments. A total of 505 submitted responses
- conducting a general survey aimed at seeking anonymous feedback from school staff, current and former students, parents/carers and other education stakeholders. We received responses from 1520 school staff members, 1653 former students, 2399 current students, 627 parents/carers, and 247 other stakeholders (6446 in total)
- holding an all-staff briefing with QCAA staff on 9 March 2021, which included an opportunity to provide roundtable feedback to inform the post-cycle review

- inviting stakeholders to provide written feedback or meet with senior QCAA staff. We received responses from school sector authorities, the teacher unions, professional associations and education administrators
- reviewing submissions provided to the QCAA during or immediately after the implementation of the new QCE system
- revisiting, in the context of the post-cycle review, results from annual surveys of endorers, confirmers and principal's delegates conducted since August 2019.

Development of the new QCE system

In October 2016, the Queensland Government released its policy position on the new senior assessment and tertiary entrance systems, *Advancing futures: New senior assessment and tertiary entrance systems in Queensland*. It was informed by recommendations from a review conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in 2014.

The new systems of senior assessment and tertiary entrance were intended to:

- provide a new approach to senior assessment that combined school-based assessment with external assessment set and marked by the QCAA
- strengthen the quality and comparability of school-based assessments
- provide students seeking tertiary entrance with an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) instead of the previous Overall Position (OP).

The key assessment elements of the Government's policy included:

- new quality assurance processes to strengthen the quality and comparability of school-based assessment
- a new system of assessment to combine school-based and external assessment
- senior subject results based on four assessments (3 school-based and 1 external for each General subject)
- external assessment to contribute 25% of the total subject result in most senior subjects and 50% in mathematics and science subjects
- school-based assessment results not to be scaled against the external assessment result
- students to receive an overall numerical score out of 100 and a level of achievement (A–E) aligned to syllabus standards
- Senior External Examinations (SEEs) to continue under the new senior assessment system.

A program office was established to manage the many projects designed to deliver the new system. The projects addressed the following areas:

- change management in schools and the community
- trialling new assessment and support processes — endorsement, calibration, confirmation, external assessment, assessor accreditation
- developing and maintaining new syllabuses
- delivering professional development to support syllabus implementation
- revising documentation, policies and legislation

- designing, building and implementing assessor accreditation processes
- designing, building and implementing new assessment processes for endorsement, confirmation and external assessment
- designing, building and implementing ICT infrastructure to support the new assessment and certification processes
- reviewing the QCAA's organisational structure and procedures
- reviewing and revising the QCE policies and procedures
- revising subject result calculation processes to enable certification and to support QTAC's revised tertiary entrance procedures.

3. Endorsement

Endorsement is an annual quality assurance process that evaluates summative internal assessment (IA) instruments for validity and accessibility, prior to their implementation with students. It involves 48 subjects, including the General, General (Extension) and Applied (Essential) syllabuses. It caters for situations in which schools choose to implement flexible delivery options (including 19 alternative sequences) and variable progression rates.

To date there have been two full cycles of endorsement made up of two events per cycle. 480 schools have participated, and more than 54 000 assessment instruments have been endorsed by over 1000 trained assessors recruited from schools.

The table below shows the overall improvement made in the first two years.

	Event 1 (students exiting in 2020)	Event 2 (students exiting in 2020)	Event 1 (students exiting in 2021)	Event 2 (students exiting in 2021)
Number of IAs submitted	17 279	9713	17 276	10 210
Application 1 endorsed	50%	51%	54%*	67%*
Application 2 endorsed	90%	90%	86%	96%
IAs at intervention	10%	10%	14%	4%

* Events 1 and 2 for students exiting in 2021 included assessments that were automatically endorsed. These automatically endorsed assessments were previously endorsed for use in 2020 but not administered due to the removal of one IA in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the introduction of the new process, most schools have been able to develop and submit their assessment instruments via the Endorsement application within the QCAA's prescribed timelines.

Feedback gathered over the past two years indicates that schools are generally supportive of the endorsement process and value the opportunity to receive feedback on their assessment instruments.

What went well

Overall, stakeholders considered that the revised endorsement procedures were streamlined and implemented in a timely manner. The Endorsement application has supported schools to develop assessment instruments, implement school-based approval procedures, and submit completed assessments to the QCAA. The new technology effectively facilitates the workflow requirements to move assessment instruments to the QCAA-trained assessors to review them before they are used in classrooms. The Endorsement application provides the endorsement decisions, directives made to schools, and information required if consultation between an assessor and a school is required. The Endorsement application has been used by assessors at both face-to-face meetings and in remote settings. The latter was crucial in allowing the event to proceed when COVID-19 related restrictions were introduced in 2020.

Training and professional development the QCAA offered successfully prepared schools for the initial year of implementation. Since then, schools have continued to develop their understanding of assessment design and steadily refine their assessment practices.

The endorsement decisions and processes are not static and provide opportunities for teachers to reflect and grow in their understanding of the syllabus and assessment literacy. There is evidence that in the more recent endorsement events, assessors have been able to apply knowledge they have gained from the delivery of assessment instruments in their schools, an improved understanding of the new QCE system syllabuses, and their experience of confirmation meetings (see next section).

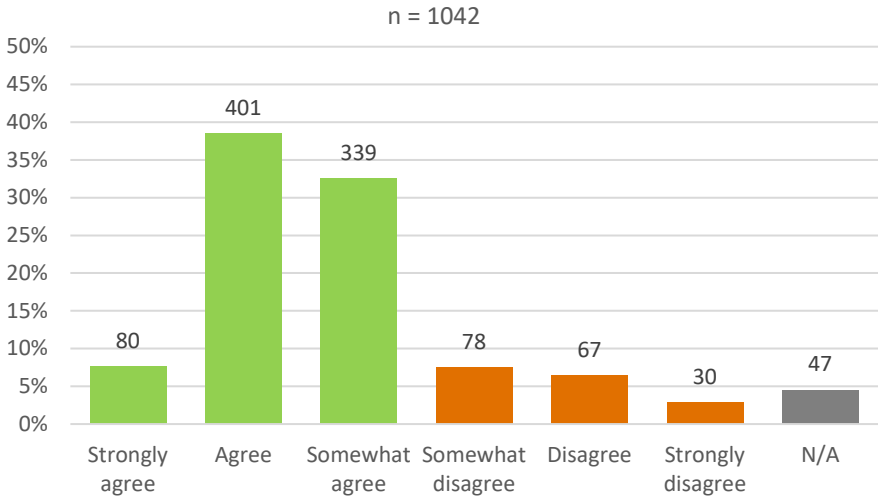
Schools valued the consultation element of endorsement, particularly the opportunity to have a conversation with a more experienced and highly trained assessor. Lead endorsers were regarded as helpful, knowledgeable and supportive in assisting schools to understand QCAA directives and have their assessment endorsed.

The outcomes of endorsement events have been communicated in a timely manner. After each event, all endorsement decisions have been provided to schools in line with the QCAA’s published timeframes.

Feedback from school staff indicates that:

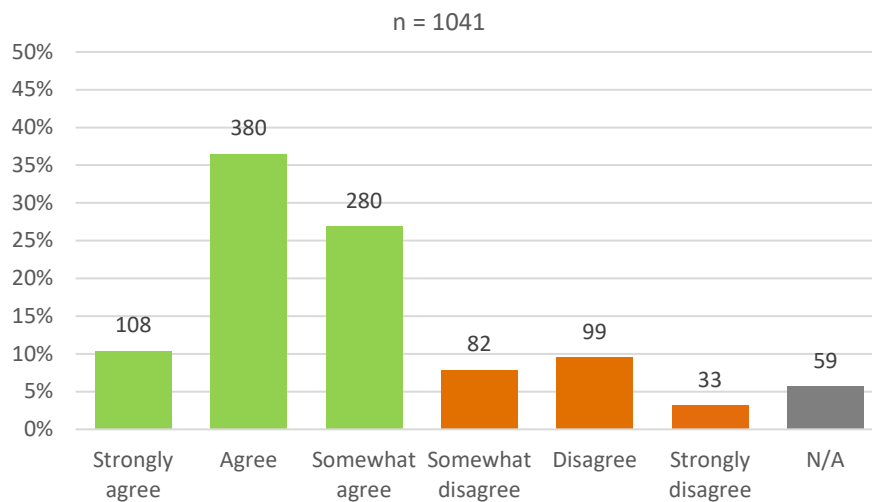
- the majority (78.7%) were pleased with the resources provided by the QCAA to help them prepare for endorsement.

School staff: The QCAA’s endorsement resources were useful in preparing for endorsement and developing assessment instruments (e.g. endorsement guidelines, user guides and tips, webinars, website FAQs, sample assessment instruments, instrument-specific quality assurance tools)



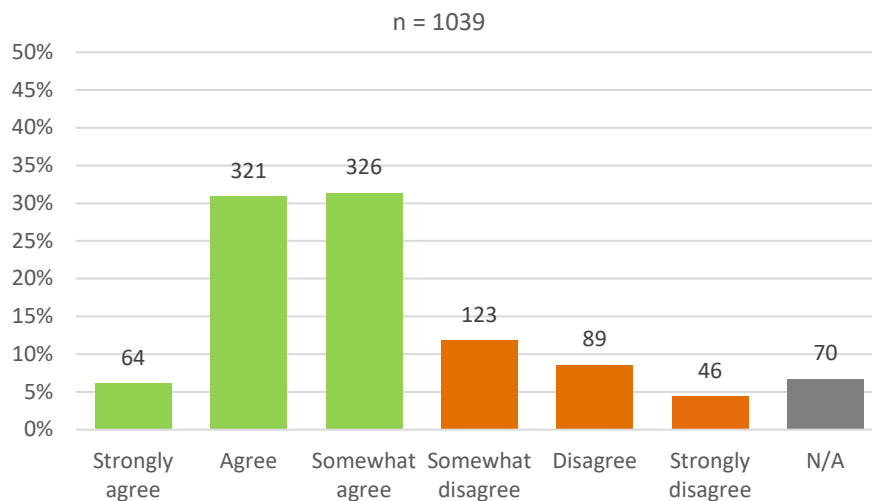
- the majority (73.8%) found the Endorsement application easy to use and effective in supporting them to perform their roles.

School staff: The endorsement application in the QCAA Portal was easy to use and effective in supporting schools to perform tasks associated with endorsement



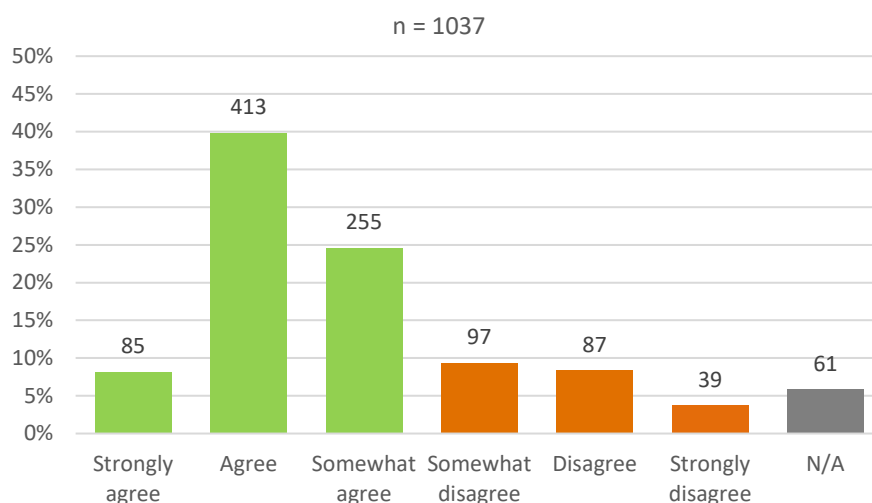
- 68.4% considered the endorsement directives easy to understand and useful for future assessment development.

School staff: The endorsement directives were easy to understand and useful for future assessment development



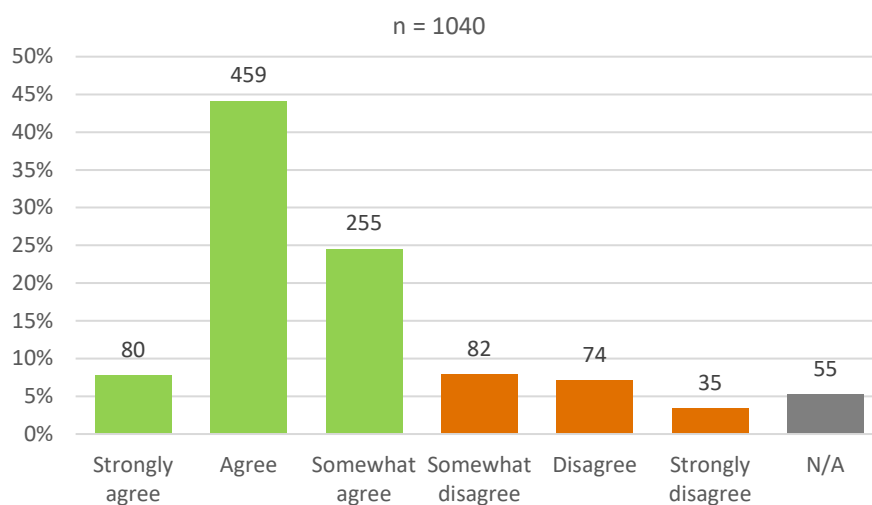
- 72.6% believed the endorsement consultation timelines and methods were appropriate.

School staff: The endorsement consultation timelines and methods were appropriate



- 76.3% agreed the timing of endorsement events was appropriate for their school.

School staff: The timing of endorsement events was appropriate for our school



Where improvement is needed

While the endorsement process ensures all assessment instruments are endorsed before they are used in the summative assessment programs for Queensland students, there are clearly opportunities for the QCAA to work in partnership with schools to improve the process.

Feedback suggests that the main areas for improvements are:

- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of assessors and schools
- improving the consistency of endorsement decisions and usefulness of directives across subjects and between assessors

- improving school assessment literacy by promoting deeper engagement with syllabus and endorsement assessment resources
- introducing new QCAA sample assessment instruments in the QCAA Portal's Syllabus application
- continuing to improve the useability of assessment templates in the Endorsement application
- reviewing the time between the August endorsement event and September confirmation event to reduce pressure on schools
- reviewing aspects of the consultation process, particularly access to lead endorsers and the timing of consultation activities.

Schools provided feedback that, at times, they received contradictory advice on assessment instruments from the first to the second year of endorsement. The QCAA needs to do further work to investigate the extent of this issue and to identify the reasons for its occurrence. More data from the confirmation process will help the QCAA to better understand the actual implementation of endorsed assessments. The QCAA can consider the results of student responses to endorsed assessments. At times, the evidence highlights implementation issues, such as insufficient evidence in responses to support judgments, or a lack of understanding of the syllabus which was not necessarily addressed at the time the assessment was endorsed.

It is important to recognise that some variation is to be expected at such an early stage in the implementation of the new system as schools and the QCAA apply learnings from one endorsement event to the next. In any case, the QCAA will look for further opportunities to improve the consistency of its directives and decisions.

During the review, some stakeholder groups also suggested that the QCAA should develop a bank of endorsed assessment instruments that could be accessed by schools. This was a particular priority for multi-item assessments, such as examinations. The QCAA will consider the business case and requirements for an assessment bank and/or item bank in 2022. In the interim, additional functionality now exists in the Endorsement application that allows schools to copy and reuse previously endorsed assessments from their own 'local' assessment bank.

What we have done

The QCAA has strengthened the endorsement process and built teacher capacity by providing teachers with professional development opportunities and improved resources, and delivering additional training to all assessors who continued in their role from 2020 to 2021.

Since the start of 2020, the QCAA has supported Queensland schools to prepare for endorsement by:

- providing subject-specific or learning area-specific webinars about what had been learned from the first endorsement events, encouraging teachers to apply this new understanding when developing assessment instruments for subsequent student cohorts. The webinars were published as a resource for each subject in the Syllabus application
- providing point-in-time training for subjects with a high rate of assessment not being endorsed at an event to clarify messages for teachers prior to resubmitting the assessments
- publishing subject reports for each General, General (Extension), and Applied (Essential) syllabus that emphasised key learnings for endorsement following the first full assessment cycle
- providing a wide range of resources to support schools to develop, review and quality assure their IAs

- updating resources, such as help guides, factsheets and the *QCE and QCIA policy and procedures handbook* in line with revisions made to key processes and the Endorsement application
- providing all assessors with subject-specific training that included a revised communication strategy to improve the effectiveness of directives, example directives that provide schools with clearer instructions, and opportunities to practise in a training environment in the Endorsement application
- including calibration exercises at the start of each endorsement meeting to provide an opportunity for chief endorsers or QCAA subject specialists to address issues with decisions or communication of directives
- quality assuring directives following each endorsement meeting to identify areas for further training for assessors, if required
- reviewing and adjusting endorsement meeting dates for 2021 to better support schools and address concerns raised about the proximity of the endorsement and confirmation events in August and September
- reviewing and adjusting consultation timelines to allow lead endorsers sufficient time to receive and reply to schools' consultation requests. The consultation workflow in the Endorsement application was revised to allow the recall and resubmission of assessment with minor issues, during the consultation period, to prevent them from progressing to intervention. This resulted in fewer assessment instruments being escalated to intervention in March 2021
- reviewing the Endorsement application to enhance existing functions or introduce new features that meet key stakeholders' needs.
 - For schools, application enhancements have improved the functionality of the assessment templates, the dashboard view and the receipt of online communications.
 - For assessors, application enhancements have increased efficiency when endorsing assessment instruments and improved school consultation processes.
 - For the QCAA, application enhancements have allowed for better visibility and data analysis.

What we are going to do

An additional review of the endorsement process is planned for late in 2021. This review will include detailed subject-level analysis to identify efficiencies and further improvement opportunities for future endorsement activities.

The current assessment samples in the Syllabus application will be revised to ensure they:

- reflect the syllabus requirements and support the growth in understanding that Queensland teachers have developed during the new QCE system's implementation phase
- model the attributes of quality assessment instruments
- mirror how assessment instruments are developed in the Endorsement application
- provide examples for a range of school contexts.

The user guides for developing assessment instruments in the Endorsement application will be updated to align more closely to the latest application updates and include more videos to improve their effectiveness. The location of the user guides will be reviewed to ensure that they

are more frequently accessed. (Feedback from the school surveys suggests they are not sufficiently well accessed.)

The amendment workflow will be implemented in late 2021 in the Endorsement application to enable schools to edit and submit an endorsed assessment instrument to the lead endorser for their approval. This is currently managed by QCAA staff.

With the release of comprehensive annual subject reports, the focus of workshops or resources will be redirected to help schools identify and manage internal quality control processes that include:

- engaging with published endorsement timelines and procedures. Feedback suggests staff in schools are not aware of the activities and timelines that underpin endorsement, leading to frustration, e.g. being 'locked out' of the Endorsement application at intervention
- developing school-based processes for constructing and quality assuring their own assessment. This includes assessment design for IAs, clarifying understanding about what schools are responsible for and assessors' role (such as checking for accuracy), establishing communities of practice and internal quality assurance processes, and improving school communication channels
- developing assessment literacy by unpacking the quality assurance tools and directives for assessment instruments that are not endorsed, and how to use that knowledge to action directives.

In 2022, the QCAA will commence scoping the business case and requirements for an assessment bank and/or item bank.

Further endorsement training for assessors will be scheduled as needed prior to each event, with major training activities planned for all assessors in Term 2, 2022.

The QCAA will also continue to refine processes and work with assessors to ensure they receive feedback on their endorsement directives from their lead endorsers, chief endorser and the QCAA subject specialist.

4. Confirmation

Confirmation is an annual quality assurance process to ensure the reliability of IAs administered by schools in 46 General and General (Extension) subjects.

It examines the accuracy and consistency of teachers' judgments about students' responses to summative IAs to ensure comparability of results across Queensland. The confirmation process aims to ensure students receive fair and reliable results.

QCAA-trained confirmation assessors review a selected sample of student responses to summative IAs to check that each school's application of the instrument-specific marking guide (ISMG) for a subject cohort is accurate and consistent. The QCAA makes the final decision about student results.

Across the three confirmation events, 446 schools submitted over 150 000 samples of student work to be reviewed by over 3000 trained assessors. The table below provides a summary of the events.

	Event 1 2020	Event 2 2020 (including compressed curriculum cohorts)	Event 1 2021	Event 2 2021 (optional for schools)
Submissions	8028	8132	8004	4419
Samples reviewed	51 355	54 131	51 890	26 683
Percentage of entire cohort's provisional marks confirmed	83%	80%	80%	Not yet available

Unlike the initial endorsement events, the confirmation events were heavily affected throughout 2020 and early 2021 by the COVID-19 pandemic. Planning for the events had intended to support assessors to complete their inaugural reviews in face-to-face meetings. All confirmation events have subsequently been delivered as entirely remote events or 'blended' events, whereby some subjects and/or lead and chief assessors work face-to-face while others work remotely.

The confirmation process has highlighted the strong commitment among Queensland teachers to provide quality school-based assessment opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know and can do. While school provisional marks indicate high rates of consistency and accuracy in the application of ISMGs, the QCAA is committed to further strengthening teachers' implementation of senior syllabuses and assessment literacy.

On average, around 80% of schools' provisional marks (i.e. the results awarded prior to confirmation) were confirmed in each confirmation event. The QCAA expects that Event 2, 2021 will show a similar level of accuracy in school mark judgments.

What went well

Overall, stakeholders considered the confirmation procedures efficient. The process of uploading files for review worked smoothly and the QCAA-developed help guides assisted school personnel in understanding the file requirements and submission steps.

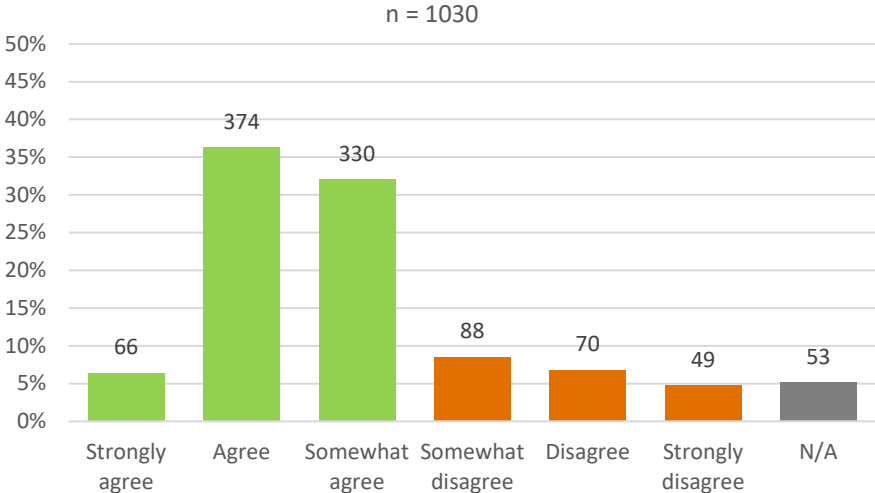
Training and professional development the QCAA offered in 2019 and 2020 prepared schools for the first confirmation event. The QCAA has continued to support school staff in 2021 with targeted training and individual support, as required.

Schools have used outcomes from confirmation procedures to prepare for assessment design, the endorsement process, and assessment implementation.

Survey feedback indicated:

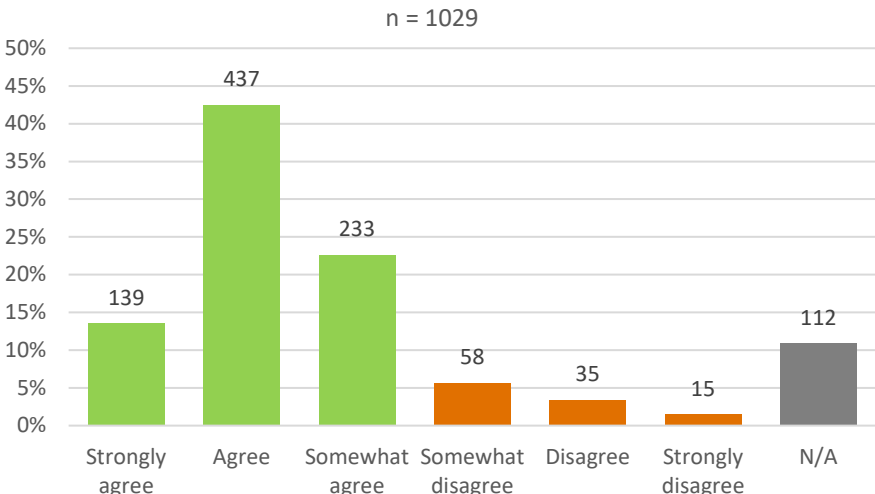
- the majority (74.7%) of school staff consider the confirmation resources helpful in preparing for confirmation and making judgments about student assessment responses.

School staff: The confirmation resources were helpful in preparing for confirmation and making judgments about student assessment responses, e.g. syllabus specifications and ISMGs, user guides and tips, webinars, FAQs, annotated sample assessment responses



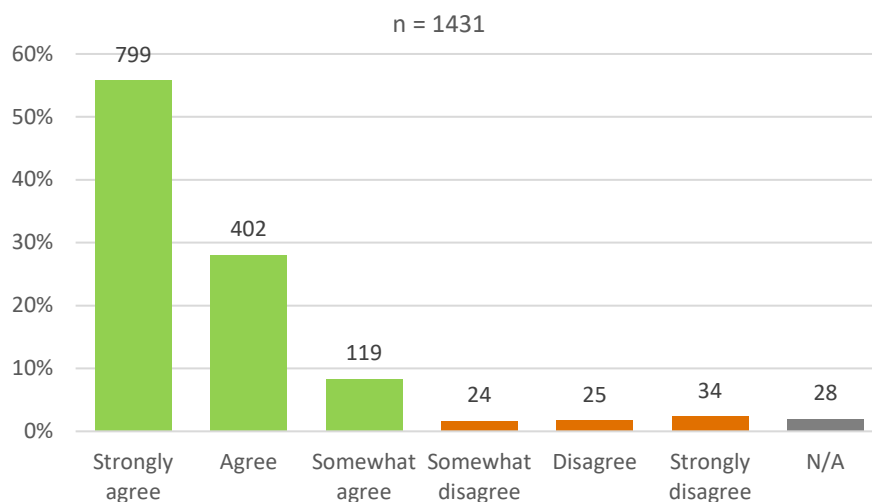
- the majority (78.6%) of school staff believe the confirmation application was easy to use and effective in supporting schools to perform confirmation tasks.

School staff: The confirmation application in the QCAA Portal was easy to use and effective in supporting schools to perform tasks associated with confirmation



- the great majority (92%) of former students wanted to know their final results for their IAs before they sat for the external assessment.

Former students: I found it helpful to know my results in my internal assessments before I sat for the external assessment



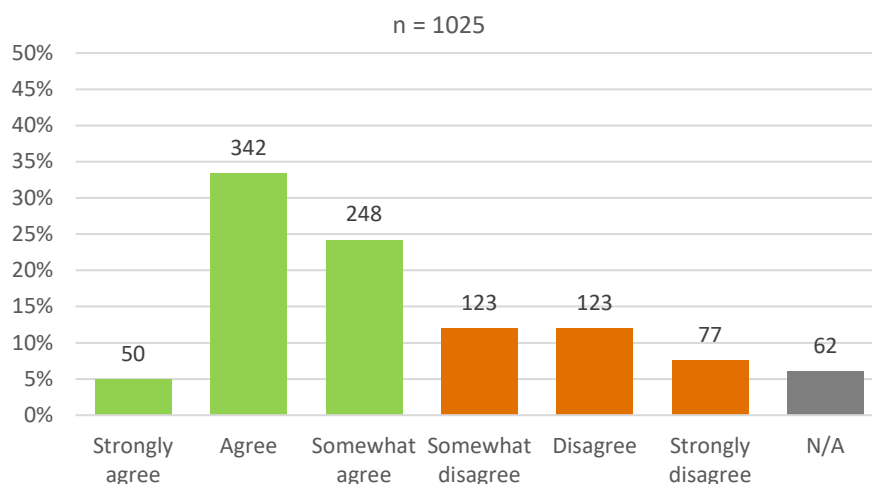
Each confirmation event has benefited from improvements in school-based processes and teacher understanding and implementation of the new senior General and General (Extension) syllabuses. The QCAA has also continued to refine processes, supporting resources, timelines and the Confirmation application functionality.

Where improvement is needed

The recent QCAA surveys suggest there are areas where further refinement of confirmation processes and supporting resources is required. These include:

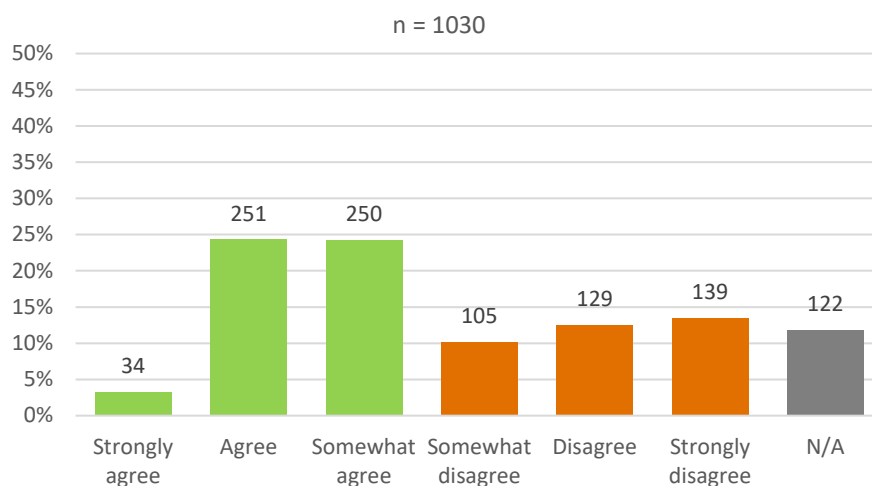
- (as mentioned in the Endorsement section) reviewing the timing of events and the timing between processes, and providing a clearer 'big picture' of when particular aspects of confirmation will occur, such as requests for supplementary samples, release dates for confirmation decisions and school reviews. A common request is for more information to be included in the Senior Education Profile (SEP) calendar on the QCAA website

School staff: The timing of confirmation events and activities (e.g. submitting provisional marks, uploading samples, supplementary and extraordinary reviews) were appropriate for our school.



- helping schools to understand new processes, such as the determination of the confirmation decision, requests for supplementary samples and requests for review of confirmed results
- helping teachers to understand the confirmation decision and how to improve their practice. Approximately one third of respondents indicated they needed more information to understand the confirmation decision and translate this into an improvement in practice.

School staff: Teachers were able to understand the confirmation decision and knew how to improve their practice.



- introducing new student sample assessment responses in the Syllabus application.

Schools appreciated the information provided in the Student Management application and subject reports to help them identify areas for improvement in each subject and understand the new quality assurance processes. The Student Management reports were issued for the first time late in 2020 and the subject reports early in 2021.

What we have done

The QCAA has strengthened the confirmation process by providing:

- supporting resources for school leaders, and reviewing and updating resources where necessary
- teachers with professional development through webinars and new subject-specific resources
- training to all assessors who continued in their role from 2020 to 2021
- retraining QCAA officers to support confirmation decision enquiries.

Since the start of 2020, the QCAA has supported Queensland schools to prepare for confirmation by:

- implementing an additional optional mid-year confirmation event in 2021 to provide greater certainty to students about their achievement earlier in the school year
- providing nine webinars to support school leader preparation for confirmation events, in addition to principal's delegates meetings
- providing 119 webinars, attended by more than 9000 teachers, to support schools in understanding and applying the ISMG when making judgments about student achievement in General and General (Extension) subjects
- delivering subject-specific webinars targeted to particular aspects of syllabus implementation in 17 subjects
- hosting 56 Learning Area Heads of Department Networking Forums, where discussions focused on strategies to improve school judgments
- updating the confirmation submission information about evidence upload requirements for every General and General (Extension) subject summative internal assessment
- updating the *QCE and QCIA policy and procedures handbook* to improve clarity, and producing additional supporting resources where needed, e.g. for managing response length
- publishing subject reports for each General and General (Extension) syllabus that emphasise key learnings for confirmation based on initial experience
- offering 44 webinars across General and General (Extension) subjects to unpack the information and advice in the subject reports in relation to making judgments about IA responses.

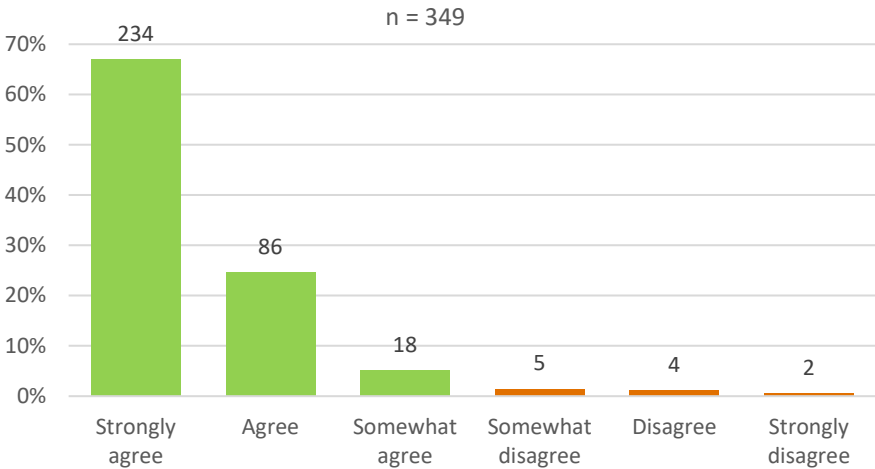
The Confirmation application has continued to be improved for schools and assessors. The improvements have been supported by detailed user guides to support school processes to upload and submit required samples for confirmation, including where students have been unable to submit all required evidence.

The QCAA continues to recruit and train more subject teachers to be assessors for confirmation, and has provided:

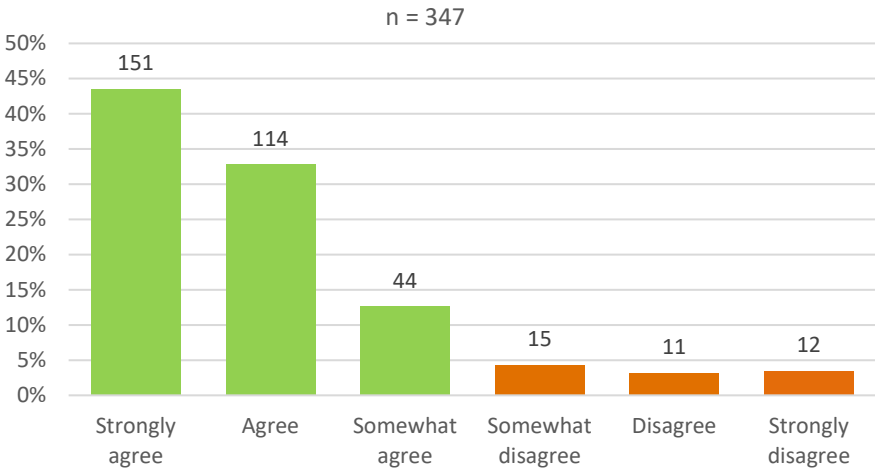
- refresher training for 2302 continuing assessors as well as QCAA officers to support confirmation decision enquiries
- updated manuals, user guides and information to support assessors to engage successfully in the confirmation review process
- quality control samples or calibration scripts that are completed by assessors prior to a confirmation event commencing. Calibration scripts provide an opportunity for chief confirmers or QCAA subject specialists to address issues with assessors.

Almost all school staff who responded to questions about being an assessor (97%) considered that their engagement in their role helped them to improve their assessment practices, and most (89%) indicated they would continue to seek employment as a QCAA assessor.

School staff: My experience as a QCAA assessor helped improve my assessment practices



School staff: I will continue to seek employment as a QCAA assessor



The QCAA has also refined its internal processes to make the release of confirmation decisions more efficient. This has had an immediate effect, with 91% of decisions being released over a one-week period in 2021 as opposed to 70% in 2020.

What we are going to do

The QCAA will continue to improve the confirmation process, supporting resources and the Confirmation application to support schools and assessors.

The QCAA will also continue to review:

- the timing of confirmation events

- how confirmation decisions are communicated and how the confirmation decision reports may be enhanced
- resources and identify process improvements to streamline confirmation procedures to ensure decisions can be finalised and released to schools more quickly
- resources to support schools and teachers to better understand why supplementary and extraordinary review samples may be requested
- resources to support schools and teachers better understand the confirmation decision, particularly where movements of students' results have occurred, and the consequences for non-sampled students.

The current student assessment samples in the Syllabus application will be revised to ensure they:

- reflect the syllabus requirements, and support teachers to build on the growth in understanding that has occurred during the syllabus implementation phase
- model the attributes of quality assessment instruments
- provide examples of a range of achievement across criteria to illustrate the match of evidence in student responses to the characteristics of the ISMGs at different performance levels
- provide examples that address a range of school contexts.

The QCAA will continue to work in partnership with schools to obtain permission to publish updated example resources on the QCAA website, including student assessment responses at varying performance levels.

The QCAA will schedule further confirmation training for assessors as needed prior to each event, with major training activities planned for all assessors in Term 1, 2022.

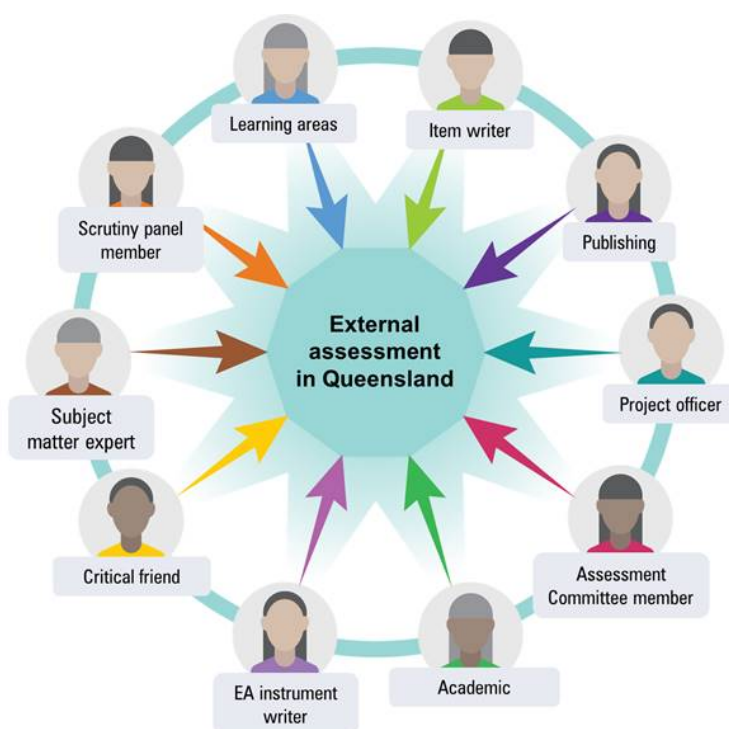
The QCAA will also continue to work with assessors and refine processes to ensure they receive feedback on their review decisions from their lead confirmer, chief confirmer and the QCAA subject specialist.

5. External assessment

The new QCE system of assessment for General and General (Extension) subjects combines school-based assessment and external assessment to calculate a final subject result for students. External assessment contributes 25% of the total subject result in most senior subjects and 50% in Mathematics and Science subjects.

In 2020, the QCAA developed external assessments for 68 subjects (including 22 General (Senior External Examination) (SEE) subjects). It developed a total of 526 alternative format papers to provide access to all students.

A range of stakeholders contributed to the writing and quality assurance processes for the development of external assessment in every subject. The stakeholders are identified in the following graphic.



The external assessment timetable was released early Term 2. It aimed to:

- minimise clashes for students across the examination period
- ensure most students sat no more than two external assessments on one day
- provide sufficient breaks between external assessments for popular courses and frequently combined courses
- enable all external assessments to be marked in time for students to receive their final Year 12 results.

Approximately 1.7 million test booklets were printed, packed and delivered over the assessment period. Variations to venue were organised for 23 international students in 11 countries, 24 interstate students, and 110 students in Queensland. The external assessments were administered over 17 days at 457 venues, with 949 QCAA-recruited invigilators in attendance. The QCAA helpdesk provided continuous support to schools during the assessment period.

Over 3000 trained assessors marked 222 000 papers. Most subjects had two days of chief and lead marker training in the external assessment marking guide (EAMG) and role-specific duties, as well as two days of marker training, before the marking of student work commenced. The QCAA implemented a range of quality assurance processes during the operation to ensure reliability of student results.

The external assessment operation was large and complex and was generally executed well in its first year. The operation relies on significant interdependencies between the QCAA's business units and strong relationships with external stakeholders. Feedback suggests that:

- schools were well prepared, organised and committed to the preparation and administration of external assessment
- schools had prepared students well
- the complex logistics were carried out with a high degree of accuracy
- the communications and supporting resources provided to schools were effective but could be streamlined and released in a more timely manner
- external assessment results were able to be finalised in time to release final student results on 19 December 2020.

What went well

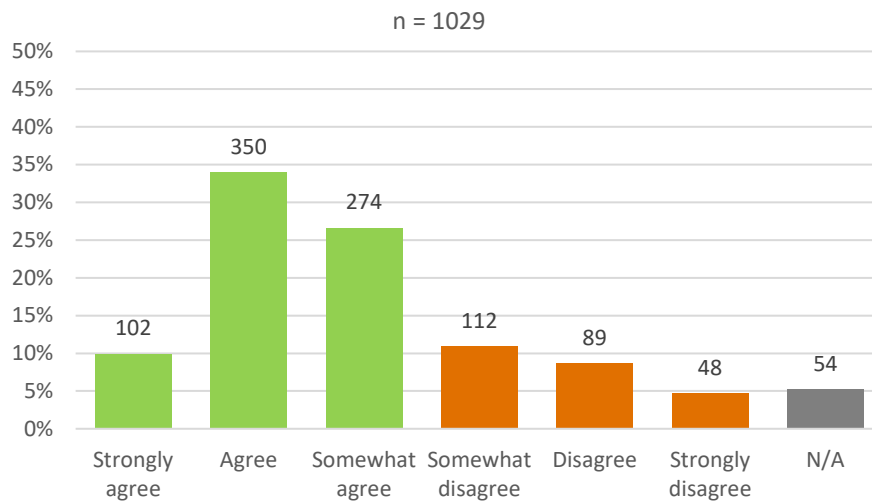
Stakeholder feedback and internal QCAA analysis indicates that the following aspects of external assessment went well:

- External stakeholders were very satisfied with the information given to them to prepare for external assessment, including mock and sample assessments, and the *Directions for administration* (DFA).
- External assessment papers provided students with opportunities to demonstrate their learning across all levels of achievement in all subjects. Feedback from markers demonstrated a high level of confidence in the quality of the assessment.
- The External Assessment, fileShare and marking applications supported schools and markers throughout external assessment processes.
- The printing, delivery, returns and scanning aspects of the operation were executed with a high degree of accuracy.
- The development and delivery of digital stimulus was made available to students to support their assessment in a range of subjects. Schools were supported to provide this to students in a way that was appropriate to their school context.
- 100% of papers were returned and marked, which enabled the QCAA to finalise subject results in time for release in December.
- QCAA staff were able to support schools through a range of disruptions, including local power loss, bomb threats, and other illness and misadventure circumstances.
- In the first year of implementation, the QCAA successfully trained and supported more than 3000 markers to meet their responsibilities and be confident that they could mark accurately and reliably.
- The change to 100% online marker training due to COVID-19 restrictions was executed successfully.

A survey of stakeholders found:

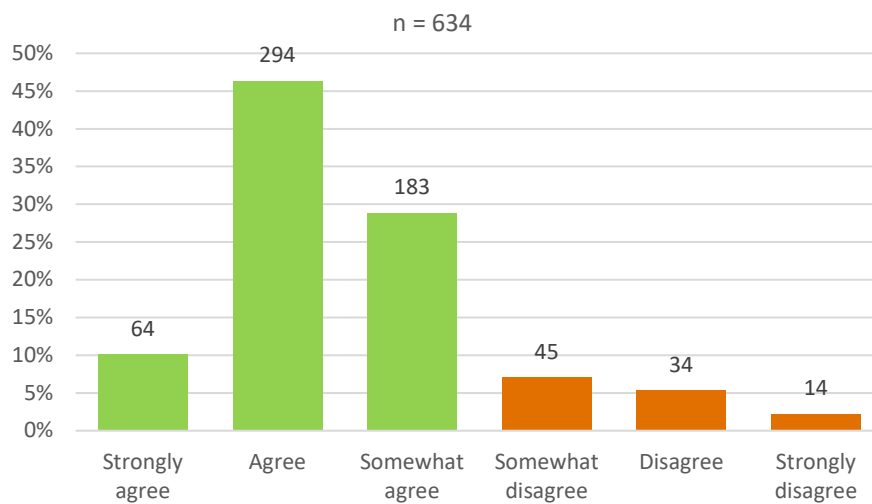
- 70.6% of school respondents agreed that the QCAA provided sufficient and timely information to prepare schools for the 2020 external assessments.

School staff: The QCAA provided sufficient and timely information to prepare schools for the 2020 external assessments



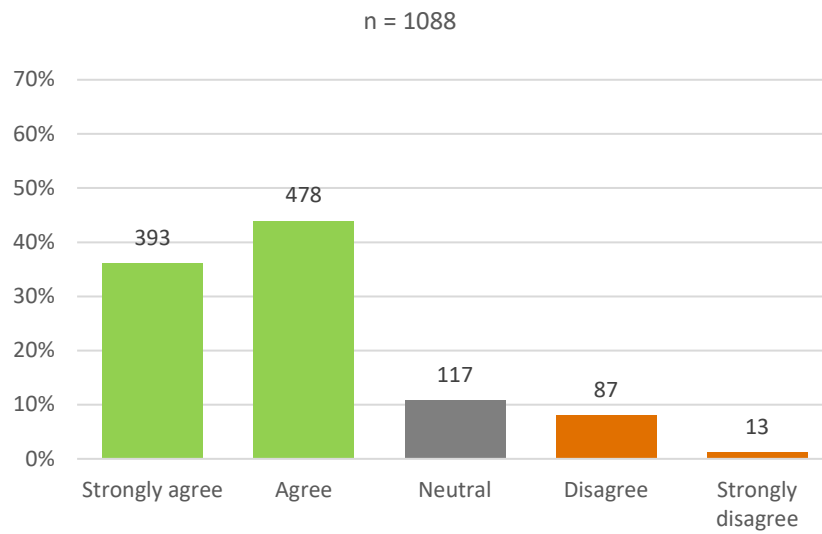
- 85.3% of school respondents agreed that the External assessment application was easy to use.

School staff: The External assessment application in the QCAA Portal was easy to use



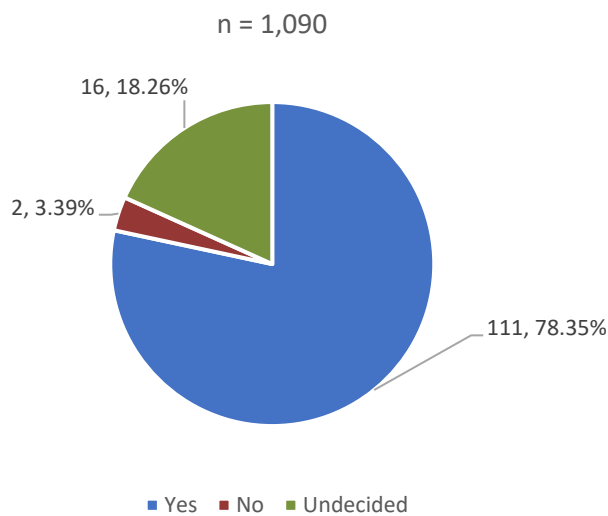
- 80% of markers who completed the survey agreed that marker training adequately prepared them for the role.

Markers: *Marker training adequately prepared me for my role*



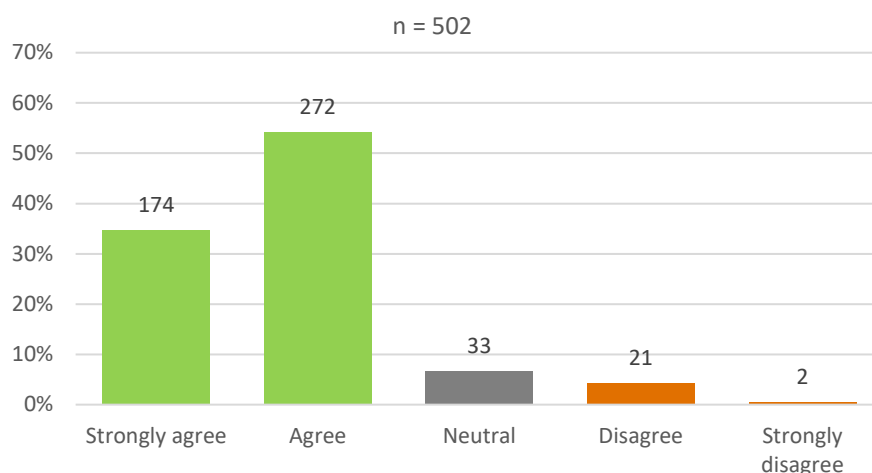
- 78.35% of markers indicated that they would apply to mark for the QCAA again in 2021.

Markers: *Will you apply to mark for us again in 2021?*



- 89% of invigilators agreed that the documentation provided sufficient information to support them perform their role.

Invigilators: Invigilator documentation provided sufficient information to support me to perform my role



Where improvement is needed

The QCAA has identified a range of areas for improvement:

- There is a need for improved role definition and training that better targets the needs of internal and external stakeholders in external assessment development.
- Communication mechanisms need to be enhanced, including improvements to back-up systems, to ensure timely and relevant communication of key information during the external assessment period.
- Releasing non-secure documents and other information, such as session announcements, to schools earlier will reduce the tasks to be completed each morning of the assessments.
- While the packing of assessment materials in 2020 was designed to reduce the number of boxes delivered to schools, feedback from schools identified that packing more than one subject's material in a box increased the complexity of processing for external assessment coordinators.
- Further streamlining the tasks and documentation to be completed after each assessment session (e.g. seating plans, incident reports) is necessary.
- The allocation and the number of different invigilators assigned to schools needs to be reduced, where possible. This will support schools with the communication, induction and training programs they provide.
- Improved marking resources will support lead and chief markers to implement consistent decision-making across a large number of separate marking events with clarity and confidence.
- Using data from 2020, the QCAA needs to identify and implement changes and improvements to the marking operation logistics based on number of markers, number of student responses and number of scripts marked per hour.

- It is important to provide markers with piece rates as soon as possible after the first three days of marking in each subject, along with more effective communication so that they understand the calculation process and timing of payments.

What we have done

The following improvements have been made since the 2020 external assessment delivery:

- The DFA has been revised to improve its function as a single point of truth for all stakeholders involved in external assessment administration.
- Feedback from schools and students about the spread of particular subject combinations has informed the 2021 external assessment timetable development.
- The ICT systems to support schools and markers have been improved in the following ways
 - Significant work has been carried out on user interfaces to improve the experience for schools managing assessment sessions.
 - The number of documents that need to be scanned and uploaded at the end of each session has been reduced.
 - The reconciliation of attendance and return of papers has been revised to improve tracking of responses and results.
 - Enhanced alerts have been introduced to support schools to complete incident records and illness and misadventure applications.
 - The marker experience will be enhanced through an improved interface that allows more direct communication and better access to training materials.
- The packing of assessment materials has been streamlined to support schools' reconciliation activities and storage of secure materials.

What we are going to do

The following actions will be implemented to support external assessment delivery in 2021 and beyond:

- The QCAA will deliver a range of resources, webinars and professional development during Semester 2, 2021 to
 - provide opportunities for schools to rehearse the use of digital stimulus and digital alternative format assessment types
 - outline the roles and responsibilities for supervisors, external assessment coordinators and teachers
 - provide a series of Q&A sessions for external assessment coordinators to address any questions or concerns
 - outline and demonstrate the new functionality being developed in the External assessment application.
- In Term 3, the QCAA will deliver a series of webinars supporting schools to prepare for external assessment. External assessment coordinators, supervisors and teachers are the identified audience.
- The QCAA will further develop student resources to improve students' confidence in, and understanding of, external assessment processes.

- The QCAA will further develop business continuity plans to support schools through emergency situations.
- The invigilator recruitment process will be improved by
 - reducing the number of different invigilators allocated to each school
 - providing schools with details of proposed invigilators ahead of the assessment period
 - providing invigilators with further clarity about their role and responsibilities.
- The QCAA will further refine the systems developed for recruitment, selection and marking processes based on stakeholder feedback.
- The QCAA will review marking processes, including training and quality assurance, to improve markers' experience and the reliability of results.
- The QCAA will also develop on-demand, role-specific training to better support markers to complete training and feel confident in their role. This will provide markers with the capacity to revisit training as needed to enhance their learning.

6. Access arrangements and reasonable adjustments

The QCAA recognises that some students have disability, impairment and/or medical conditions, or experience other circumstances that may be a barrier to their performance in assessment. Access arrangements and reasonable adjustments (AARA) are designed to assist these students.

The principles that underpin AARA are:

- ensuring that assessment is accessible for all students
- students having opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills
- minimising barriers
- planning and negotiating as early as possible with all stakeholders
- streamlining processes
- enhancing consistency.

The *QCE and QCIA policy and procedures handbook* outlines the policies and procedures for the AARA process, including eligibility requirements, roles and responsibilities, and reporting and approval processes.

Schools submit applications via the AARA application in the QCAA Portal. Schools can submit a single application for all subject assessments (General and Applied) for a student.

Implementation of the AARA process has affirmed the strong commitment of Queensland teachers to provide quality assessment opportunities for all students so they can demonstrate what they know and can do. This was evidenced by the number of schools completing applications and the range of adjustments submitted for approval. The largest number of adjustments related to extensions, extra time, rest breaks, varied seating and alternate format papers (e.g. N18, N24, N36, A3, black and white, dyslexic font and electronic format papers).

There was strong teacher engagement with the range of professional development opportunities and supporting resources the QCAA provided to support schools with the AARA processes.

What went well

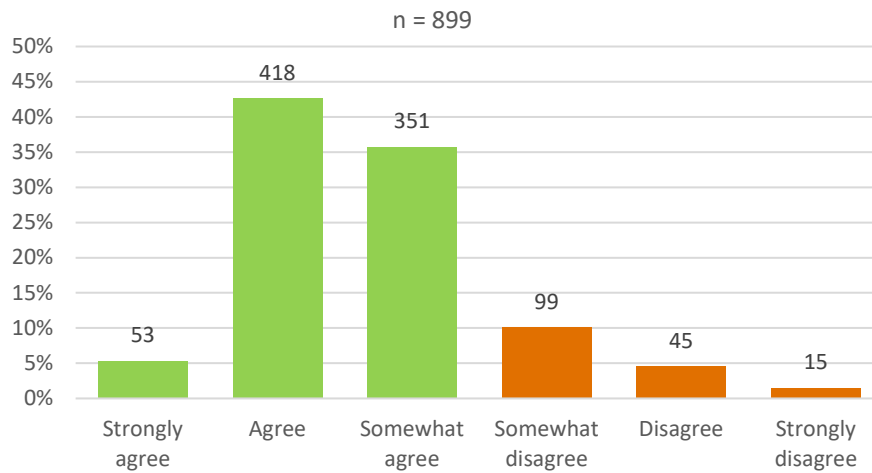
In general, external stakeholders were satisfied with the information given to them and the professional development offered to support the AARA application process. The QCAA also received positive feedback in relation to its responsiveness and support. In the first year of implementation, the QCAA received approximately 5000 applications for QCAA-approved AARA for 3800 students across 410 schools.

The QCAA has also continued to refine AARA processes, supporting resources, and timelines, and has updated the AARA application.

A survey of stakeholders found:

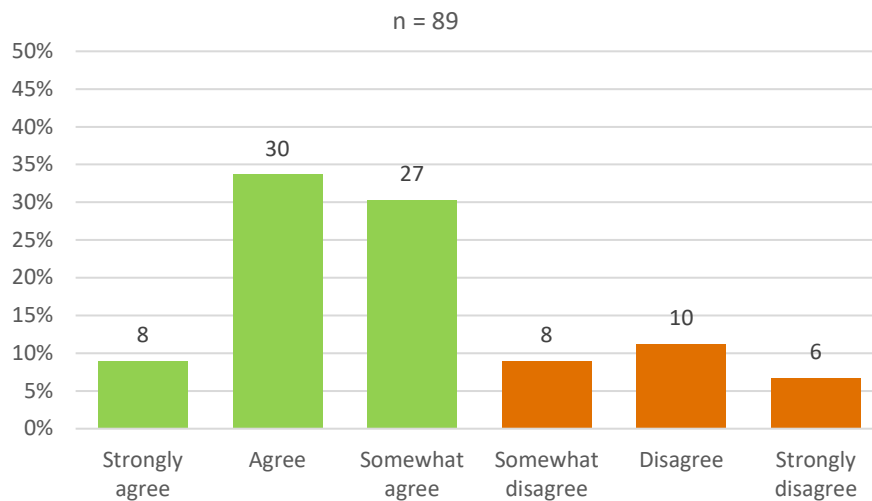
- 83.8% of respondents agree that the QCAA's AARA information and application processes were clear and easily accessible.

The QCAA's information and application processes for access arrangements and reasonable adjustments (AARA) were clear and easily accessible



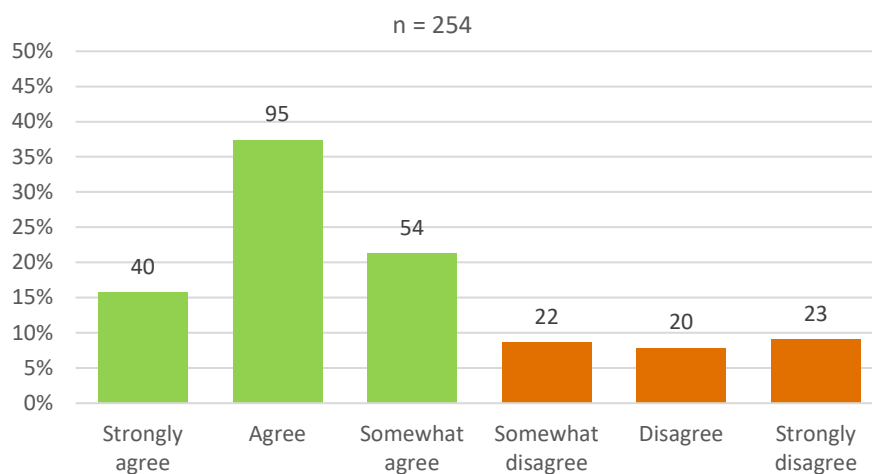
- 73% of 89 parents/carers agreed that their child's school successfully managed the AARA processes and kept them informed.

Parents/carers: My child's school successfully managed the AARA processes and kept us informed



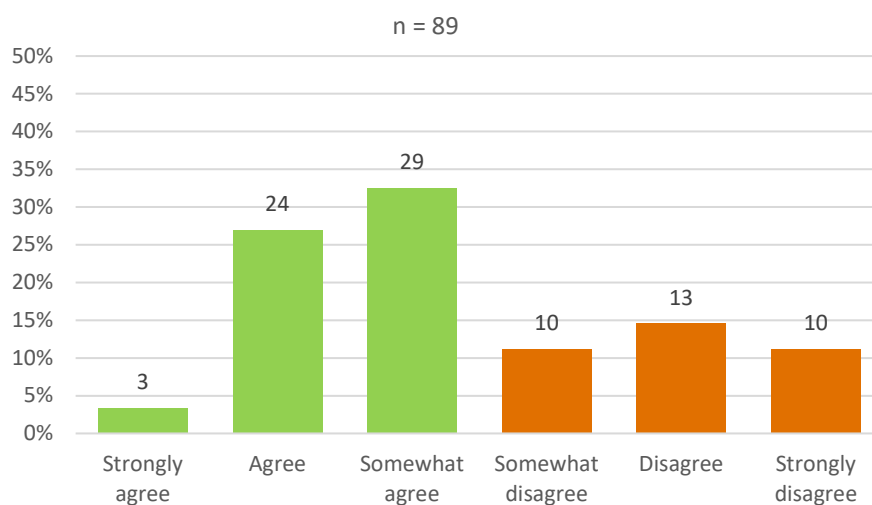
- 74.4% of 254 former students agreed that the AARA granted to them were sufficient.

Former students: The access arrangements and/or reasonable adjustments granted to me were sufficient.



- 37.1% of parents/carers disagreed that the QCAA's information and application processes for AARA were clear and easily accessible.

Parents/carers: The QCAA's information and application processes for AARA were clear and easily accessible



Where improvement is needed

Feedback from schools has indicated that further refinements can be made by:

- providing opportunities through QCAA-led professional development to allow schools to share best practice with each other, along with their methods for managing more complex AARA requirements
- providing more clarity in relation to timelines and when application outcomes will become known
- considering ways in which the AARA application can support schools when a student changes a subject after an application is approved

- processing illness and misadventure applications in a more timely manner to provide certainty to schools and students of the outcome of applications during the external assessment period
- providing more supporting resources that schools and students can refer to when obtaining documentation from medical professionals
- enhancing the resources for parents/carers and students to help understand AARA and support its implementation.

What we have done

The QCAA has supported Queensland schools to prepare for AARA by:

- presenting a series of webinars in Term 2, 2021, including an AARA overview and 30-minute 'AARA bites'. In total, 1275 webinar registrations were received from 577 staff in 318 schools across the three sectors
- presenting three-hour interactive workshops in Term 3, 2021 to support schools with best practice knowledge and to develop a community of practice for school staff
- working with schools on the quality of applications to improve practice and approval rates
- updating a range of resources for schools, students and parents/carers, including factsheets, the school statement template and a short video explaining AARA.

What we are going to do

The QCAA will improve the provision of AARA services to students and their families, and schools by:

- continuing to work with the school sectors to increase systemic understanding and align practice
- improving the AARA application variation to venue and illness and misadventure functionality
- enhancing the External assessment application and the AARA application illness and misadventure process to streamline the application process and processing time
- increasing the AARA team during peak periods to improve the turnaround time for processing applications and responding to schools.

7. Supporting QCAA assessors and external assessment invigilators

The QCAA has developed a range of procedures and resources to support its workforce of casual assessors and external assessment invigilators. The post-cycle process review has focused on two key elements of this support: assessor accreditation and remuneration procedures.

Accreditation

Accreditation is a two-stage program of professional learning the QCAA developed for teachers to support quality assurance processes for assessment in the new QCE system.

The QCAA developed the accreditation program to:

- build all senior secondary teachers' assessment literacy so they have a consistent understanding of quality assessment and exercise high-level skills in judging the qualities of student work
- develop teacher expertise in the new QCE system through specialist online role-specific training
- recruit and train teachers to conduct quality assurance processes as a QCAA assessor
- provide a pathway to be formally recognised as a part of a graduate qualification at either Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Level 8 or 9.

Stage 1 includes three assessment literacy courses that explain the new QCE system's internal and external assessment quality assurance processes:

- Course 1 — Attributes of quality assessment introduces the attributes of quality assessment (validity, accessibility and reliability), and the concepts and processes of assessment in the new QCE system. It must be successfully completed to access Course 2 and/or Course 3.
- Course 2 — Assessment item and instrument construction explores the development and writing of assessment items and instruments for the new QCE system, and how they will be endorsed by QCAA assessors.
- Course 3 — Understanding and using marking guides explains how teachers will use the ISMGs, as well as how to identify and mitigate risks to reliable marking.

Teachers wishing to become a QCAA assessor must successfully complete Course 1 and either Course 2 and/or Course 3.

Stage 2 of the Accreditation program focuses on the role-specific knowledge and skills teachers need to become a QCAA assessor:

- Course 4 — Endorsement
- Course 5 — Confirmation
- Course 6 — External assessment writing
- Course 7 — External assessment marking.

The Stage 1 courses were launched on 15 January 2018; the Stage 2 courses were released progressively in 2018 and 2019.

The following table shows the number of course completions (indicated by assessment attempts) by July 2021.

Accreditation course	Assessment attempts (as at 09/06/2021)
Course 1 — Attributes of quality assessment	32 960
Course 2 — Assessment item and instrument construction	30 120
Course 3 — Understanding and using marking guides	23 552
Course 4 — Endorsement	7 611
Course 5 — Confirmation	6 650
Course 6 — External assessment writing	6 417
Course 7 — External assessment marking	5 310
Total	112 620

Following implementation of the first full cycle of the new QCE system, the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) was commissioned to evaluate the courses. Its findings included:

- The review team commended the QCAA for the high quality of the first edition of the accreditation courses, developed when much of the new QCE system’s assessment, syllabus and technical details for operation were still unknown.
- The accreditation courses are clearly popular with Queensland teachers, as indicated by the high number of teachers who engaged with the modules. As at 9 June 2021, there have been 112 620 course assessment completions (see table above). The high percentage of participants who reattempted course assessments suggests that teachers value passing the course assessment.
- There were several indicators that the accreditation modules were also generally fit for their original purposes of informing teachers, developing their assessment literacy, and equipping them to participate in specific roles.
- Several elements of the accreditation modules have been working well, including
 - the importance of, and commitment to, the high status of teacher professionalism and importance of teacher assessment literacy
 - the focus on developing a shared language between teachers, the QCAA and assessors
 - acknowledging and valuing teachers as quality assessors through assessment and micro-credentialling
 - continued success in online delivery and high rates of completion.

QUT made five recommendations to improve the program:

1. Refresh the accreditation courses, including by:
 - refocusing the program on professional development with a greater emphasis on learning
 - updating and expanding the resource selection
 - addressing equity and diversity issues.

2. Refresh the course assessment, including by:
 - modelling quality assessment practices in the course construction
 - providing a feedback function
 - removing the requirement for all participants to complete assessment.
3. Develop additional courses, including:
 - refresher courses for assessors
 - a P–12 approach.
4. Monitor and evaluate the courses by:
 - using the feedback from participants and the senior assessment quality assurance processes to revise the courses and evaluate the new QCE system’s impact
 - conducting annual internal and external evaluations.
5. Improve strategic messaging and development by:
 - emphasising the benefits of developing assessment literacy
 - investigating tertiary recognition of the courses.

Remuneration of casual employees

Many assessors and invigilators experienced payment issues throughout 2020 and 2021. These included underpayment, overpayment, or late payment.

The payment complications associated with implementing the new QCE system in its initial years were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic with most major face-to-face events employing casuals moving to remote or online events.

Survey responses from external assessment markers, invigilators, endorsers and confirmers indicated that many casual employees were inconvenienced by the issues and the affected casual employees were expecting improvements to prevent the issues reoccurring.

Casual employees affected by the payment problems generally received timely communications from the QCAA to explain how each error affected them. Every assistance was offered to address any late or underpayments and to determine a repayment plan to suit each overpaid employee.

What we are going to do

The QCAA is committed to making improvements to the resources and processes that support its assessor workforce. Our priorities include:

- implementing QUT’s recommendations for improving the accreditation program with a view to releasing updated courses throughout 2022
- designating a senior officer to direct performance improvement and establishing an internal working group to identify business process improvements
- establishing a casual payroll team to implement consistent reconciliation and approval processes
- implementing recent audit report recommendations, such as
 - documenting all payroll processes

- making immediate revisions to ICT systems to reduce manual processes
 - improving internal control systems
- working with our external payroll provider to recover any overpaid funds.

8. Communication

Throughout the development and implementation of the new QCE system, QCAA's main communication objectives were to:

- share information about the new QCE system and build relationships with stakeholders
- position the QCAA as the change leader working in partnership with school communities.

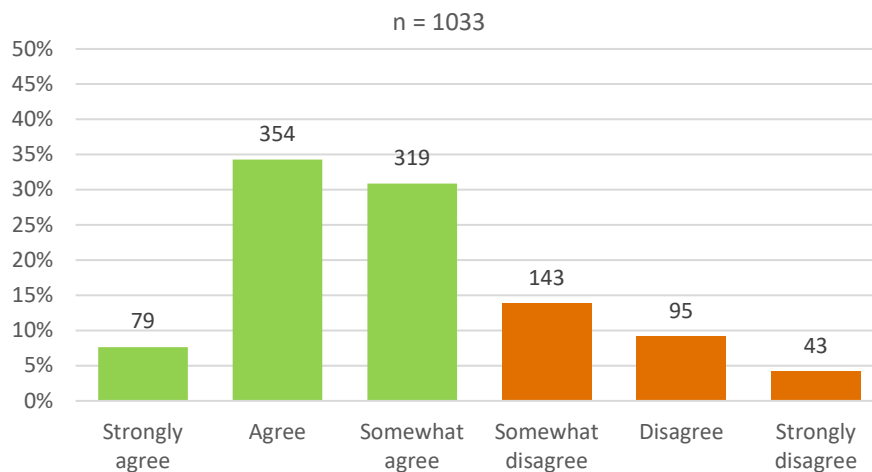
Our aim was, and continues to be, to communicate clear, consistent, timely and frequent messages to stakeholders using multiple channels. We used the following as our main communication channels:

- the QCAA website and the QCAA Portal
- QCAA publications, e.g. newsletters, memos, factsheets and correspondence
- videos
- social media
- events and forums (including biannual school leader forums)
- print and online media.

Based on the survey responses, the QCAA's general communications about the new system appeared to be effective:

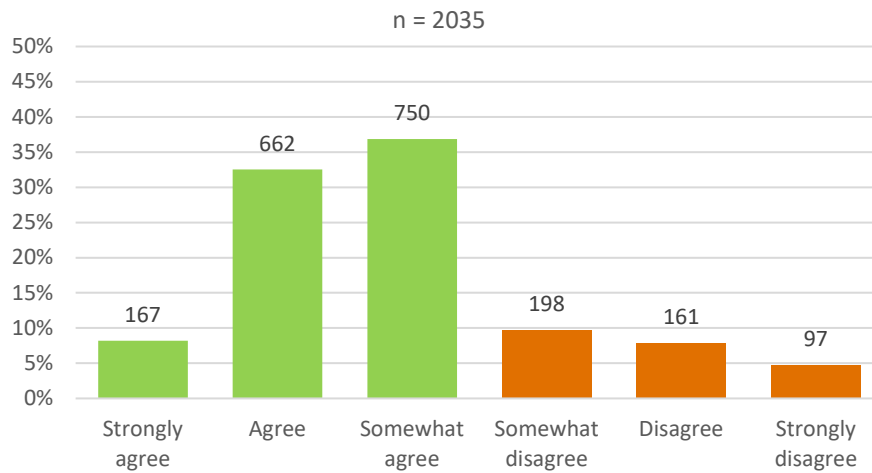
- 73% of 1033 school respondents expressed a positive disposition to the statement that the QCAA's communications were clear, timely and well-coordinated.

School staff: The QCAA's communications were clear, timely and well-coordinated (e.g. newsletters and email updates, memos, operational emails to teachers with specific assessment roles)

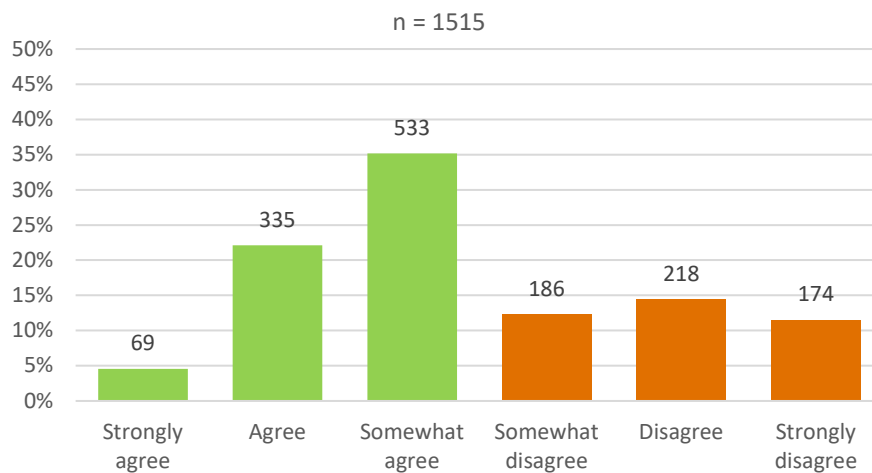


- 78% of 2035 current students who responded to the survey and 62% of 1515 former students generally considered that the QCAA’s website, brochures and documents helped them to understand how the new QCE system works.

Current students: The QCAA’s website, brochures and documents helped me to understand how the new QCE system works

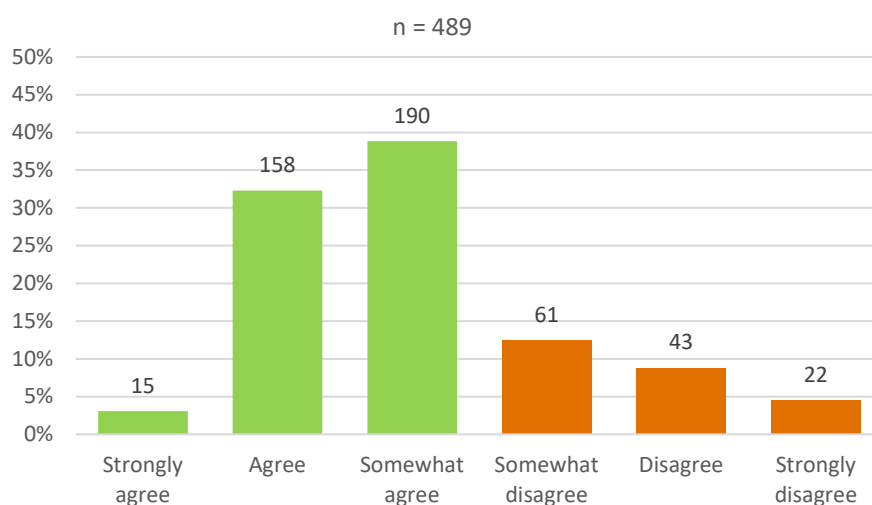


Former students: The QCAA’s website, brochures and documents helped me to understand how the new QCE system works



- 75% of 489 parents/carers generally considered the QCAA’s website, brochures and documents help them to understand how the new QCE system works.

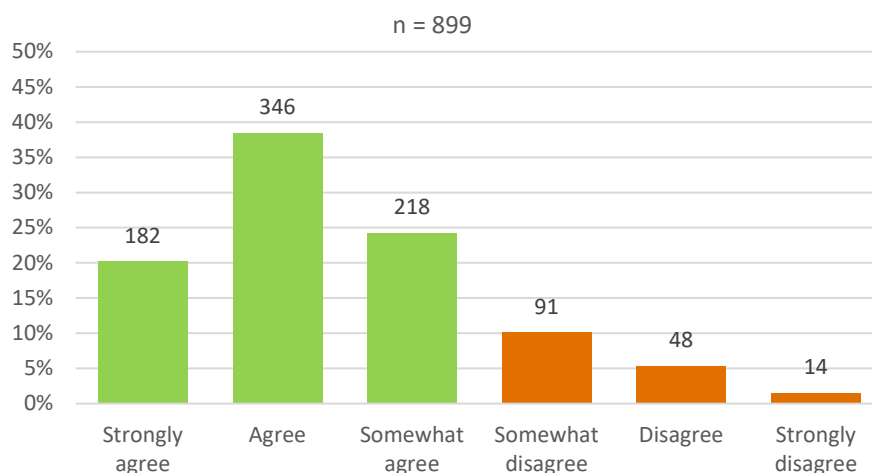
Parents/carers: The QCAA’s website, brochures and documents help me to understand how the new QCE system works



Around 45–50% of school, former student and parent/carer respondents did not express strong feelings about QCAA’s communications, i.e. they either somewhat agreed or somewhat disagreed. This might suggest that the QCAA has some work to do in establishing a presence in the minds of students, in particular.

Of the 1031 school respondents who answered the question about frequency of contact with the QCAA, 90% had made some contact (11.9% frequently, 53.8% occasionally, and 23.8% rarely). Overall, 83% expressed a positive disposition to the QCAA’s helpfulness, with 59% agreeing or strongly agreeing that QCAA staff were helpful.

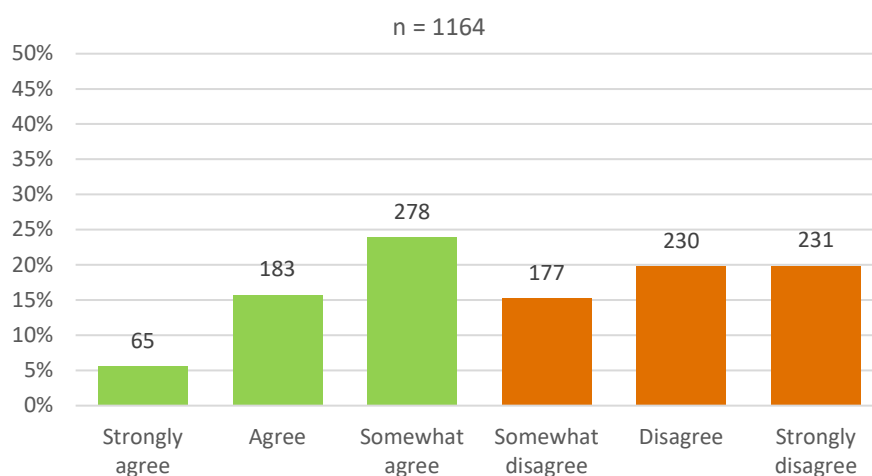
School staff: The QCAA staff were helpful and answered my question/s



Only 28% of 490 parents/carers had contacted the QCAA at any point (and most indicated it was rarely). The majority (79%) generally found QCAA staff to be helpful. A similar proportion of current students (73%) had the same feelings, but only 66% of former students generally found QCAA staff to be helpful, with 49% providing mid-range responses.

Most students knew about and had accessed the myQCE website, with 94% of former students successfully navigating the QCAA's Student Portal application to access their results. While only 45% of 1164 former students indicated that they understood how their final results were calculated, this must be considered in the context of the removal of one IA in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The removal of this assessment meant that all students were subject to a derived result process — something normally only required for a small number of students. The QCAA will further review existing resources, including those that explain derived result processes.

Former students: I understand how my final results were calculated



Survey responses indicated that 67% of parents/carers, 54% of former students and 55% of current students generally agreed that the QCAA's communications about COVID-19 and its impact on the new QCE system in 2020 were timely and clear.

What went well

Many survey respondents and education stakeholders praised the QCAA for its frequent and effective communications, and its capacity to listen to others' concerns.

QCAA staff identified the organisation's increased engagement with schools and external stakeholders as a positive aspect of the initial years of implementation.

The QCAA's service culture has enabled it to build support and credibility within its key communication audiences.

Where improvement is needed

Frequently recurring comments in the survey feedback suggest that the QCAA needs to be:

- more timely in responding to enquiries
- clearer, more definitive and more consistent in responding to enquiries
- more willing to respond in writing

- less inclined to offer bureaucratic or formulaic responses, e.g. simply quoting the syllabus.

Students also added that they would like QCAA staff to be more knowledgeable about the QCE system and to better prepare schools to respond to enquiries about the system.

The pressures associated with implementing a new system, especially with the added challenges of COVID-19, resulted in many important emails and other communications being issued outside business hours, including on the last day of term. Important professional development opportunities were also announced at short notice, making it difficult for teachers to find the time to participate.

The use of webinars as a communication mechanism is appreciated by many school staff, although some would prefer more information presented 'in writing' via the QCAA's online channels. Webinars and other forms of verbal communication have the benefit of creating opportunities for interaction and detailed exploration and explanation of issues. However, while webinars are relatively quick to prepare and easy to deliver, they can be problematic if they become the sole mechanism for communicating important information. Each presentation is restricted to those who attend and there is potential for confused messaging when the information is subsequently presented second or third hand. Recording presentations offers a partial solution, but privacy and other legal issues affect the efficacy of recordings. The QCAA will examine how it provides enduring artefacts that support key messages delivered via this medium.

In addition, the QCAA is currently presenting its information across two key online channels: the QCAA website and QCAA Portal. There is a need to ensure important information and key communication messages are consistently delivered via the appropriate channel.

What we have done

The QCAA is currently producing more short videos about key messages and events for distribution via its social media channels and website. It is also using contact information in the Student Management application to send direct emails with timely information to senior cohorts. The look and feel and content of the myQCE website has also been updated for release in Term 3, 2021.

The QCAA also founded the myQCE Student Reference Group in 2021 to give a student voice to discussions about the QCE system and senior schooling. It comprises 20 self-nominated students from across Queensland and the three schooling sectors.

What we are going to do

The QCAA has identified some key actions to improve its communications, including:

- updating the *QCE and QCIA policies and procedures handbook* for release in Term 3
- developing webinar delivery protocols to ensure that other communication channels provide alternative mechanisms for receiving the same or complementary information
- implementing a customer relationship management application to deliver more customised communications to the QCAA's contacts
- streamlining communications to key target groups by better coordinating messages across the organisation, reducing the frequency of communications, improving message clarity, and issuing communications within business hours, wherever possible

- implementing integrated corporate communication and marketing planning to support business processes where it is needed, such as assessor recruitment and retention, and external assessment and AARA
- expanding the myQCE website content and associated social media channels to ensure students are better informed about aspects of the new QCE system, especially how they are assessed, how their results are calculated, and how and when results will be communicated.