

March 2004

**Student Education Profiles:
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 39 592 Student Education Profiles (SEPs) to students who completed Year 12 in Queensland in 2003.

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

- A Senior Certificate is issued to all students who complete Year 12 with at least one result in an Authority subject, Authority-registered subject, or Recorded subject. 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.
- A Tertiary Entrance Statement is issued to OP-eligible students. It reports overall achievement on a ranking from OP 1 (highest) to OP 25 (lowest), as well as achievements in a maximum of five fields ranked from FP 1 (highest) to FP 10 (lowest).

In addition, in 2003, the QSA continued the trial of a Certificate of Post-compulsory School Education. In 2003 a Certificate of Post-compulsory School Education was issued to students who were not eligible for the Senior Certificate but who had completed twelve years of schooling or who had some accredited VET but no results in Authority subjects or Authority-registered subjects.

Table 1: Summary of the Year 12 student population in 2003

<i>Number of Year 12 students (including visa students)</i>	39 592
Number of Year 12 students (excluding visa students)	38 928
Students eligible for an OP or equivalent OP	28 543
Students eligible for an OP (excluding visa students)	27 970
Students ineligible for an OP or equivalent OP (including visa students)	10 816
Students ineligible for an OP (excluding visa students)	10 725
Repeat students (including visa students)	237
Re-entry students	52
Students who completed senior studies over three years	245
Visa students (eligible and ineligible for an equivalent OP)	664

In the preparation and distribution of SEPs, and during the review period, the QSA:

- continued development of the format of the Senior Certificate
- made provisional data about their students available to schools on the QSA's schools website
- analysed data to produce parameters needed in the calculation of OPs and FPs
- analysed data from each school looking for possible anomalies
- analysed individual student data to identify possible outliers before the finalisation of OP calculations
- conducted any necessary special-case calculations
- determined OPs and FPs
- produced and dispatched Senior Certificates and Tertiary Entrance Statements
- provided OPs and FPs through the new QSA's "Smart OP" website and through a freecall interactive voice response (IVR) phone service
- electronically transmitted tertiary entrance data to all tertiary admissions centres and selected interstate universities
- processed applications for verification (Senior Certificate) and review (Tertiary Entrance Statement).

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

1. HOW WAS THE FORMAT OF THE SENIOR CERTIFICATE DEVELOPED?

In 2003, as in previous years, there was continued development of the format of the Senior Certificate.

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 2003, for the fourth time, students received Senior Certificates printed on A4 paper with details about VET achievements and other Recorded subjects printed on accompanying statements. From 1997 to 1999 students received certificates printed on A3 paper when their achievements could not be reported 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 on one piece of folded A3 paper. This was still the case in 2003.

In 2003, certificates printed with accompanying statements reported VET in one or more of the following ways:

- as part of Authority subjects or Authority-registered subjects with syllabus documents developed by the QSA
- as part of Authority-registered subjects developed by the school
- as VET subjects
- as studies completed under school-based apprenticeship or traineeship arrangements.

Some students received certificates with VET achievements reported on two accompanying statements.

In 2003, as in the previous three years, students who completed studies towards a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship had the opportunity to have these studies reported on their Senior Certificates as being completed under these arrangements.

All certificates in 2003 showed summary information, such as:

- levels of achievement in Authority and Authority-registered subjects
- QCS Test grades
- VET certificates completed
- 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 user-friendliness of the Senior Certificate were necessary in 2003 (as in previous years) because the senior curriculum continues to develop in response to changes in the senior secondary school population.

The design of the 2003 Senior Certificate accommodated the following situation:

- 39 592 senior students received a Senior Certificate (in 2002 there were 39 480); 599 external certificates were issued (in 2002 there were 939); 233 Certificates of Post-compulsory School Education were issued (in 2002 there were 174).
- 22 868 students received a result in one or more Authority subjects or strands of Authority-registered subjects with embedded VET (in 2002 there were 22 874 students with results in embedded VET, and in 1997 there were 2616 students with results in embedded VET undertaken as part of Board subjects).
- 325 944 modules and/or competencies were printed for 25 400 students as part of Authority subjects

and Authority-registered subjects reported on the Senior Certificate (in 2002 there were 342792 modules and/or competencies printed for 22874 students, and in 1997 there were 18097 modules and/or competencies printed for 2355 students, as part of Authority or SAS Authority-registered subjects).

- The highest number of modules reported for a student studying Authority subjects or Authority-registered subjects with embedded accredited VET was 101 for five such subjects (in 2002 the highest was 106 in six subjects and in 1997 the highest was 32 in two subjects).
- 2882 students were recorded as studying under a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship program at 264 schools; of these, 1465 students in 228 schools had modules or competencies shown on their Senior Certificate as being completed under these arrangements. (In 2002 there were 3506 students at 241 schools who studied in such programs, 2570 of whom from 241 schools had modules or competencies reported.)
- 23238 students finished Year 12 with at least one VET result recorded on their Senior Certificate. (In 2002 there were 23534 students with at least one VET result.)

Changes to the format and user-friendliness of the Senior Certificate were designed to produce useful minor improvements while preserving its continuity.

2. WHAT DATA WERE SENT TO SCHOOLS?

Data was made available to schools through the QSA’s secure schools website. When an individual school accessed the data, what that school saw depended upon 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.

In addition, the QSA mailed to affected schools some information about special scaling procedures for visa schools, and procedures used for visa subject-groups.

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’.

Table 2 shows the different categories of schools involved in the 2003 OP calculations. Table 3 shows the different categories of school subject-groups involved in the 2003 OP calculations.

Table 2: Count of senior schools by category¹

<i>Total number of schools with senior students</i>	379
Number of senior schools with OP-eligible students:	356
• Large schools	307
• Small schools	42
• Intermediate schools	13
• Schools with a high proportion of visa students (visa schools)	7
Schools without any OP-eligible students	6

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.

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

<i>Total number of school subject-groups</i>	8520
Large subject-groups	4117
Small subject-groups	3301
Intermediate subject-groups	1102
Subject-groups with a high proportion of visa students (visa subject-groups)	92
Subject-groups without any OP-eligible students	264

Following receipt of assessment data from schools (Exchange Disk 5) on 27 November, the QSA made data available to schools on the QSA's secure schools website as follows:

- data for large schools were uploaded on 1 December
- a second dataset for large schools was uploaded on 8 December
- data for intermediate schools were uploaded on 8 December
- data for small schools were uploaded on 17 December
- data for visa schools and schools with visa subject-groups were uploaded on 17 December — these schools were earlier sent a letter alerting them to different procedures applied to the calculation of scaling parameters for subject achievement indicators (SAIs) and overall achievement indicators (OAIs).²

This was the third time these datasets were made available to schools through the website only, rather than by website and mail. Schools were informed of the availability of the data by email on the day they were uploaded. Schools whose emails were not successfully delivered were contacted by fax the following day. Further data were made available on the website in February. These data provided details about aspects of QCS Test performance, OPs, and selected subject results of groups of students at each school. For comparison purposes Queensland State data also have been made available to schools on the website.

3. HOW WERE ANALYSES OF DATA USED TO PRODUCE PARAMETERS NEEDED IN THE CALCULATIONS?

Analyses were used to:

- determine parameters used 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. An exemption from the requirement to sit the QCS Test may be granted to students who provide acceptable documentary evidence of the reason for such an exemption. 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 2003.

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

Table 4: Students who sat or did not sit the QCS Test in 2003

<i>Total number of students who sat the QCS Test</i>	<i>30 989</i>
OP-eligible students (excluding visa students)	27 549
OP-ineligible students (excluding visa students)	2 747
Visa students	589
Students who sat the QCS Test but did not complete Year 12	115
<hr/>	
<i>Total number of students who did not sit the QCS Test</i>	<i>8707</i>
OP-eligible students who were granted exemption from sitting:	432
• for medical reasons	392
• for bereavement reasons	17
• for cultural reasons	0
• for sporting reasons	6
Students previously eligible who were not granted an exception from sitting	343

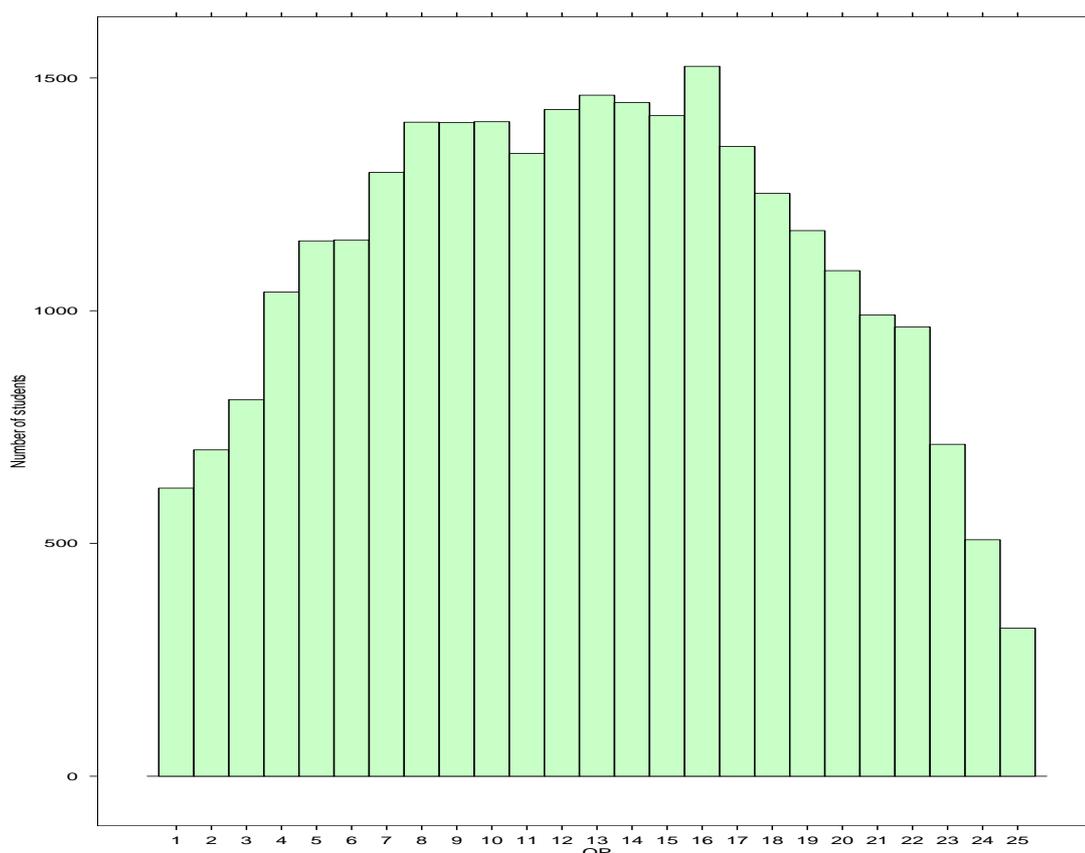
The analysis of data shows that there is a high correlation between the way OP-eligible students perform on the QCS Test and the way they perform in their school assessment. In previous years (1992–2002), the correlation between the QCS Test and the Within-School Measure (WSM) generally ranged between 0.73 and 0.75. In 2003 this correlation was 0.73. The high correlation of QCST/WSM suggests that the QCS Test is a suitable and accurate scaling instrument.

Approximate year-to-year comparability of OPs was maintained in 2003. This process involved finding cutoffs comparable with the 2002 cutoffs using a combination of estimates from two methods:

- comparing OAI scales using levels of achievement and multiple regression³
- comparing the OAIs of students from 2002 whose matching was based on subjects and levels of achievement.

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.

Figure 1: OP distribution, 2003



4. HOW WERE SCHOOL DATASETS ANALYSED FOR ANOMALIES?

Each school dataset was analysed before the OP calculations were finalised. This occurred in at least two 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

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

Distributions of SAIs were checked against the corresponding Forms R6 for face-value discrepancies for 1596 school subject-groups. Schools were contacted when there were questions about the face-value consistency of SAIs placements and the relativities implied by the corresponding Form R6. Two

hundred and six schools were contacted by phone about 641 school subject-groups.

There were alterations to SAIs for 425 of these school subject-groups as a result of these checks.

Possible unusual patterns of SAI decisions across subject-groups within a school were identified using several mathematical modelling techniques. 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.

Following these analyses, the QSA requested exit folios of work for selected students to provide the evidence on which SAI decisions had been made for six subject-groups at one school. This school provided the exit folios of 60 students in six subject-groups.

For these subject groups, subject experts at the QSA provided relativities for the selected students based on the evidence in the folios of work. The QSA then contacted the school concerned when changes to SAIs indicated by these relativities would resolve the issues identified by the earlier analyses. As a result of this set of SAI checks, the school provided changed SAI distributions as recommended for three of the six subject-groups.

Unusual patterns of SAI decisions include patterns of linear translations that were identified for another 13 schools. The QSA gave these schools the opportunity to reconsider their decisions before making a final decision to request exit folios. All 13 schools accepted this offer and submitted SAI distributions that had been changed and that indicated that finer distinctions had been made, with the exception of 11 subject-groups from two schools. The heads of department for these 11 subjects maintained that they could not make any finer distinction between students who were assigned the same SAI. These schools were offered free SAI seminars with the aim of increasing teachers' understanding of SAIs and how to assign them.

4.2 School-group data

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

⁴Note concerning polyscores

A simple mathematical model (Simpson, J. B. & Haladyna, T. M. 1988, *An Evaluation of Polyweighting in Domain-Referenced Testing*, a 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 OAI (the finer-grained scale which is cut into OPs).

Correlation	2003 student data N = 27 970
OAI ~ Polyscore	0.955
OAI ~ QCS	0.766
Polyscore ~ QCS	0.729

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 5-point scale.

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, school groups with a much larger polyscore spread than OAI spread were also selected 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, changes to final stage parameters were made for 21 schools. These changes involved raising the mean OAIs at 11 schools and raising the mean-difference at 8 schools to bring these parameters to the values whereby they would not have stood out as outliers. For two schools both their mean OAIs and mean-difference were raised.

Ten cases were referred to the Scaling Anomalies Committee because of issues raised by schools. The data showed that intervention was not warranted in any of these cases.

5. WHAT WAS DONE TO ANALYSE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT DATA FOR ANOMALIES?

Individual checks were based on the relationship, for groups of students with similar combinations of subjects, of OAI and average level of achievement (across best five subjects) and OAI and individual polyscore. A multiple regression analysis, which models OAIs in terms of levels of achievement, was also used 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 with the same name in another subject.

Like the polyscore analysis, the multiple regression analysis showed a very good correlation of 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, manual scrutiny of data was undertaken 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 Queensland and involved comparing them with every other student with a sufficiently similar combination of subjects.

Manual checks of around 3500 plots showing these individual student data indicated that further investigation was warranted for 1178 of these students, on the basis that these students’ OAIs were possibly odd. For these students an assessment record was printed showing semester units, levels of achievement, and SAIs in Authority subjects. Panel comments on the relevant Forms R6 were noted and the student’s approximate place within the achievement band was found for each subject.

Analysis of data for these students found 656 cases for which a change was justified to the student’s OAI before the issue of SEPs. The OAIs of these 656 students were increased to the point where they would not be considered outliers.

6. WHAT SPECIAL CASE CALCULATIONS WERE CONDUCTED?

Special calculations were carried out 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?

In 2003, for the seventh year, SEPs were printed in-house. This brings speed, flexibility and efficiency at a low cost.

In-house printing provides a number of advantages over printing outside. 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.

Extensive hand checks of all certificates for production quality were conducted before dispatch. The quality-control process allowed scrutiny of every SEP printed. Necessary changes were made 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 19 December 2003. To try to make sure that all students would receive their certificates on the same day, posting occurred over two days — Thursday 18 December for students living interstate, overseas, and in the remote areas of Queensland; and Friday 19 December for the remaining students. In 2003, SEPs were posted to 559 Australian postcodes and five overseas zones.

The schedule encountered no major problems, and 39592 Senior Certificates and 28543 Tertiary Entrance Statements (including those for visa students) were posted. Computer programs were used to ensure that every SEP had a precise known position in the packing production line.

This year, for the first time, there were two new ways for students to find out their OP and FPs. One way was through the QSA's "Smart OP" website, and the other was through a freecall interactive voice response (IVR) phone service. The IVR system replaced the old "OP hotline" phone service. To ensure that students could access their OP and FPs on the Smart OP website or on the IVR service from 20 December 2003, students were required to go to the Smart OP website and enter their QSA student number and change their PIN sometime between 1 and 31 October 2003. Between Saturday 20 December 2003 and Friday 9 January 2004, there were 38 115 hits on the Smart OP website. The number of hits included successful and unsuccessful logons, as well as multiple hits by the same student. For the same period, 7228 calls were made to the IVR service. Between Saturday 20

December 2003 and Friday 23 January, 1152 calls from students and their parents were made to the general phone number. The subjects ranged from lost PINs, rankings, calculation of OPs and FPs and tertiary entrance. The Office of the QSA was staffed through the Christmas and New Year period except for the public holidays.

In addition to the information made available to schools on the website, details of students' results for each school — levels of achievement, OP, FPs, and QCS Test grades — were posted on the schools section of the website on Tuesday 23 December. Because the privacy of students and schools must be safeguarded, internet data transfers remained secure, and user identities and secure passwords were needed for access.

8. WHAT TERTIARY ADMISSIONS DATA WERE ELECTRONICALLY TRANSMITTED?

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

The Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) was supplied with a file of Year 12 student results (external and internal) by Friday 19 December 2003. Interstate admission centres began receiving data after Tuesday 23 December 2003, and these requests are still going on.

One thousand one hundred and ninety-four Queensland students applied to interstate universities in 2003 (in 2002 there were 1126 such students, and in 1997 there were 1275). In 2003, the Australian Tertiary Admissions System was used to convert the OPs of students applying to interstate universities. The system uses the common Interstate Translation Index (ITI), which is a common scale used to convert the Tertiary Entrance rank of one state to that of another. Each state is responsible for the conversion from home state Tertiary Entrance 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 (TERTIARY ENTRANCE STATEMENT)?

Students had until Monday 12 January 2004 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 2003, there were 568 of these applications, which was an increase of 17 from the 2002 figure (551).

Students' applications can be classified into five main categories:

A. Change of name

There were 14 requests received for change of name on Senior Certificates.

B. Verification of result in Authority and/or Authority-registered subject

Most of these applications related to differences between the levels of achievement as stated on the student's exit statement or school report, and those shown on the Senior Certificate. Schools were asked to verify results.

C. Correction of result in Recorded subject

Thirty-seven requests were received for a correction of result in Recorded subjects.

D. Review of OP/FPs

There were 461 students who applied to have their OP or FP reviewed (37 more than the 424 applications in 2002). In each case a comparison was made across Queensland with students with similar results in a similar combination of subjects. Further checking of available information was made if this preliminary check showed that 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 decided whether the calculation of a correction factor (to bring the student's OP/FP into line with those of others with similar results) was warranted.

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, at the end of February 2004) is given in table 5 (final figures may be different).

Table 5: Amendments to student results (as at 28 February 2004)

Changes to levels of achievement (number of students)	
• Authority subjects	0
• Authority-registered subjects	0
• Recorded subjects	37
• External subjects	0
Changes to OPs	2
Changes to FPs	0
Changes to QCS grades	0

As soon as amendments were available, they were transmitted by the Office of the QSA to QTAC and tertiary admissions centres in other states.

10. CONCLUSIONS

Issuing SEPs in 2003 was more complex than in 2002. The amount and complexity of the information collected and reported, as well as the quality assurance required, continued to increase. Much of this complexity comes from the reporting of accredited VET 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.

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