

Research Series

Factors Affecting

Participation In the

Queensland Core Skills Test



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Executive Summary

Background

The overall focus of this research was to improve understanding of the factors which significantly affect participation by different categories of Year 12 students in the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test. The study was prompted by concerns regarding the:

- growing number of OP-ineligible students across the State; and
- the developing trend for OP-ineligible Year 12 students not to sit the QCS test.

Previous research conducted for the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority (TEPA) (Porter 2002), suggested that the post-school pathways of some OP-ineligible students could be constrained by not sitting the QCS Test. The data collected during that research, together with anecdotal evidence from contact with schools and students, identified a number of factors which appeared to impact on the informed choices made by OP-ineligible¹ students regarding post-school pathways. While the overall macro-policy states that students “will be encouraged to sit the Test and to try their best” (Viviani 1990):43, particular processes and practices at the meso (school) and micro (individual) levels of Queensland’s education system appeared to play an important role in determining whether or not an individual student elects to sit the QCS Test.

Aims of the research

The research sought to collect data regarding student participation in the QCS Test from school principals and Year 12 students. The primary aims were to:

- obtain data on the number of OP-eligible and OP-ineligible QCS Test participants within each school;
- identify whether or not there are different school policies and practices with regard to student participation in the QCS Test;
- assess whether there was a relationship between different school policies and practices and the proportion of OP-ineligible students who opt to take the QCS Test; and
- identify the reasons students did or did not participate in the QCS Test.

The research also sought to identify factors which were perceived by Year 12 students to facilitate their effective preparation for the QCS Test. In particular, the research collected data on:

- the impact of different ways of providing information and advice to students; and
- actual preparation practices of all students.

¹ OP-ineligible students are those students who have not studied the required number of Board subjects in order to be eligible for an Overall Position and Field Positions used in the tertiary entrance process within Queensland.

Method

A two-phase, self-completed survey methodology was devised to obtain reliable data regarding:

- (1) the number of OP-ineligible and OP-eligible students in each school, the number of OP-ineligible students who intended to sit the 2000 QCS Test, as well as each school's approach toward the provision of information to students about the Test and in relation to Test preparation (Phase 1); and
- (2) different students' reasons for deciding to sit or not sit the 2000 QCS Test, as well as their experiences in sitting the Test where they did so (Phase 2).

Principals from 65 per cent of all senior secondary schools in Queensland returned completed surveys during early 2000. Non-response did not vary significantly between school sectors and schools from different geographical locations. The information provided by responding principals was considered, therefore, to be representative of schools in these senses. Only data from schools that reported a Year 12 student population of which 10 per cent or more were OP-ineligible students were used to inform the recommendations made at the conclusion of this report regarding schools' Test administration policies and procedures.

Twenty-five schools were selected from the 183 schools that indicated a willingness at Phase 1 to be involved in Phase 2 (student survey) of the research. These schools were chosen in order to highlight differences between schools according to school sector, degree of remoteness, gender (single sex or co-educational), size of Year 12 population and rate of expected QCS Test participation by OP-ineligible students. Phase 2 survey responses comprised 74 per cent of the total population of Year 12 students from the twenty-three schools which participated in that phase of the study. The response rate from OP-ineligible students was, however, lower than that of OP-eligible students.

Key findings

OP-eligibility

- OP-eligibility was highest among students in Independent schools and lowest amongst State Government schools. However, the more remote a school, the lower the proportion of OP-eligible students. This relationship between the remoteness of a school and rate of OP-eligibility among students was apparent in both Independent and State Government schools. It was also largely apparent in the Catholic sector although rate of OP-eligibility was lower in schools *near Brisbane* than in Catholic schools in *rest of SE plus major coastal centres*.
- Female Year 12 students were proportionately more likely to be OP-eligible than were males. This difference was more marked in State Government schools.

OP-ineligibility and QCS Test participation

- OP-ineligible students from Catholic and Independent schools were proportionately more likely than OP-ineligible students attending State Government schools to intend to sit the 2000 QCS Test.

- Female OP-ineligible students were also reported as being proportionately more likely than male students to intend to sit the QCS Test. This pattern of intention was consistent across all three school sectors.

Advice given to students

- Three-quarters of responding schools stated that all Year 12 students were advised to sit the QCS Test. Importantly, in schools that advised all students to sit the QCS Test, a higher proportion of OP-ineligible students was reported as intending to sit the Test than in those schools that did not advise all students to sit the Test.
- Lower proportions of State Government and Catholic schools advised *all* students to sit the QCS Test.
- Among schools that did not advise all students to sit the QCS Test, the average rate of OP-ineligible students' intention to sit the Test varied significantly according to the degree of remoteness of the school attended.
- The reasons all students were not advised to sit the QCS Test focused on providing students, generally OP-ineligible students, with "options" and "opportunities" regarding Test participation, leaving the "choice" to sit to students and their families.
- Teachers were overwhelmingly the most common source of information regarding the QCS Test for both OP-eligible and OP-ineligible students.
- OP-ineligible students were proportionately less likely to have received information about the QCS Test.

Test preparation

- The majority of schools with more than 10 per cent of Year 12 enrolments comprising OP-ineligible students reported providing all students with access to QCS Test preparation (93 per cent).
- While all but one principal reported that all students had access to Test preparation, in at least half of the schools surveyed in Phase 2, some OP-eligible and OP-ineligible students indicated that they did not participate in preparation as they were not at school during preparation time. Such students were variously involved in work education, apprenticeships or other forms of training and were often OP-ineligible.

Types of Test preparation

- The majority of schools provided specific timetabled QCS Test preparation sessions. Just over one-half of schools indicated that Test preparation was embedded in the Years 11 and 12 curriculum.
- The most common forms of preparation in which students reported participating were special lessons set aside each week (just under half of all students) and special practice test sessions (two out of five students).

Reasons students sat the 2000 QCS Test

- Almost all OP-eligible students who were surveyed sat the QCS Test, while only 46 per cent of OP-ineligible students sat the Test.
- The majority of OP-eligible students agreed that they sat the QCS Test because they wanted to receive an OP at the end of Year 12 and because they wanted to gain entrance to a program of university or TAFE study.
- The most common reasons given by OP-ineligible students for sitting the QCS Test were that they had been encouraged to do so by their school (60 per cent), that it

was compulsory to sit the Test (53 per cent) or that they wanted to go to university or TAFE (55 per cent).

- Students' responses to the sitting of the QCS Test being compulsory were mixed. Many OP-ineligible students who were required by their school to sit the Test stated that they had no desire to do so and could not see any reason for doing so. Even though it is necessary for students who wish to obtain an OP to sit the QCS Test, some OP-eligible students also complained about the Test being compulsory. A minority of students stated that being made to sit the Test was good.

Reasons students did not sit the 2000 QCS Test

- A minority of OP-eligible students did not sit the 2000 QCS Test.
- Just over half of OP-ineligible students did not sit the 2000 QCS Test. Only 5 per cent of these students cited either illness or a "special reason" as explanation for not sitting the Test.
- Half of those OP-ineligible students who did not sit the QCS Test believed they did not need a Test result, that there was no point in sitting the QCS Test and/or that a Test result would not be of any help to their future job/career. This belief was re-emphasised in open-ended comments made at the conclusion of the survey.
- Importantly, while 40 per cent of OP-ineligible students who did not sit the QCS Test stated that they made this choice because they did not want to enter a program of TAFE or university study, a substantial minority of these students (40 per cent) actually intended to go on to further study at a university or TAFE.
- A number of OP-ineligible students incorrectly believed that their QCS Test performance would adversely affect the performance of their class or school.
- Some comments also highlighted misunderstandings among some OP-ineligible students regarding who can sit the Test. In some instances, these misunderstandings had potentially negative effects on the future pathways of those students.

Satisfaction with preparation and Test conditions

- While most students responded favourably regarding the quality and quantity of Test preparation, some students complained that there was "insufficient" or "ineffective" preparation. These complaints were mostly school specific with other students from the same schools also providing positive responses about the work of the teachers in preparing them for the Test.
- Some students complained that preparation for the QCS Test did not start early enough. In particular, students suggested that term 3 in Year 12 was too late to commence preparation. These complaints, while school specific, emanated from students in all three school sectors.

Destinations of students

- Comments provided by the principals of the schools surveyed indicated a belief among students that, given the likely post-school destinations of OP-ineligible students, sitting the QCS Test was not relevant to them.
- Not unexpectedly, reported post-secondary school destinations significantly differed between OP-ineligible and OP-eligible students.
- OP-eligible students were proportionately more likely to nominate university as a preferred destination than were OP-ineligible students. The degree of remoteness

of the school attended, as well as school sector, was related to post-school destinations.

- The intended destination for the majority of OP-ineligible students was TAFE (particularly for those who sat the QCS Test), apprenticeships or traineeships (particularly for those who did not sit the QCS Test), and jobs (almost equal proportions for those who sat the QCS Test and for those who did not).
- OP-ineligible students were clearly more likely to intend seeking employment directly following completion of senior secondary school than were OP-eligible students, regardless of the geographical location of the school or school sector.

General comments from students

- The general comments made by students revealed misconceptions about the content and purpose of the QCS Test and perceived biases. They made suggestions regarding the timing of the Test as well as Test preparation and the provision of information about the Test e.g. “We hadn’t learnt any of that through our 12 years of schooling” and “Everyone just expected me to know what it was and all that, but I didn’t and had to ask”.

Complexities

- Relationships between QCS Test administration and participation, school sector and geographical location of a school were not simple ones. While there were some broad patterns, school policies appeared to mitigate some of the negative impacts of remoteness. *Far-remote*² schools, on average, reported a higher level of intention to sit the QCS Test by OP-ineligible students than did schools in the *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres*.

Future QCS Tests: research implications

Comments made by OP-ineligible students to the Phase 2 survey indicate a lack of understanding about the Test and a concern among some students that they will not be able to perform well in the QCS Test. Such a concern was not voiced by any of the OP-eligible students surveyed. Given that the QCS Test is derived from core aspects of Board subjects, this articulated perception by OP-ineligible students is perhaps indicative of some broader issues with the Test’s development and/or administration. Reflections regarding the utility of the Test for non-OP pathways as well as for other community stakeholders, e.g. employers, are provided in the body of this report.

Significance of non-participation in QCS Test

It could be argued that with the small but steady decline in levels of OP-eligibility among Year 12 enrolments and the noticeable decline in the proportion of OP-ineligible students sitting the QCS Test, coupled with an increased emphasis being placed in Queensland on the value of VET pathways for students in senior secondary schooling and post-compulsory study in Queensland, it may be appropriate to assess the impact and significance of non-participation in the QCS Test on student pathways and transitions to further education and employment.

² Italics denote use of QBSSSS categories devised to describe the degree of remoteness of different schools in Queensland (QBSSSS, 1999b).

VET skills, knowledges and competencies

The forty-nine Common Curriculum Elements (CCEs) tested by the QCS Test are derived from Board subjects. However, senior secondary school students are increasingly taking VET subjects either in addition to or in preference to Board subjects. Given the promotion of the value of VET pathways for students in senior secondary schooling and post-compulsory study by current State Government policy, the number of students studying VET subjects at school could be expected to increase. It is perhaps timely to consider the extent to which the QCS Test can or should assess a student's achievement on core elements across the breadth of the senior secondary curriculum.

The capacity of the QCS Test to assess skills, knowledge and competencies taught through the Queensland school VET curriculum could be explored. The concerns voiced by OP-ineligible students regarding the very specific abilities, capacities and understandings being assessed by the QCS Test may have some basis. Consideration might be given to using alternative tests e.g. QTAC Ltd.'s Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT) to combine with students' ranks in order to facilitate their entry into tertiary study.

Student profiling and the QCS Test

The utility of the Test in assessing achievement in the development of different core skills could also be considered. While QCS Test results are used for scaling purposes, they are also a report on student achievement. The Viviani report proposed that the Test results would be "more generally useful for selection by TAFE Colleges, other institutions and employers" (1990:43) and is presumably one of the reasons Test results are reported on the Queensland Senior Certificate.

The results of the current study clearly show that some OP-ineligible students are studying in environments which either formally and/or informally communicate to them that the sitting of the QCS Test is only important for students currently considering a future which involves tertiary study. Further, there is also a belief among students that QCS Test results are not well understood by, nor considered important information for, employers. The extent to which the use of such results by potential employers could be expanded bears further investigation. Promoting the use of QCS Test results by a broader audience, including employers, could assist in emphasising the importance of the QCS Test for a broader range of students. However, such broader promotion of the utility of Test results would be most appropriate in a context where it was clarified that:

- the QCS Test effectively measured OP-ineligible students' competencies, knowledges and abilities as well as achievement across the core curriculum elements by OP-eligible students; and
- Test results were used in conjunction with all subject results also reported on the Senior Certificate.

The outcome of the current review of senior certification will be instructive in relation to this issue.

Further research

It is considered important that the relevance of the QCS Test to the ever-changing senior secondary and post-compulsory education context be kept under review. Further research is required to establish the extent to which the preliminary findings regarding QCS Test administration and participation are further substantiated, particularly findings from the Phase 2 student survey. It is also important to assess to what extent key stakeholders in the educational system believe that the scope of the QCS Test, and the way in which it is administered, could, or should, be changed. The survey data reported here provide critical benchmark data regarding the QCS Test administration and participation against which future data will be able to be compared.

Recommendations

A set of five recommendations targeting different stakeholder groups, as developed in *Section 5* of the report, are detailed below. Some of the key implications of the research conducted, which provide supporting evidence for the recommendations made, can be found in *Section 5* before each recommendation.

Students, Teachers and Parents

Recommendation 1

Given that the QCS Test may offer OP-ineligible students a pathway to tertiary entrance via an enhanced rank, as well as additional information on their Senior Certificate regarding achievement in five broad areas, *it is recommended that the utility of the QCS Test for all Year 12 students, rather than its relevance only to OP-eligible students, be further explicated and communicated to all relevant stakeholders.*

This communication strategy must target students, their parents and senior secondary school teachers. Management of the provision of information services by TEPA across the last ten years suggests that different types of communication and/or different communication strategies may need to be developed. In order to achieve maximum impact of such a strategy, that is, to bring about change in understanding the utility of the QCS Test among students, parents and teachers, *it is further recommended that a coordinated communication strategy be developed. Peak educational groups, e.g. counsellor and guidance officer associations, should play an important role in promoting the primary emphasis of the communication strategy and in coordinating that strategy.*

Consultations should be held with relevant stakeholders, e.g. educators and providers of information to senior secondary school students, regarding establishing the preferred format and content for the information developed and the optimal timing for the distribution of that information.

Key advantages of QCS Test participation to be emphasised include the following:

- the potential for the QCS Test result to be utilised as a key indicator of capacity following senior secondary schooling alongside the Senior Certificate, vocational education certificates, etc., rather than as:
 - simply a scaling device; or

- as just a test, the taking of which establishes a hierarchy distinguishing good from poor students;
- the utility of a QCS Test result in boosting the ranks for entry into university and TAFE; and
- the utility of a QCS Test result in communicating to potential employers information regarding a student's generic skills.

Community Stakeholders

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that:

- *An information or awareness-raising program emphasising the significance and utility of QCS Test results be developed and implemented targeting different stakeholder groups external to the school environment, e.g. employers, parents and community associations.* The development of this program could be guided by the information program and promotional documents prepared as a part of the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority's 1992–94 awareness-raising program targeting employers (Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority 1992). The aim of this program was to promote the Student Education Profile (SEP) as a tool for improving staff selection. A copy of some of the documents used as a part of that campaign is reproduced in Appendix 5.
- *A program of research, both pre- and post-awareness raising, be undertaken to monitor and evaluate the extent to which there is change in employers' use of, and satisfaction with, QCS Test results as a discrete element of the Student Education Profile (SEP).*

Schools

Recommendation 3

Given the generic underpinnings of the Test and the kinds of preparation valued by students in the current research, schools should be encouraged to review and refine approaches to QCS Test preparation to ensure all students are provided with adequate support and assistance to take and perform effectively in the QCS Test.

Authority responsible for developing the QCS Test

Recommendation 4

Given that the QCS Test is derived from the forty-nine CCEs underpinning the senior secondary Board subject offerings in Queensland, it would therefore be timely to investigate the relevance and appropriateness of the QCS Test to all students in the context of non-OP pathways.

Education Researchers

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that further survey research regarding administration of the QCS Test in schools be conducted in order to:

- collect data from a larger sample of Year 12 students;
- cross-validate the findings of the current research; and
- further investigate the extent to which OP-eligibility, difference between schools (e.g. geographical location, school sector, school size and sex of school population), as well as differences in student characteristics, affect participation in the QCS Test.

It is also recommended that additional research be conducted into a number of other key areas relating to QCS Test administration and participation including:

- the types of QCS Test preparation and the timing of QCS Test preparation which appear best to assist students to ready themselves for taking the Test. This study should investigate whether there are different types of preparation which are better suited to the needs of OP-ineligible students in comparison with OP-eligible students. This research could be informed by previous TEPA research in this area (see Mullins, 1993).
- the extent to which different school and community cultures affect how the QCS Test is understood and valued by students, parents and teachers, as well as how it is administered in Queensland schools.

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List of Acronyms

CCE	Common Curriculum Element
CCEs	Common Curriculum Elements
FP	Field Position
OP	Overall Position
QBSSSS	Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies
QCS	Queensland Core Skills
QTAC Ltd.	Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd.
SEP	Student Education Profile
STAT	Special Tertiary Admissions Test
TEPA	Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority
VET	Vocational Education and Training

1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority (TEPA) is a Queensland statutory authority which monitors the transition of students from Year 12 to tertiary education. One of TEPA's goals is to identify and investigate issues relating to tertiary entrance policies, with a view to exploring relevant implications for policy development. Investigation of trends in students' taking the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test, school policies and practices relating to the taking of this test and students' reasons for sitting the QCS Test are within the TEPA brief. The QCS Test is part of a process by which students, whether or not they are OP-eligible, receive a result which is included on their Senior School Certificate.

For the purposes of tertiary entrance (particularly university entrance), OP-eligibility is still the preferred pathway for school-leavers although the use of rank when OP-ineligible is also legitimate (Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd. 2001). With the growing number of OP-ineligible students (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2000a) as well as the developing trend for Year 12 students to not sit the QCS Test (Lanyon 2002), it could be argued that some students are being disadvantaged with regard to gaining tertiary entrance either immediately or at some future time.

The issue of potential disadvantage arising from OP-ineligible students not taking the QCS Test was noted in data collected in a TEPA research project on school-based vocational education and training (Porter 2002). The data collected during that research, together with anecdotal evidence from contact with schools and students, illustrated a number of issues which appeared to impact on the informed choices made by OP-ineligible students regarding post-school pathways. While the overall macro-policy states that students "will be encouraged to sit the Test and to try their best" (Viviani 1990):43, particular processes and practices at the meso (school) and micro (individual) levels of Queensland's education system appear to play an important role in determining whether or not an individual student elects to sit the QCS Test.

1.2 The history of the QCS Test

In Queensland, a system of school-based assessment has been the basis of senior school certification since 1973 (the last external Senior examinations were held in 1972). In 1992, the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test replaced the Common Scaling Test (CST) as a means of scaling Year 12 students' results (Viviani 1990). Students' scaled results were to be used to obtain an Overall Position (OP) and Field Positions (FPs). Further, a student's QCS Test results were to form part of a tertiary entrance profile, and as such, were to be reported on the Senior Certificate provided to Year 12 students upon graduation. The QCS Test results could also be used for selection

by TAFE colleges, other institutions and employers. That is, the QCS Test was to serve two functions: scaling and certification of students' levels of achievement.

The construction of the QCS Test was to reflect the Common Curriculum Elements (CCEs) of the Queensland senior curriculum. Further, it was intended to be an achievement test, not an intelligence test or an aptitude test (Viviani 1990). The task of constructing the Test was given to the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (QBSSSS).

1.3 What is the QCS Test?

The QCS Test is designed to assess levels of achievement in the CCEs embedded in the senior curriculum (Board subjects). It was decided that these CCEs must be testable, given the three modes of assessment (extended writing, short response, and multiple choice) (Matters and Gray 1993). The criteria for inclusion of a CCE in the QCS Test were that each element be:

- common to at least two syllabi;
- required by the syllabus to be included in the work programs;
- likely to be accessible to most students through their subject combinations; and
- testable in the formats available. (Matters 1991)

Those CCEs included in the QCS Test, however, are derived from syllabi comprising Board subjects. VET subjects do not necessarily include such elements.

The QCS Test consists of four papers – the Writing Task, Short Response Items, and two multiple-choice papers. While specific content knowledge of Year 12 subjects is not required, basic levels of general knowledge and vocabulary and Year 10 mathematics knowledge are assumed. The Test requires reading and writing in Australian English. The QBSSSS stance in relation to concerns regarding claims of discrimination in the QCS Test against students from non-English speaking backgrounds as well as students who have speech impairments is summarised as follows:

The QCS Test is a test of achievement, not aptitude or capacity. The result of the Test is reported to the community as achievement in a test of the common elements of the senior curriculum. The Board does not see that it can equitably and accountably certify that candidates have achieved something which in fact they have not. (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2002):13.

It is pertinent to note at this point that no student's individual QCS Test result is currently used in the tertiary entrance admissions process. It is a student's OP that is used for this purpose. While QCS Test results of *OP-eligible* students are used to position schools in relation to one another, they are not used in the calculation of individual OPs. QBSSSS also uses a statistical model to determine the weight to be given to a particular student's scaling score in the calculation of scaling parameters.

1.4 Who sits for the QCS Test?

As stated in the Viviani Report:

Since these results [QCS Test] will now count in university entry and in employment, students will be encouraged to sit the Test and to try their best... Further, since it will be compulsory for students to take the Test..., students will have to make a decision to “opt out” of sitting the Test if they do not want their test results stated on the certificate, in the knowledge of the later consequences (Viviani 1990).

It was, therefore, the original intent of the Viviani Review that all students, whether OP-eligible or OP-ineligible, should sit the QCS Test. OP-eligible students were clearly required to sit the QCS Test in order to obtain an OP. OP-ineligible students were expected to sit the Test so that their skills in the CCEs could be assessed and the results of that assessment be recorded on their Senior Certificate. It was not intended however that QCS Test results be the major factor in selection for tertiary entrance or employment.

Since the release of the Viviani Report, the QBSSSS has distributed various memoranda, student information bulletins and briefing notes to Queensland schools and other key stakeholders providing information in relation to the administration, content and participation of the QCS Test. The terminology used in these documents with regard to participation varies between:

- “Students who are otherwise eligible for an Overall Position (OP – a measure comparing students across the State in terms of their overall achievement in senior studies) are required to take the QCS Test” (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2000c):1;
- “Students whose program of studies does not make them eligible for an OP may sit the QCS Test or they may choose not to” (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2000c):1; and
- “If you are in Year 12 and are eligible for an Overall Position (OP), you **must** take the QCS Test. You will also get an individual result. If you are not eligible for an OP, you **may** still sit for the Test and get a result” (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2001a):3.

Students who sit the QCS Test, whether OP-eligible or OP-ineligible, have the option of applying through the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd. (QTAC Ltd.) to go on to further tertiary study. Those students who are OP-eligible apply for a position with a tertiary institution using their OP. Individual QCS Test results are not taken into account in the admissions process. OP-ineligible students however use their “Rank”, calculated by QBSSSS following analysis and weighting of marks achieved for all subjects taken during Years 11 and 12, as well as QCS Test results. While the QCS Test results of those students who are OP-eligible contribute toward the group results for calculating OPs, the results of OP-ineligible students do not.

All students who are eligible for an OP must, therefore, sit the QCS Test. If they do not sit the Test, without special reason, they will not receive an OP. While not all OP-eligible students apply for tertiary entry, the majority of Year 12 students elect to take OP pathways into tertiary study.

Students who are not OP-eligible may sit the QCS Test and the result may contribute to an improved Rank for those wishing to apply for tertiary courses (Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd. 2001). For instance, if the student gains a result of "D" or better (results are recorded on a scale of "A" to "E", with "A" indicating the highest achievement), they will receive an improved Rank compared with not sitting for the Test at all (the equivalent of receiving an "E"). However, it is acknowledged that the majority of OP-ineligible students are awarded a "D" whereas the majority of OP-eligible students are awarded a grade of "B" or "C" (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, 2000b). Most universities and TAFE colleges in Queensland accept these Ranks for tertiary entrance.

1.5 QCS Test participation trends 1993 to 2000

Data from the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2001b) indicates a slow polarisation in QCS Test participation rates between OP-eligible and OP-ineligible students from 1993 and 1999. Since 1993 there has been a slow decline in the percentage of OP-eligible students as a percentage of the total number of Year 12 students. In 1993, OP-eligible students comprised 79 per cent of the total Year 12 student population. By 1999, they accounted for 75 per cent of that population. In the year 2000, when the data collection for this study was occurring, the proportion of OP-eligible students decreased further to 72 per cent. While the percentage of OP-ineligible students has increased as a percentage of Year 12 students there has, however, been a steady decline in the percentage of OP-ineligible students sitting for the QCS Test – see Table 1. These trends, together with the increasing range of school-based Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs being introduced in Years 11 and 12, are perceived to impact on students' post-compulsory schooling pathways.

Table 1: OP-eligibility and QCS Test participation by OP-ineligible students from 1993 to 2000*

YEAR	OP-eligible	OP-eligible (percentage of Year 12)	OP-ineligible	OP-ineligible (percentage of Year 12)	OP-ineligible & sit QCS	OP-ineligible & sit QCS (percentage of OP-ineligible)
1993	27 336	79	7 100	21	3 295	46
1994	25 985	78	7 406	22	3 444	47
1995	25 118	78	7 106	22	3 300	46
1996	24 893	76	7 870	24	3 588	46
1997	25 958	77	7 860	23	3 552	45
1998	26 736	76	8 658	25	3 642	42
1999	27 750	75	9 282	25	3 653	40
2000	28 293	73	10 436	27	3 221	31

* Note: All figures include visa students.

(Source: (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1999a) (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2001b))

QBSSSS holds data relating to QCS Test participation. An analysis of Year 12 data relating to QCS Test participation was undertaken in 1999 (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2000b). Some variations between schools and sectors were identified (e.g. in relation to size of school, school location and aggregated SES of each school). However, given that the QBSSSS database used for this analysis did not include a record of reasons students chose to sit as opposed to not sit the QCS Test, it was not possible to ascertain the primary stimulus to their involvement in the Test.

Although anecdotal evidence suggests that many OP-ineligible students are encouraged to sit the QCS Test, access to test preparation for these students can be constrained; for instance, students involved in school-based apprenticeships can have classes or practical work in locations outside the school scheduled at the same time that test preparation takes place. Test preparation is deemed necessary so that students become familiar with the format of the QCS Test (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1994). It is recognised that “students are more likely to perform in a way that matches their capabilities if they are comfortable with the Test format, know appropriate strategies such as using time effectively, and are aware of the Test preparation procedures” (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1994):36.

It is also recognised across the senior secondary education sector that the best preparation for the QCS Test is participation in quality learning experiences. Once again, the QCS Test was ultimately designed to be a test of achievement in particular areas considered to be “core” to a person’s capacity to live and learn. The

findings of previous research (Porter 2002) suggest that some students might not have easy access to test preparation sessions nor be studying subjects, primarily VET subjects, underpinned by some of the CCEs. It is likely that such students will be disadvantaged in their test performance. The critical question to ask, however, is:

Are the future pathways of particular categories of Year 12 students being constrained through a lack of assistance (both personal and structural) to ready themselves for, and to sit, the QCS Test?

In summary, the factors that appear to influence QCS Test participation are:

- OP-eligibility;
- school policies and practices; and
- access to Test preparation and information regarding the Test.

Although the focus of the present research was not to determine QCS Test preparation practices in any great detail (see (Mullins 1993) for further detail), data collection and analysis of information regarding students' experiences of QCS Test administration at the school level was to be undertaken.

1.6 Aim

The research reported here sought to collect data from school principals and Year 12 students relating to student participation in the QCS Test. The primary aim was to:

- obtain data on the number of OP-eligible and OP-ineligible QCS Test participants within each school;
- identify whether or not there are different school policies and practices with regard to student participation in the QCS Test;
- to assess whether there was a relationship between different school policies and practices and the proportion of OP-ineligible students who opt to take the QCS Test; as well as
- to identify the reasons students did or did not participate in the QCS Test.

The research also sought to highlight factors which facilitated Year 12 students in preparing well for the QCS Test. In particular, the research attempted to collect reliable data on:

- the impact of different ways of providing information and advice to students; and
- actual preparation practices of all students.

The intended outcomes of the research are to:

- provide base data against which to note future trends in relation to QCS Test participation of both OP-eligible and OP -ineligible students;
- provide a report to inform TEPA's Information Services Team, the Authority's committees and all stakeholder groups with an interest in QCS Test issues regarding factors affecting students' participation in the QCS Test;
- provide a research brief to promote discussion regarding policy, practices and future directions among stakeholder groups in relation to the level of information, support and encouragement provided to students regarding preparation for and participation in the QCS Test; and
- allow TEPA to provide the Minister for Education with updated information regarding student participation in the QCS Test in order to assist in improving the content and focus of policy decisions in relation to tertiary entrance matters.

2: The Research

2.1 Methodology

In order to strategically collect data on both Queensland schools' policies and practices in relation to the QCS Test as well as from students regarding preparation for and participation in that test, this research was undertaken in two phases. Phase 1 comprised a survey sent to all principals in Queensland senior schools. The purpose of this survey was to identify school policy and practice regarding the QCS Test, the number of OP-eligible and OP-ineligible students in the school, and the number of OP-ineligible students intending to sit the QCS Test. It also sought to identify those schools that were willing to participate in an extended study of student participation in the QCS Test through further survey research to be partly administered by school staff.

Phase 2 comprised the development of school profiles from information provided by respondents to Phase 1 according to five key characteristics (school sector, whether or not a school was single sex or co-educational, location of the school, number of Year 12 students in total and proportion of OP-ineligible students sitting QCS Test in 2000) were developed. On the basis of those profiles, and with the aim of obtaining detailed information from Year 12 students attending different types of schools in Queensland, twenty-five schools were selected for involvement in the Phase 2 survey. A package of self-completed surveys was mailed to each of the schools chosen for involvement in Phase 2. School staff oversaw the distribution and collection of these surveys to their Year 12 student population. This survey was designed to collect information which would assist in improving understanding of students' perceptions of, school advice regarding, and preparation for, the QCS Test.

2.1.1 Sample

In 2000, Principals of all 355 senior schools in Queensland were contacted (by email or fax) and asked to complete the Phase 1 survey – see Appendix 1. In total, 230 surveys were completed and returned yielding a response rate of 65 per cent. This represented initial data on over 26631 studentsⁱ.

Non-response did not vary significantly by school sector nor by the QBSSSS school remoteness indexⁱⁱ.

The schools that responded to Phase 1 comprised forty-seven Catholic schools, 52 Independent schools, 128 government schools, and two senior collegesⁱⁱⁱ. Eighty-three (36 per cent) of the responding schools were located in *Brisbane*, 47 from *near-Brisbane*, 62 from the *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres*, 26 from *near-remote* areas, and ten schools were from the *far-remote* areas of Queensland (categorisation

scheme used by the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1999b)).

Twenty-five schools were selected from the 183 schools that indicated a willingness at Phase 1 to be involved in Phase 2 (student survey) of the research. Phase 2 schools, therefore, only represented just under 14 per cent of willing participants. Phase 2 schools however were purposively selected in order to highlight differences between schools according to school sector, degree of remoteness, gender (single sex or co-educational), size or Year 12 population and rate of QCS Test participation by OP-ineligible students.

Each of the Phase 2 schools was sent a package of student surveys to be distributed to all Year 12 students. According to data provided by those schools in Phase 1 questionnaires, this constituted a total Year 12 population of approximately 2679 students. Twenty-three schools (92 per cent of schools recruited to Phase 2) returned a package of completed student surveys, a potential 2580 students according to Phase 1 data. However, only 1913 surveys were returned in a form that could be used in further analysis. The Phase 2 survey, therefore, yielded a:

- 74 per cent response rate for the total population of Year 12 students from the twenty-three schools which participated in Phase 2;
- 71 per cent of all the Year 12 student population of the twenty-five schools invited to be involved in Phase 2; and
- 7 per cent of the Year 12 student population about which data was collected from schools in Phase 1 of the research.

2.1.2 Instruments

Survey of principals

The aim of the survey (see Appendix 1) was to obtain preliminary data regarding the following student groups at each school:

- numbers of OP-eligible and OP-ineligible students;
- numbers of OP-ineligible students intending to sit the QCS Test; and
- school policies and practices with regard to the QCS Test (for example, QCS Test preparation timetabling, preparation time, whether it is embedded in the curriculum, whether all students have access to preparation).

Principals were also asked to indicate whether they would be willing to be involved in Phase 2 of the research, a survey of all its Year 12 students.

Survey of students

Items in this survey (see Appendix 2) inquired about:

- students' reasons for choosing to sit or opt out of sitting the QCS Test;
- the source of information and advice they had received regarding the QCS Test;
- if they had been involved in any preparation for sitting of the Test; and
- their preferred destination after school. Students were also able to comment further on any issues relating to their perceptions of the QCS Test.

2.1.3 Details of research procedure

All principals of senior schools in Queensland were sent an email explaining the objectives of the research and its methodology followed by being faxed a survey in September 2000. During the Phase 1 survey period, clarification of some schools' responses to the surveys were obtained via telephone.

After data collected were entered, the twenty-five schools were purposively selected for involvement in Phase 2 of the research using the characteristics detailed in *Section 2.1.1*. In mid-October (after the QCS Test had been held), twenty-three of the selected schools distributed student surveys and returned the completed surveys to TEPA. All Year 12 students were requested to complete the survey.

2.1.4 Analysis

In line with the two phases of the research, two sets of analyses were conducted – analysis of the school-specific data collected during Phase 1 followed by analysis of students' responses to the Phase 2 questionnaire.

During Phase 1 analysis QBSSSS identification numbers were used to identify schools. Variables included in this analysis were:

- school sector;
- degree of remoteness of school's location;
- gender of the school (whether single sex male or female or co-educational);
- number of OP-eligible students (broken down by gender);
- number of OP-ineligible students (broken down by gender);
- number of OP-ineligible students intending to sit the QCS Test (broken down by gender);
- QCS Test preparation (timing for and type of);
- extent of student access to Test preparation; and
- reasons OP-ineligible students opted not to sit the QCS Test.

The degree of remoteness of a school was allocated according to the remoteness index devised by the QBSSSS (QBSSSS, 1999b).

Analysis of this school data included exploration of the relationship between rates of QCS Test participation and OP-eligibility or OP-ineligibility. Potential differences between schools in terms of OP-ineligible students' participation in the QCS Test were investigated using the variables detailed above.

No statistically significant differences according to school sector and degree of remoteness of school location were found between responding and non-responding schools. The data collected from school principals during Phase 1, therefore, can be considered to be broadly representative of different school sectors operating in different parts of Queensland during 2000.

From the response to the survey of principals, the following information was provided:

- Year 12 student populations widely ranged in size between three students and 356 students (valid responses from 228 Phase 1 schools). Average number of students was 117, the median was 109.5 students and the mode, 141 students. Not surprisingly, the standard deviation was 71.39.
- Just over half (56 per cent) of schools were State Government schools, with an equal one-fifth being independent and another one-fifth being Catholic. Senior colleges accounted for a little less than 1 per cent of responding schools.
- Almost 57 per cent of Phase 1 schools were located in or near Brisbane. Another one-quarter of these schools was located in either the south-east corner of Queensland or in major coastal centres.
- One out of ten Phase 1 schools were classified as *near-remote* and another one in twenty were considered *remote*.
- The majority of Phase 1 schools were co-educational schools (83 per cent). One in ten schools were all girls' schools and 7 per cent were all boys schools.
- The number of OP-ineligible students registered with these schools ranged from none to 162. All schools with no OP-ineligible students were Independent schools. Of those schools which had OP-eligible students (217 schools), the average number of OP-ineligible students was thirty-one and the median was twenty-five.
- The proportion of students at Phase 1 schools which were OP-ineligible ranged from 0 to 100 per cent. The larger the Year 12 student population, the smaller the proportion of OP-ineligible students^{iv}. Of those schools which had OP-ineligible students, on average they comprised almost 30 per cent of the total Year 12 student base (standard deviation = 18.85).
- Rate of QCS Test participation by OP-ineligible students also varied greatly between responding schools. Out of the 217 schools which had OP-ineligible students, 9 per cent had no OP-ineligible students who

intended on sitting the QCS Test^v. In approximately 6 per cent of those schools with OP-ineligible students, all students intended to sit the QCS Test. The average proportion of OP-ineligible students who intended to sit the QCS Test was 35 per cent (standard deviation = 33.35).

The average percentage of Year 12 students who were OP-ineligible and the average percentage of OP-ineligible students who intended to sit the QCS Test varied significantly according to level of remoteness of schools, school sector and the sex of the population of the school:

- Co-educational schools reported the highest average percentage of Year 12 students who were OP-ineligible (31 per cent). The majority of co-educational schools are State Government schools^{vi}.
- *Far-remote* schools reported the highest average proportion of Year 12 students who were OP-ineligible (53 per cent). *Brisbane* schools reported the lowest average (21 per cent).
- State Government schools, on average, reported the highest proportion of Year 12 students who were OP-ineligible (39 per cent). Independent schools reported the lowest percentage (7 per cent).

By comparison:

- All girls' schools reported the highest average percentage of OP-ineligible students who intended to sit for the 2000 QCS Test (60 per cent). Co-educational schools reported the lowest average (31 per cent).
- Schools in *Brisbane* reported the highest average percentage of OP-ineligible students who intended to sit for the 2000 QCS Test (52 per cent) while schools located in the south-east area of the State (apart from *Brisbane* or *near Brisbane*) as well as in major coastal centres reported the lowest average OP-ineligible participation rate (20 per cent).
- Catholic and Independent schools reported the highest average percentage of OP-ineligible students who intended to sit the 2000 Test (45 and 44 per cent respectively). The lowest average percentage was reported by state government schools (29 per cent). Differences between averages were statistically significant.

All the above differences between average percentages were statistically significant.

This brief overview of the Phase 1 data emphasises the difference between schools in Queensland in terms of the number of OP-ineligible students and the rate of OP-ineligible students' intended participation in the QCS Test in 2000. It highlights the important role that school sector, level of remoteness and sex of school population could play in terms of affecting OP-ineligible students participation in the QCS Test. The need to investigate differences in school administration of the QCS Test as well as whether those practices resulted in different outcomes in terms of OP-ineligible students' participation in the QCS Test is reinforced.

2.1.5 Selection of Phase 2 schools

Further analysis of the Phase 1 school data was necessary in order to strategically identify different categories of schools to participate in Phase 2 of the research. Given financial and resources constraints, it was not possible to survey Year 12 students from all schools that had indicated a willingness to assist in administering the Phase 2 survey. As stated previously, schools were purposively selected for the Phase 2 survey in order to obtain a sample of students from schools which varied according to the following key characteristics:

- school sector;
- degree of remoteness of each school;
- gender of school's population; and
- rate of QCS Test intended participation by OP-ineligible students.

Analysis of the distribution of QCS Test participation amongst OP-ineligible Year 12 students in Phase 1 responding schools (expressed as a percentage) indicates that:

- one-third of the distribution falls between 0 and 10.69 per cent;
- one-third of the distribution falls between 10.70 and 44.21 per cent; and
- one-third of the distribution falls between 44.22 and 100 per cent.

The first band is nominally referred to here as a low level of participation, the second as a middle range level of participation and the third as a high level of participation.

To the extent possible, Phase 2 schools were chosen to represent high and low levels of OP-ineligible student participation in the QCS Test across school sector, different types of school population and different degrees of remoteness. Theoretically it was possible to have seventy-five different types of schools. In association with financial and time constraints, Phase 1 schools' willingness to participate in Phase 2 of this study, however, constrained the extent to which it was possible to achieve such coverage.

Amongst Phase 1 responding schools there were:

- No Independent schools located in *near-remote* or in remote areas;
- No single sex government schools (as there are none in Queensland);
- No all male Catholic schools nearby Brisbane; and
- No all male Independent schools in the south-east section of the State (apart from in or nearby Brisbane) nor in any of the large coastal centres.

In Queensland the largest proportion of *near-remote* or remote schools are government schools.

One category of school that responded to Phase 1 of this study did not agree to participate in Phase 2, the survey of Year 12 students. This school was a co-

educational Catholic school in a remote area and could not be represented in the Phase 2 survey.

And finally, while a number of all male and co-educational schools *near Brisbane* participated in Phase 1 and agreed to participate in Phase 2, they were not able to be included in the Phase 2 survey due to resource constraints.

Table 2 summarises the characteristics of the schools selected for inclusion in Phase 2. Clearly, the attempt has been made to choose a low and a high QCS Test participation school in each geographic location.

Table 2: Summary of schools selected for Phase 2 (Student Survey) of the study

SCHOOL SECTOR	SEX OF SCHOOL POPULATION			SCHOOL LOCATION	% of Yr 12 students who were OP-ineligible	% of OP-ineligible students who sat QCS Test
	M	F	CO-ED			
Catholic	* (low)			<i>Brisbane</i>	13	5
	* (high)			<i>Brisbane</i>	17	100
		* (high)		<i>Brisbane</i>	19	100
		* (low)		<i>SE + coastal centres</i>	22	12
		* (high)		<i>Near Brisbane</i>	15	80
			* (low)	<i>SE + coastal centres</i>	21	12
			* (low)	<i>Near remote</i>	30	10
			* (high)	<i>Near remote</i>	7	75
<i>Sub-total (students)</i>				951		
Independent	* (med)			<i>Brisbane</i>	7	44
		* (low)		<i>Near-Brisbane</i>	6	0
		* (high)		<i>Brisbane</i>	8	100
			* (low)	<i>SE + coastal centres</i>	48	0
			* (high)	<i>Brisbane</i>	4	100
<i>Sub-total (students)</i>				795		
Government			* (low)	<i>Brisbane</i>	48	12
			* (high)	<i>Brisbane</i>	51	100
			* (low)	<i>Near-Brisbane</i>	65	0
			* (high)	<i>Near-Brisbane</i>	21	60
			* (low)	<i>SE + coastal centres</i>	34	5
			* (high)	<i>SE + coastal centres</i>	50	92
			* (low)	<i>Near-remote</i>	45	0
			* (high)	<i>Near-remote</i>	59	70
			* (low)	<i>Far-Remote</i>	36	0
			* (high)	<i>Far-Remote</i>	40	73
			* (low)	<i>Far-Remote</i>	60	0
			* (high)	<i>Far-Remote</i>	100	100
<i>Sub-total (students)</i>				1 010		
TOTAL (students)				2 756		

* Words in brackets refer to the proportion of OP-ineligible students school principals expected would sit the 2000QCS Test.

NB: The 2 State Government schools highlighted in grey originally agreed to participate in the Phase 2 survey but were ultimately unable to do so.

There were, however, no all male Independent schools in *Brisbane* who responded to Phase 1 survey *and* who had expected a low participation in the 2000 QCS Test by OP-ineligible students. Consequently, a school with a middle range of participation in the QCS Test was chosen as the comparison within *Brisbane* and *near Brisbane*. The shaded cells highlight the two schools that did not return any Phase 2 questionnaires.

3: Results

3.1 Results of principals' surveys

Two hundred and thirty surveys out of a possible 355 (65 per cent) were returned at Phase 1 of the study. As stated previously, eighty-three of these schools (36 per cent) were located in *Brisbane*, forty-seven were *near-Brisbane*, sixty-two were from the *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres*, while twenty-six were from *near-remote* areas and ten were from *far-remote* areas of Queensland. As non-response did not vary significantly by school sector nor by degree of remoteness of the school, the data collected regarding schools' administration of the QCS Test can be considered to be broadly representative of different categories of schools.

These 230 schools reported covering 26631 Year 12 students, 13668 (51 per cent) of which were female and 12825 (49 per cent) of which were male. Year 12 student populations ranged in size from three to 356 with an average of 117. Six thousand eight hundred and six OP-ineligible students were covered by those surveys, this time 41 per cent being female and 59 per cent being male. This is in line with broader trends.

This section of the report of the study firstly provides a brief overview of QBSSSS data regarding trends in OP-eligibility, OP-ineligibility and the participation of OP-ineligible students in the QCS Test. Where possible QBSSSS 2000 data is compared with the 2000 Phase 1 survey data. This is followed by a description of the data collected during the Phase 1 survey regarding responding schools' positions in relation to advice provided to OP-ineligible students' regarding QCS Test participation. The final section of the report comprises a summary of the data collected during the Phase 2 survey of a sample of Year 12 students (both OP-eligible and OP-ineligible) in selected schools post-2000 QCS Test.

3.1.1 OP-eligibility

Data summarised in the introduction to this report evidenced the gradual decline over the last eight years in the percentage of Year 12 students who are OP-eligible. Table 3 presents the gender breakdown of those trends.

Table 3: OP-eligibility for the years 1993–2000

Year	OP-eligible males (as percentage of Year 12 males)	OP-eligible females (as percentage of Year 12 females)	OP-eligible students (as percentage of Year 12)
1993	76	82	79
1994	74	81	78
1995	74	81	78
1996	71	80	76
1997	72	81	77
1998	70	80	75
1999	69	80	75
2000	67	78	73

(Source: (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1999a) (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2001b))

The percentage of OP-eligible females has been consistently higher than that of males during the past eight years.

Among the Phase 1 schools when school sector is taken into account, the difference between males and females was less marked in Independent and Catholic schools than it was in State Government schools – see Table 4. These two school sectors had the highest average percentage of OP-eligible students, while State Government schools and colleges had the lowest average percentage (being below the State average).

Table 4: OP-eligibility by school sector in Phase 1 survey of senior secondary schools

SCHOOL SECTOR	OP-eligible males (as percentage of males)	OP-eligible females (as percentage of females)	OP-eligible students (as percentage of students)
Catholic	75	85	82
Independent	91	94	93
Government	52	68	61
TOTAL	64 (n=199*)	77 (n=208#)	72 (n=227)

* Twenty-four schools were all female. The remaining seven schools did not provide data on the sex breakdown of students.

Fifteen schools were all male schools. The remaining seven schools did not provide data on the sex breakdown of students.

All differences between average percentages of OP-eligible students studying within different school sectors were statistically significant across the total sample as well as for males and females (at $p=0.000$).

Average rates of OP-eligibility within schools from different locations across the State were statistically different (Table 5). Correlation analysis between these two variables also yielded significant negative relationships – as the degree of remoteness increased, the proportion of OP-eligible students decreased. This relationship is perhaps partly explained by the higher percentage of independent and Catholic schools in *Brisbane*, compared to other locations. Independent and Catholic schools had a higher proportion of OP-eligible students in comparison with government schools. This pattern was consistent across all locations. The proportion of OP-eligible males compared to OP-ineligible females was less marked in *Brisbane* and most marked in *near-remote* areas within the State.

Table 5: OP-eligibility by location and gender in Phase 1 survey of senior secondary schools

LOCATION	OP-eligible males (as percentage of males)	OP-eligible females (as percentage of females)	OP-eligible students (as percentage of students)
1. <i>Brisbane</i>	72	80	79
2. <i>near-Brisbane</i>	69	80	76
3. <i>rest of south-east plus major coastal centres</i>	63	79	72
4. <i>near-remote</i>	47	66	57
5. <i>far-remote</i>	38	61	47
TOTAL	64 (n=198*)	77 (n=207#)	72 (n=226)

* 24 schools were all female. Seven schools did not provide data on the sex breakdown of students and another school did not provide sufficient data to allow geographical location to be coded.

15 schools were all male schools. Seven schools did not provide data on the sex breakdown of students and another school did not provide sufficient data to allow geographical location to be coded.

Given the relationship between school sector and level of OP-eligibility within schools, it is not surprising that State Government schools had the lowest average proportion of OP-eligible students in the *far-remote* and *near-remote* areas of the Queensland. The proportion of OP-eligibility for both males and females in Independent schools was consistently high (above 90 per cent) in the areas where the majority of schools were located (*Brisbane*, *near-Brisbane*, and *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres*). While the proportion of OP-eligible students in Government schools was, on average, lower among both male and female Year 12 students, the

average percentage of females remained relatively stable (between 67 per cent and 71 per cent) across the five locations. In comparison, the average proportions of OP-eligible males in State Government schools across all five locations were 60 per cent in *Brisbane*, 46 per cent in *near-remote* areas and 50 per cent in *far-remote* areas.

3.1.2 OP-ineligible students' intention to sit the QCS Test

As mentioned previously, while there has been an increase in the proportion of OP-eligible students since 1993, there has also been a decline in the percentage of OP-ineligible students who take the QCS Test (see Table 1). A lower proportion of OP-ineligible male students compared with OP-ineligible female students has consistently sat the QCS Test (see Table 6).

Table 6: QCS Test participation by OP-ineligible students - 1993–2000*

YEAR	OP-ineligible students (as percentage of Year 12)	OP-ineligible males sitting for QCS Test (as percentage of OP-ineligible males)	OP-ineligible females sitting for QCS Test (as percentage of OP-ineligible females)	OP-ineligible students sitting for QCS Test (as percentage of OP-ineligible students)
1993	21	Not available	Not available	46
1994	22	43	54	47
1995	22	44	52	46
1996	24	42	52	46
1997	23	42	51	45
1998	24	39	49	42
1999	25	36	47	40
2000	27	Not available	Not available	31*

* Note: All figures include visa students.

(Source: Unpublished QBSSSS statistics, 2000)

Analysis of the Phase 1 data provided by principals revealed that among those schools surveyed:

- 28 per cent of total students were OP-ineligible;
- 30 per cent of OP-ineligible males intended to sit the QCS Test in 2000;
- 40 per cent of OP-ineligible females intended to sit the QCS Test in 2000; and
- 36 per cent of OP-ineligible students in total intended to sit the QCS Test in 2000.

Differences in principals reports of the proportion of OP-ineligible students' intention to participate in the 2000 QCS Test were also apparent between schools according to geographical location (see Table 7). Although schools in *far-remote*

areas reported lower average proportions of OP-eligible students intending to sit the QCS Test in comparison with the rest of the State, and the difference between males and females was not as marked as in other areas within the State, the average level of expected QCS Test participation rate was higher than in the *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres*. Schools located within the fringe of the south-east region and in major coastal centres reported the lowest average level of intention by OP-ineligible students to sit the QCS Test. All differences between averages were statistically significant.

This relationship between the remoteness of a school and rate of OP-eligibility among students was apparent in both Independent and State Government schools. It was also largely apparent in the Catholic sector although rate of OP-eligibility was lower in schools *near Brisbane* than in Catholic schools in *rest of SE plus major coastal centres*.

However, due to the lack of availability of QBSSSS data on the rate of OP-ineligible students' participation in the 1999 QCS Test across different geographical locations, it is not possible to assess the extent to which the data collected in Phase 1 reflects broader population trends.

Table 7: Principals' reports of intention to participate in the 2000 QCS Test by OP-ineligible students across location and gender

LOCATION	% of OP-ineligible males* intending to sit the 2000 QCS Test	% of OP-ineligible females* intending to sit the 2000 QCS Test	% of OP-ineligible students* intending to sit the 2000 QCS Test
<i>Brisbane</i>	43	55	52
<i>near-Brisbane</i>	28	39	34
<i>rest of south-east plus major coastal centres</i>	17	22	20
<i>near-remote</i>	25	36	27
<i>far-remote</i>	29	28	27
TOTAL	30	40	36

* Calculated as a percentage of OP-ineligible males, females or students

QBSSSS data summarised in Table 8 regarding OP-ineligible students' participation in the 1999 QCS Test shows that participation was highest for all students, as well as for both male and female students, in Independent schools. While the participation rate of female OP-ineligible students was high in Catholic schools, QCS Test participation by male students was comparatively low, approximating the State average. OP-ineligible students from State Government schools were clearly proportionately less likely to participate in the QCS Test than students from the other two school sectors.

Table 8: QCS Test participation by OP-ineligible students across school sector and gender - 1999 QBSSSS data

SCHOOL SECTOR	% of OP-ineligible males* who sat the 1999 QCS Test	% of OP-ineligible females* who sat the 1999 QCS Test	% of OP-ineligible students* who sat the 1999 QCS Test
Catholic	38	61	47
Independent	59	67	62
Government	34	44	38
TOTAL	36	47	40

* Calculated as a percentage of OP-ineligible males, females or students

(Source: Unpublished QBSSSS statistics, 1999)

Rates of OP-ineligible students' intention to sit the 2000 QCS Test across the three different schools sectors using Phase 1 survey data were generally lower than 1999 rates as detailed in Table 9. While the general pattern of lower rates of participation in the QCS Test by State Government school OP-ineligible students in comparison with rates of participation by students from other school sectors was apparent, overall principals surveyed reported lower participation rates. Also note that the differences between average rates of intended 2000 QCS Test participation by OP-ineligible students in each of the school sectors found in the Phase 1 survey data, however, were not significant for female students.

Table 9: Intention to sit the QCS Test in 2000 by OP-ineligible students across school sector and gender - Phase 1 survey

SCHOOL SECTOR	% of OP-ineligible males* who intended to sit the 2000 QCS Test	% of OP-ineligible females* who intended to sit the 2000 QCS Test	% of OP-ineligible students* who intended to sit the 2000 QCS Test
Catholic	40	44	45
Independent	37	48	44
State Government	25	36	29
TOTAL	30	40	36

* Calculated as a percentage of OP-ineligible males, females or students

3.1.3 Advice given to students in relation to participation in the QCS Test

While three out of four principals indicated that all Year 12 students were advised to sit the QCS Test, clearly this did not result in 100 per cent Test participation. Independent schools were significantly more likely to have advised all students to take the QCS Test than were State Government and Catholic schools (90 per cent in comparison with 70 per cent). However, when schools advised all Year 12 students to take the Test, a higher percentage of OP-ineligible students were reported as intending to sit the QCS Test in comparison with OP-ineligible students from schools that did not specifically advise all students to sit the QCS Test (44 per cent compared with 12 per cent^{vii}).

While most schools reported encouraging OP-ineligible students to sit the Test and the benefits were discussed, comments provided by just over 4 per cent of Phase 1 schools suggest that the final decision was left to the student and/or parents/guardians. Some schools “insisted” that all OP-ineligible students sit the QCS Test and the principals in these schools stated that all OP-ineligible students would participate. Other schools indicated that the “advantages” and “disadvantages” of sitting the Test were discussed specifically with OP-ineligible students and the final decision rested with them. In other schools, OP-ineligible students were specifically advised ONLY to sit the QCS Test if they were aiming to enter a program of TAFE study (see Appendix 3 for a summary of comments made at *Question 9 – Are all Year 12 students advised to sit the QCS Test?*). However, in only one school were students who were involved in SATS (school-based apprenticeships and traineeships) or work experience specifically expected **not** to sit the Test.

It should be noted that while fifty-five principals/schools expanded on their response to *Question 9*, 175 principals/schools did not. Generally, the latter group of respondents agreed that all Year 12 students were advised to sit the QCS Test. A response of “yes” without clarification may not, however, provide a complete description of how these schools communicated the importance of sitting the QCS Test (or otherwise) with OP-ineligible students. A response of “information is given to all students, but then it’s up to the students to choose” is qualitatively different from “all OP-ineligible students are expected to sit for the QCST”. It is not at all clear what was the content of “the information” provided to students in the former school, nor how the advantages and disadvantages of sitting the QCS Test were described.

The discussion in *Sections 3.1.3.1 Students not advised to sit the QCS Test* and *3.1.3.2 Students advised to sit the QCS Test* as well as that provided in *Section 3.1.4 Access to preparation* relates to schools where principals reported that more than 10 per cent of their Year 12 student population comprised OP-ineligible students (75 per cent of the total Phase 1 response equating to 171 schools). It was considered that schools in which the Year 12 population comprised less than one in ten OP-ineligible students (25 per cent of responding schools) would not be in a position to provide

useful feedback regarding “difference” in the way in which OP-ineligible versus OP-eligible students were advised about sitting and supported to prepare for the QCS Test. *Sections 3.1.5 Types of preparation* and *3.1.6 Timing of preparation* describe the full complement of responses provided by schools to the Phase 1 survey.

3.1.3.1 Students not advised to sit the QCS Test

Initial indications that the group of students who tended not to be specifically advised to sit the QCS Test were OP-ineligible, were borne out by further analysis. Just over 28 per cent of schools (forty-eight schools) with less than 10 per cent of OP-ineligible students stated that they did not advise all students to sit the QCS Test. While the principal of only one Independent school stated that only some students were advised to sit the QCS Test, almost one out of three State Government and one out of four Catholic school principals stated that their schools only advised some students to sit the QCS Test.

This resulted in, on average (across all school sectors), fewer than 11 per cent of OP-ineligible students in such schools intending to participate in the QCS Test (ranging between 0 and 62 per cent). Two-thirds of those schools reported a low rate of OP-ineligible student participation in the QCS Test (as defined in *Section 2.1.5*). Further, in approximately one out of five schools that did not advise all students to sit the QCS Test, no OP-ineligible students intended to do so.

Among the schools which did not advise all students to sit the QCS Test, those located in the *Brisbane* area reported the highest average rate of intended QCS Test participation by OP-ineligible students (22 per cent). Schools located in the *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres* reported the lowest average rate of OP-ineligible students’ intention to sit the QCS Test (7 per cent) closely followed by those schools classified as being *near-Brisbane* (8 per cent).

A range of reasons was given to explain a school’s practice of not specifically advising all students to sit the QCS Test and some comments were more informative than others. In schools where OP-ineligible students recorded a low participation rate, and where not all students were advised to sit the QCS Test (35 schools), the words “choice”, “opportunity” and “option” were often used to describe how student participation in the QCS Test was promoted. The scope of such comments also ranged from the general to the specific.

It is totally the students’ choice.

All are told they may sit. OP-ineligibles may choose. Certainly [at] no time are they told they cannot sit.

All students offered opportunity.

Students are given the opportunity to sit the Test with the facts given at the time. Classes are then QCS or Career Ed classes.

OP-ineligibles are given the option of sitting.

Emphasis to sit, but if identified as non-academic, counselled as to options and skill in responses, but allowed to choose.

Generally speaking, however, comments suggest that it is OP-ineligible students who are provided with the option to sit, per QBSSSS advice to schools, while OP-eligible students are either expected to or strongly advised to sit the Test.

The majority of comments provided, detailing perceived reasons students do not sit the QCS Test, communicate a belief among students that unless a student aims to enter a program of further study immediately following graduation from senior school, the sitting of the QCS Test is irrelevant. The flavour of such comments was similar regardless of the QCS Test participation rate of OP-ineligible students.

Going to work - do not see any need to sit

Ineligible, therefore no need, no interest in OP and tertiary entry.

Vocationally oriented student with no need for university.

(Schools with low level of intention of OP-ineligible students to sit QCS Test)

Most do not want access to Degree or Diploma courses (i.e. are non-OP) and therefore see little need to do Test; others who are OP and don't sit say the same.

(Schools with medium level of intention of OP-ineligible students to sit QCS Test)

Some principals highlighted the fact that some students, particularly OP-ineligible students, believed that they would not be able to perform well on the QCS Test because they did not have sufficient knowledge and skills:

OP-inel. and feel no need to have a QCST result for the future. Students doing mainly voc. Ed. Feel they don't have sufficient background in their subjects.

Most of OP-inel. Do not study Board subjects, but take TAFE modules. Therefore are concerned by their ability to cope with the demands of the Test.

(Schools with low level of intention of OP-ineligible students to sit QCS Test)

OP-inel. Opt out. Many are scared of "failing" and consider QCS Test even too difficult to attempt.

(Schools with medium level of intention of OP-ineligible students to sit QCS Test)

In association with concerns regarding ability to do well on the test, some principals indicated that some students would rather have no result recorded on their Senior Certificate in preference to having a result of a "D" or "E".

Likely poor result, see QCS result as being less important than subject results.

Not relevant to post-school intentions. Do not wish to record low result, i.e. "E" for no purpose.

(Schools with low level of intention of OP-ineligible students to sit QCS Test)

Some don't wish to have low QCS Test score on Senior Cert.

(Schools with medium level of intention of OP-ineligible students to sit QCS Test)

The extent to which comments provided reflect the opinion of school staff regarding the involvement of OP-ineligible students and/or less bright students in the QCS Test is not discernible. Regardless, there appears to be a broadly held belief among some people in some schools that the sitting of the QCS Test is only useful if a

student is aiming to undertake university or Diploma level study at a TAFE Institute. To a lesser extent there is also a belief that participation in the QCS Test may be more difficult for OP-ineligible students as a result of the type of subjects they have studied and, further, that a low QCS Test result recorded on their Senior Certificates may disadvantage them as they move into the workforce.

3.1.3.2 Students advised to sit the QCS Test

In schools where principals reported a school policy whereby all students, both OP-eligible and OP-ineligible, were advised to take the QCS Test (122 schools), an average of 40 per cent of OP-ineligible students intended to do so (ranging between 0 and 100 per cent participation). Therefore, although these schools advised OP-ineligible students to sit the QCS Test, in some instances this advice did not translate into Test participation.

Yet, in comparison with schools where not all students were advised to sit the QCS Test, under one-third of principals from such schools (twenty-eight schools) reported a low rate of OP-ineligible student QCS Test participation. The lowest average rate of intended QCS Test participation by OP-ineligible students was reported by State Government schools (37 per cent)^{viii}. Catholic schools reported the highest average rate of intention to sit the QCS Test amongst OP-ineligible students (56 per cent).

Principals from schools located in the *Brisbane* area reported the highest average rate of OP-ineligible students' intention to sit the QCS Test (54 per cent of OP-ineligible students in those schools). Interestingly, *near-Brisbane* schools and *far-remote* schools reported similar rates of OP-ineligible student intention to participate (39 per cent). The lowest average rate of OP-ineligible student intention to sit the QCS Test was reported among schools in the *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres* (28 per cent)^{ix}.

In summary then, overall, among schools with a Year 12 population comprising more than 10 per cent of OP-ineligible students, those schools that advised (compared with schools that did not advise) all students to participate in the QCS Test reported a higher proportion of OP-ineligible students intending to sit the QCS Test. However, most principals at schools which did not directly advise OP-ineligible students to take the Test stated that the students were given the choice or opportunity to sit the Test. While it is true that all students whether or not they are OP-eligible or ineligible do have a choice, analysis of the Phase 1 data suggests that when students are given such a choice *but are not specifically advised to sit the QCS Test*, there is a tendency to opt *not* to sit the Test.

3.1.4 Access to preparation

Access to preparation was another issue addressed in the Phase 1 survey. Most principals (93 per cent) indicated that all students had access to QCS Test preparation, that is, in terms of being given access to specific timetabled preparation

sessions. Given that the majority of schools provided all students which access, previously described trends in OP-ineligible student intention to sit the QCS Test were apparent across different school sectors and geographical locations.

However, open-ended comments provided in both the Phase 1 and 2 surveys suggest that some students, often OP-ineligible students, were not on campus during preparation time. Of those schools where not all students had access to preparation (thirteen schools), the main reasons provided centred around students being away from school at scheduled QCS Test preparation times (eight schools). These students were variously involved in work education, apprenticeships or other forms of training. Not surprisingly, intention to sit the QCS Test by the OP-ineligible students in these schools was on average 21 per cent, four schools reporting that no OP-ineligible students intended to sit the QCS Test.

However, in one of these schools all OP-ineligible students sat the Test, although they did not participate in preparation. QCS Test policy at this school was that all students were expected to sit the Test. In a follow-up telephone conversation, it was revealed that the OP-ineligible students who were not on campus during normal timetabled preparation could access extra voluntary preparation sessions at other times.

3.1.5 Types of QCS Test preparation

Returning to description of the full 230 schools which responded to the Phase 1 survey, among these schools, QCS Test preparation took many forms. Within each school this preparation usually included more than one type of preparation. The majority of schools (99 per cent) provided specific timetabled preparation sessions. Fifty-two per cent of the principals indicated that QCS Test preparation was embedded in the curriculum. Other forms of preparation described included the conduct of a special trial test (with and without QCS Test markers marking those tests) and practice with prepared packages.

No statistically significant differences in approaches to QCS Test preparation were found between different school sectors and between schools in different geographical locations.

3.1.6 Timing of QCS Test preparation

Most schools (74 per cent) commenced timetabled preparation in semester one of Year 12. However, some schools (6 per cent or thirteen schools) did not commence preparation until semester two of Year 12. Two out of five of these schools stated that preparation was embedded in the curriculum. These schools may, therefore, not have felt a need to start more formal preparation any earlier. However, in the other eight schools that did not commence preparation until semester 2 of Year 12, no other form of QCS Test preparation was provided.

While there were differences in the timing of QCS Test preparation between different school sectors and between schools in different geographical locations, these differences were not statistically significant.

3.1.7 Summary - Findings from the Phase 1 survey

In summary, the main findings from the Phase 1 survey of principals of senior secondary schools in Queensland regarding the 2000 QCS Test were:

Population representativeness

- Phase 1 sample is representative of Queensland schools with a senior secondary department in terms of school sector and geographical location.

OP-eligibility

- Differences were found in the proportions of OP-eligible and OP-ineligible students from different school sectors and geographical locations. The proportion of Year 12 students who were OP-eligible was lowest in State Government schools and highest in Independent schools. This pattern was consistent across all geographical locations. The higher the degree of remoteness of schools, the lower the proportion of OP-eligible students.
- Female Year 12 students were consistently proportionately more likely to be OP-eligible than were male Year 12 students. However, in Catholic and Independent schools the difference between the proportion of female and male students was less marked than in State Government schools.

OP-ineligibility and QCS Test participation

- Differences were also found in the proportions of OP-ineligible students who were reported by different school sectors as intending to sit the QCS Test in 2000. OP-ineligible students from Catholic and Independent schools were proportionately more likely than OP-ineligible students from State Government schools in other sectors to be intending to sit the 2000 QCS Test.
- Differences were also apparent according to the geographical location of schools. Of note was the lower proportion of OP-ineligible students intending to sit the QCS Test in the *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres*.
- Female Year 12 OP-ineligible students were proportionately more likely to sit the QCS Test than were male OP-ineligible students (40 per cent compared with 29 per cent). This relationship was not affected by sector of school attended.

Advice given to students

- Three-quarters of responding schools stated that all Year 12 students were advised to sit the QCS Test. A higher proportion of OP-ineligible students was reported as intending to sit the 2000 QCS Test in those schools than in schools that did not advise all students to sit the Test.

- State Government and Catholic schools were significantly less likely to advise all Year 12 students to sit the QCS Test than were Independent schools.
- Differences between average rates of OP-ineligible students' intention to sit the QCS Test were apparent among schools from different geographical locations that reported not advising all Year 12 students to sit the QCS Test. Participation rate was higher, on average, in the *Brisbane* area and lowest in the *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres* and *near-Brisbane* areas.
- Only one school reported specifically advising students involved in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships or work experience not to sit the QCS Test. Reasons provided for all students NOT being advised to sit the QCS Test focused on providing students, generally OP-ineligible students, with "options" and "opportunities" regarding Test participation, leaving the "choice" to sit to students and their families. Comments provided by the principals of these schools indicate a belief among students that given the post-school destinations of OP-ineligible students, the sitting of the QCS Test was not relevant for them.

Test preparation

- The majority of schools with more than 10 per cent of Year 12 enrolments comprising OP-ineligible students reported providing all students with access to QCS Test preparation (93 per cent).
- Where schools reported not providing all students with access to QCS Test preparation (thirteen schools), the most commonly cited constraint to full access was students being off campus at the time of such preparation. Such students were variously involved in work education, apprenticeships or other forms of training and were often OP-ineligible.

Types of Test preparation

- In terms of the full Phase 1 sample (230 schools), the majority of schools provided specific timetabled QCS Test preparation sessions. Just over one-half of schools indicated that Test preparation was embedded in the Year 11 and 12 curriculum.
- While three-quarters of all Phase 1 survey schools commenced timetabled QCS Test preparation in semester 1 of Year 12, a small proportion of schools did not start such preparation until semester two of Year 12. That said, two out of five of these schools reported that Test preparation was embedded in their curriculum.
- No statistically significant differences were found in approaches to and timing of Test preparation between different school sectors or between schools in different geographical locations.
- Eight schools (3 per cent of responding schools) did not provide any other form of QCS Test preparation apart from that commenced in semester two of Year 12.

Complexities

- Relationship between QCS Test administration and participation, school sector and geographical location of a school was not a simple one. While there were some broad patterns, school policies appeared to mitigate some of the negative impacts of remoteness. *Far-remote* schools, on average, reported a higher level of intention to sit the QCS Test by OP-eligible students than did schools in the *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres*.

3.2 Results of students' surveys

Twenty-three (of twenty-five) schools returned completed student surveys. This accounted for 1913 students (of the original 2756 students). While 92 per cent of the expected OP-eligible students returned their surveys, only 58 per cent of the expected OP-ineligible students returned their surveys. Consequently, the majority of the Phase 2 student survey data comprises responses from OP-eligible students.

This pattern of response was more than unfortunate. One of the primary aims of this research was to identify reasons for OP-ineligible students sitting or not sitting the QCS Test. The extent to which the responses summarised and analysed below are able to be generalised to the wider OP-ineligible student population is constrained by this response rate. Clearly, the experiences of a proportion of the OP-ineligible students who did not sit the QCS Test in that year were not captured by the Phase 2 survey - see Table 10.

Table 10: Comparison of characteristics of Year 12 population data (QBSSSS data) for 2000 with the characteristics of the Phase 2 sample

CATEGORIES OF STUDENTS	Population		Phase 2 Survey		Diff.
	Number	%	Number	%	
Year 12 students (including visa students)	38 729	100.0	1 913	100.0	--
OP-eligible students (excluding visa students)	27 839	71.9 (of total Yr 12)	1 572	82.2 (of total Yr 12)	+ 10.3
• OP-eligible students who sat the QCS Test	27 430	98.5 (of OP-elig)	Not avail	Not avail	--
OP-ineligible students (excluding visa students)	10 372	26.8 (of total)	336	17.6 (of total Yr 12)	- 9.2
• OP-ineligible students who sat the QCS Test	3 198	30.8 (of OP-inel)	156	46.4 (of OP-inel)	+15.6
Visa students	518	1.3 (of total)	Not avail	Not avail	--
• visa students who sat the QCS Test	472	91.1 (of visa)	Not avail	Not avail	--

3.2.1 Reasons students sat the 2000 QCS Test

Students were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements regarding reasons for taking the QCS Test.

The **majority** of OP-eligible students agreed that they sat the QCS Test because they wanted to receive an OP at the end of Year 12 and because they wanted to gain entrance to a program of university or TAFE study. Of these OP-eligible students, the majority reported that they wanted to go to university (see discussion in *Section 3.2.6*).

By comparison the most common reasons given by OP-ineligible students for sitting the QCS Test were:

My school encouraged me to sit the Test (60 per cent)

It was compulsory (53 per cent)

I wanted to go to university or TAFE (55 per cent)

“I want to improve my rank” (48 per cent) as well as “My parents advised me to sit the Test” (46 per cent) also featured in responses made.

OP-ineligible students who stated that they sat the QCS Test because it was compulsory tended to be students from specific schools and from private schools in the main.

Further comments from those students who sat the QCS Test illustrate mixed reactions in cases where the school stated it was compulsory to take the Test. Many of the OP-ineligibles who were made to sit the Test stated that they had no desire to do so, and could not see any reason for not doing so. Some OP-eligible students in these schools also complained. They felt that students who did not want to sit the QCS Test should not be made to do so, as they tended to disrupt preparation sessions. However, a minority of students stated that they believed it was a good idea for all students to sit the Test and were grateful that the school had made them do so.

3.2.2 Reasons students did not sit the QCS Test

A minority of OP-eligible students who responded to the survey (fifteen students) did not sit the QCS Test. Eleven of these students reported that they did not sit because of illness or they had a special reason for not sitting. Four students simply did not “see the point in sitting”.

Of those OP-ineligible students who did not sit the QCS Test (52 per cent of the total number of responding OP-ineligible students), eighteen students (5 per cent of non-sitters) reported that they had intended to sit the QCS Test but that they had been ill or had a special reason that prevented them from doing so.

Just over half of those OP-ineligible students who did not sit the 2000 QCS Test reported not taking the Test because “I didn’t need a QCS Test result”. Other reasons for not sitting the Test, these students frequently reported were:

I didn’t see the point in sitting for the QCS Test (47 per cent)

It isn’t of any help to my future job/career (46 per cent)

It is of note that almost half of the OP-ineligible students who did not sit the QCS Test (in comparison with only 13 per cent of OP-eligible students) did not believe that sitting the Test would assist them in their future employment or career.

Less commonly cited reasons were: “It wasn’t necessary, because I don’t want to go to university/TAFE” (41 per cent); “I didn’t want a QCS Test result on my Senior Certificate” (31 per cent); and “I wasn’t advised to sit the Test” (23 per cent).

Importantly, however, a substantial minority of all students (40 per cent) who did not sit the Test reported that they intended to go to university or TAFE.

The trend in these responses is contingent with those provided by principals regarding reasons students choose not to sit the QCS Test (see *Section 3.1.3.1*). The open-ended comments provided by OP-eligible students regarding their choice not to sit the QCS Test further support the impressions reported in the Phase 1 survey.

Just over one in four OP-ineligible students (fifty-one students) who did not sit the QCS Test provided a written comment in further explanation of why they chose not to do so, with another one in five students (thirty-eight students) providing a second comment. Of the total 89 open-ended comments made by these students:

- 30 per cent emphasised their perception of the lack of need for them to sit the Test or the lack of importance for them to do so e.g. for their future or job prospects;
- 15 per cent stated that they were “not OP” bound, and, by implied corollary, that they believed they did not need to sit the QCS Test; and
- 12 per cent indicated that they chose not to sit the Test because they were concerned about their Test performance. These students either stated that they did not want to have a poor mark recorded on their Senior Certificate or that they did not want to bring the score of their class or school down by their participation in the Test.

Smaller numbers of students stated that they simply did not want to or did not desire to sit the QCS Test (six students), were not university bound (four students) or that they felt sitting the Test would have been too stressful (three students).

The comments of five OP-ineligible students who did not sit the QCS Test indicated that they had misunderstood the information provided to them or did not receive accurate information regarding who could or could not sit the Test:

I couldn't as I wasn't eligible.

Voc ed. can't.

I was told that I did not need an OP for the uni course I wanted to do. This was at the end of Year 11. I changed from English Comm. to English but too late.

Not enough Board subjects.

I didn't want my bad result bringing down the rest of the school result, but I want to do it though.

These comments highlight a number of misunderstandings among some OP-ineligible students about who can sit the Test. In some instances, these misunderstandings have negatively affected the future pathways of those students.

And finally, it was noted in previous discussion in this report (see Table 7 in *Section 3.1.2 OP-ineligible students' intention to sit the QCS Test*) that schools in the *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres* had the lowest rate of intention by OP-ineligible students to sit the 2000 QCS Test. From the responses provided to the Phase 2 survey, it was not possible to identify a single cause or set of causes for OP-ineligible students in that area not intending to take the QCS Test, in comparison with students attending schools in other areas.

3.2.3 Sources of information

The most common source of information for both OP-eligible and OP-ineligible students who responded to the Phase 2 survey was teachers (95 per cent), with the second-most common source being friends (61 per cent). Two out of five students also received information about the QCS Test from the principal or deputy principal of their schools.

OP-ineligible students, however, were proportionately less likely than OP-eligible students to have received information about the QCS Test from teachers (87 per cent versus 96 per cent) or from their parents and family (39 per cent versus 49 per cent). Further, a higher proportion of OP-ineligible students than OP-eligible students indicated that they had not been provided with much information about the Test (11 per cent versus 4 per cent). Overall, therefore, a higher proportion of OP-eligible students reported receiving information compared with OP-ineligible students. This suggests that the sitting of the QCS Test by OP-ineligible students is not considered to be important by the culture of some schools and communities.

3.2.4 Access to and types of preparation

A diversity of approaches to Test preparation was reported by students. Variation in approach appeared to be school-specific. In some schools, all students participated in some form of QCS Test preparation, whether they were OP-eligible or not, and whether they intended to sit the QCS Test or not. However, in other

schools, some students (both OP-eligible and OP-ineligible) did not participate in preparation.

The most common forms of preparation in which students reported participating were special lessons set aside each week (just under half of all students) and special practice test sessions (two out of five students). From written comments provided, it was evident that some schools had as many as two full days set aside to sit for a practice test.

However, it also appeared that some students who sat the QCS Test did not participate in timetabled preparation sessions (e.g. weekly classes) nor Test practice sessions as they were not at school during these times. This was particularly so for OP-ineligible students.

Student responses to the Phase 2 survey in relation to QCS Test preparation did not systematically resonate with responses given in the Phase 1 survey of principals. All but one of the twenty-three principal surveys indicated that all students had access to preparation in the schools included in Phase 2 of this study. However, in at least half of the schools surveyed in Phase 2, some OP-eligible and OP-ineligible students indicated that they did not participate in preparation, as they were not at school during preparation time. These findings raise the question of what aspects of students' lives and experiences constrain the transformation of access to Test preparation into participation. Further detailed research is required to assess the extent to which differences between schools and school practices brought about such differences in access to preparation.

3.2.5 Satisfaction with preparation and Test conditions

While most students responded favourably regarding the quality and quantity of Test preparation, some students complained that there was "insufficient" or "ineffective" preparation. These complaints were mostly school specific with other students from the same schools also providing positive responses about the work of the teachers in preparing them for the Test. Some students also expressed gratitude to schools which provided "brekky" on the days of the Test, or water and "minties" during the Test. In contrast, a number of students from one school complained that they were not permitted to take water bottles into the QCS Test examination room, although the temperature was very high.

Some students also commented that insufficient information was given to them regarding the physical requirements for sitting the Test; for instance, information relating to the equipment students were permitted to take into the Test. Again, these complaints were school specific.

Finally, some students complained that preparation for the QCS Test did not start early enough. In particular, students suggested that term 3 in Year 12 was too late to start effective preparation. These complaints, while school specific, did come from students attending schools in all three sectors.

3.2.6 Destinations of OP-eligible and OP-ineligible students

As was expected, the preferred destination for the majority of OP-eligible students surveyed in 2000 was university. This was particularly so in *Brisbane*, where 81 per cent of OP-eligible students stated that they intended to go to university, compared with 58 per cent of students attending schools in remote rural areas. A higher proportion of students from Independent schools (84 per cent) compared with State Government schools (59 per cent) indicated that their intended destination was university. In contrast, a higher proportion of students from State Government schools (27 per cent) compared with Independent schools (8 per cent) indicated that their intended destination was TAFE. A minority of OP-eligible students also indicated that deferring university study, applying to TAFE, applying for apprenticeships or traineeships and jobs (full-time or part-time) were options.

In contrast, the preferred destination for the majority of OP-ineligible students was TAFE (particularly for those who sat the QCS Test), apprenticeships or traineeships (particularly for those who did not sit the QCS Test), and jobs (almost equal proportions for those who sat the QCS Test and for those who did not).

Almost two-thirds of OP-ineligible students in the *Brisbane* area and one-half of OP-ineligible students in the *near-Brisbane* area identified TAFE as their preferred destination. TAFE study was less commonly cited as a post-school destination by the students attending schools in *rest of south-east plus major coastal centres* (42 per cent), *near-remote* (26 per cent), and *far-remote* (37 per cent). These differences were statistically significant. No statistically significant difference was found in the proportion of OP-ineligible students who cited TAFE as a preferred destination by students attending schools in different sectors.

No significant differences were found between different geographical locations in relation to the proportions of OP-ineligible students who identified apprenticeships and traineeships as a preferred destination.

Finally, not surprisingly, OP-ineligible students were proportionately more likely to state obtaining a job as a preferred destination upon leaving school in comparison with OP-eligible students (63 per cent versus 37 per cent). This pattern of response was constant across all geographical locations and school sectors.

3.2.7 General comments by students

Analysis of the general comments made by students revealed misconceptions about the content and purpose of the QCS Test, perceived biases, suggestions regarding the timing of the Test as well as regarding preparation for and the provision of information about the Test. Other school-specific comments were also made relating to the administration of the QCS Test. These comments are synthesised

below, followed by a summary of the comments made by OP-ineligible students in particular.

Comments in General

Content and purpose of the QCS Test

A number of comments made in response to open-ended questions in the Phase 2 survey illustrated a lack of understanding as to the content and purpose of the QCS Test. A minority of students criticised the relevancy of the questions in the Test stating: "I thought many of the questions were irrelevant to what I'm studying at the present time", "We were not able to study for it" and "We hadn't learnt any of that through our 12 years of school."

Such responses indicate that some students focus on the content of the QCS Test, rather than the types of reasoning which are required for the Test. One student went so far as to say, "We should be able to have information that we can study and the QCS should be based on that information." Other comments illustrated that some students believed that the QCS Test is an intelligence test, a standardised test, a test of knowledge, or a test of "reading, writing and arithmetic". Finally, one OP-eligible student believed that the OP is affected by the individual's QCS Test result.

Perceptions of QCS Test bias

The issue of bias was also raised and covered issues such as gender, cultural and subject content bias. Firstly, some students from all-male schools stated that there were too many questions "geared towards the female sex". Some boys believed the written task in particular was "too suited to girls" and that subjects such as Art and English were also biased towards females. All criticisms relating to the Art and English content in the QCS Test came from all-male schools. Some comments were also made that there was a perceived mathematics and science bias in the QCS Test and suggestions were made that more general questions across a broader range of subject areas be included in the Test. Finally, a number of students noted a cultural bias in the content of the Test - a bias towards Australian culture.

A number of students stated that they believed the 2000 QCS Test was more difficult than tests set in previous years and issues regarding specific questions were raised. The Writing Task was found to be "uninspiring" and framed around an "odd topic". Male students specifically did not like the open-ended nature of some of the tasks, preferring multiple-choice questions. Another commented, "The Test should not concentrate so much on the interpretation of emotions through written language as it is more important to understand emotions through other forms of communication in the real world".

Timing of the QCS Test

The timing of the QCS Test was criticised on a number of grounds. Students felt they were "tired" by third term, and believed the Test should be set in first term. Other students stated that the end of winter was a time when many students were ill, and either could not sit the Test, or sat the Test when feeling very ill. Both OP-eligible and OP-ineligible students who were ill throughout the Test period stated that they would have liked to be able to sit/resit the Test at a later time.

Several students suggested that the QCS Test should be spread over a few days, rather than having four tests in two days.

Test preparation

Positive and negative responses regarding preparation practices were school specific. While at some schools the majority of students criticised the preparation provided, a minority of students in these schools praised the school for the preparation undertaken. In two schools where principals had stated that all students had access to preparation during school time, some OP-ineligible students complained that they were made to sit the Test without access to preparation. These students had been off-campus completing work education or apprenticeship / traineeship or other types of training. As stated previously, further investigation identified a practice of providing access to voluntary Test preparation for these students outside school time.

Positive comments relating to preparation were also made. Many students stated that sitting for practice tests and preparation in general had greatly enhanced the “ease and confidence” with which they approached the QCS Test. In contrast, where students believed that insufficient preparation was provided (in particular where preparation started in third term), many students in these schools criticised the lack of preparation.

Information regarding the QCS Test

Like preparation, the level of satisfaction reported in relation to the provision of information was school specific. Teachers in some schools were criticised for providing inadequate information regarding the advantages of sitting the QCS Test, the content of the Test and the equipment required for completion of the Test.

Physical environment

In some schools, particularly in warmer regions of the State, students criticised the environment in which they had to sit the Test. Apart from extremes in temperatures, some physical settings posed problems for some students, for example, sitting in the sun throughout the length of the Test or competing with distracting noises of birds or construction sites.

Other issues raised

A variety of other school-specific issues were also reported. At one school, students stated that many students “left” the Test room as soon as the minimum time was up, and that many students did not take the Test “seriously”. Without exception, students (both OP-eligible and OP-ineligible) at schools where QCS Test participation was “compulsory” for all students suggested that students should not have to sit the Test if they did not want to do so.

Stress levels

Finally, the open-ended comments made by students in all schools included in the Phase 2 survey referred to the issue of stress. Students stated that their school’s approach to Test preparation had either increased or reduced their stress levels.

Students specifically stated that their level of anxiety about taking the QCS Test had been increased by:

- schools overemphasising the importance of the QCS Test;
- providing inadequate or incorrect information about the QCS Test; and
- providing inadequate preparation practices.

OP-ineligible students' comments

While only twelve OP-ineligible students provided further comments at the conclusion of the Phase 2 survey, they are indicative of the diversity of understanding regarding utility of and concerns about participation in the QCS Test by that particular category of students.

Understanding of the Test

Everyone just expected me to know what it was and all that, but I didn't and had to ask.

I didn't see the point of the whole thing. How can it help us in life, writing up stories and answering silly multiple choice questions.

Utility of the Test

I don't think you need to do the QCS. I think it is a big waste of time when you can rely on school subjects.

OP has nothing to do with getting a job. Most employers don't know what the two letters mean.

Concerns

Don't put results on Senior Certificate and more students would do it.

Further, two OP-ineligible students reported regretting not having sat the Test.

I regret not sitting for the Test, but I hope to still get in to uni through TAFE.

I wish I had done it now. Make it compulsory and everyone prepares for it.

4: Discussion

4.1 Reasons OP-ineligible students sit or do not sit the QCS Test

OP-ineligible students sitting for the QCS Test who achieve a grade “D” or better improve their rank for tertiary entrance. This result is arguably valuable if these students intend to enter university or TAFE immediately following graduation from senior school or at a later date. The results of the study show that whether or not an OP-ineligible student wished to go to university or TAFE was one of the main factors which appeared to determine participation in the QCS Test. However, in some cases OP-ineligible students who did not sit the Test still reported that they intended to go to university or TAFE. Other reasons reported by students in relation to QCS Test participation were they were encouraged to do so; it was compulsory; and their parents advised them to sit.

Very few students stated that they sat the Test to help them get a job. This might account for the fact that students who intended to obtain paid employment immediately following senior school did not believe that sitting for the Test would assist them to get employment. As detailed previously, one student stated that they believe employers do not even understand the meaning of a QCS Test result. A number of students stated that they did not want a QCS Test result on their Senior Certificate.

And finally, and most importantly, while students who were advised to sit the Test tended to do so, students who were not advised or advised not to sit the Test, tended not to sit.

There has been a steady decline in the proportion of OP-ineligible students who sit the QCS Test since the early 1990s. It is difficult to determine to what extent the issues highlighted by the survey of principals and selected students provide definitive explanations for this decline. However, the data collected through these surveys forms the basis for future investigation and comparison. Any future research into student participation in the QCS Test should incorporate a representative survey of all Year 12 students.

4.2 Information and preparation

While most students were satisfied with the information they received, a higher proportion of OP-eligible students than OP-ineligible students reported receiving information. Some students (particularly OP-ineligible students) felt dissatisfied with the information they received. Lack of information about the Test itself appeared to be school specific, and many students from these schools complained about the lack of knowledge of the staff. Considering that the main source of

information about the QCS Test was teachers, this lack of information is of some concern. (However, QBSSSS do provide to Year 12 students a number of pamphlets giving information about the QCS Test).

Further, some students were either receiving incorrect information or interpreting information incorrectly. Some incorrect information was apparent in the responses from the schools as well as the individual students and included, OP-ineligible students do not sit the QCS Test; a result of “D” is of no benefit; and the QCS Test is an intelligence test.

Along with adequate information, it would appear that adequate and good practices with regard to Test preparation is essential to all students, both OP-ineligible and OP-eligible. Adequate preparation resulted in the students’ feeling more at ease and better prepared. Beneficial test preparation appears to take the form of structured preparation and practice sessions that were timely (before third term of Year 12) and informative in relation to:

- what to expect in the Test (content);
- how to approach the Test;
- how to manage time during the Test; and
- what equipment was required to assist in taking the Test.

Students also commented on the importance of completing a practice test before sitting the actual QCS Test.

Students’ and principals’ responses in relation to preparation being embedded in the curriculum illustrated different understanding and interpretations. For example, students’ responses tended to show that some were unaware that they had experienced preparation for the QCS Test through the Year 11 and 12 curriculum.

The environment in which the QCS Test is conducted was also an issue raised by students. A number commented on the importance of establishing congenial Test conditions. For instance, physical comfort (room temperature, low noise levels) and provision of food and drinks were identified as important to students. Currently, QBSSSS regulations prohibit the provision of food and drinks during the Test except where special permission is given.

4.3 Differences in OP-eligibility and QCS Test take-up by location, sector and gender

With regard to levels OP-eligibility in different schools across the State, students from remote areas (*near-* and *far-remote*) had the lowest rate and this was especially so for males. Under-representation in higher education by remote rural students has been reported elsewhere (e.g. (National Board of Employment Education and Training (NBEET) 1996) and the lack of OP-eligibility affects participation in higher education. A number of reasons have been suggested in relation to the low

participation level of rural and remote students in higher education. These include financial constraints (National Board of Employment Education and Training (NBEET) 1996); lack of role models and awareness of career opportunities (Patton 1997); distance factors (Patton 1997); and limited subject choice (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 2000); (Teese 1995).

Although most students choose twenty-four semester units of Board subjects, only twenty semester units are required in order to be eligible for an OP (three Board subjects must be studied for four semesters each). However, if there is a limited choice (due to few subject offerings or subject lines constraints) or only five Board subjects available, students can be disadvantaged. While some schools attempt to overcome restricted subject choice by offering subjects by distance education, anecdotal evidence suggests that many students find this form of study difficult. Another factor in subject selection concerns prerequisite subjects for university entry. In some rural remote schools, students cannot study some prerequisite subjects for certain university courses. The lack of resources due to small school populations in some rural and remote schools may be one factor which results in higher numbers of OP-ineligible students.

Further, students in remote rural areas are less likely to make an application for a tertiary place than those in other areas (TEPA 2002). This suggests that students living in remote and rural areas may not perceive any importance in being OP-eligible. Further discussions of attitudes of remote rural students to educational factors can be found in Higher Education Council (HEC) (Higher Education Council (HEC) 1999).

As has already been mentioned, the proportion of OP-ineligible students sitting for the QCS Test has steadily decreased over the last 10 years. However, there was a significant decrease from 1999 to 2000 in all sectors for both males and females. Overall, the proportion of male students sitting the QCS Test was lower than for females. The current study shows that although the percentage of OP-eligible students was lowest in remote areas, participation in the QCS Test by OP-ineligible students in these areas was comparatively high. The area that had the lowest rate of QCS Test participation by OP-ineligible students was in the *rest of the south-east plus major coastal centres*. No location-specific reason was identified in explanation of this pattern in students' responses.

Findings from the current study also showed that students from State Government schools reported the lowest levels of OP-eligibility, particularly among males. This sector also had the lowest level of participation in the QCS Test by OP-ineligible students, particularly for males. These findings can partly be understood by the fact that there are no Independent schools and very few Catholic schools in remote areas. Further, State Government schools are open to students of all levels of ability in comparison to the majority of Independent and some Catholic schools. Thus, any comparison of student behaviour needs to take into account factors related to school sector and location.

4.4 Future QCS Tests: research implications

A number of comments made by OP-ineligible students to the Phase 2 survey indicate a lack of understanding about the Test and/or a concern that they will not be able to perform well in the QCS Test. Given that the QCS Test is derived from core aspects of Board subjects, this articulated perception by OP-ineligible students is perhaps indicative of some broader issues with the Test's development and/or administration. Reflections regarding the utility of the Test for non-OP pathways as well as for other community stakeholders, e.g. employers, have already been made in the body of this report.

Looking to the broader senior secondary educational context in Queensland, two trends in student enrolment have been flagged in this report as being important:

- an increase in the proportion of students who are OP-eligible; and
- a decline in the proportion of OP-ineligible students who take the QCS Test.

Further, there is an increase in the number of Queensland students taking non-Board subjects. This is contingent with Queensland State Government policy which currently emphasises the value of VET pathways for students in senior secondary schooling and post-compulsory study. Within this context it maybe appropriate to assess the impact and significance of non-participation in the QCS Test on student pathways and transitions to further education and employment.

The forty-nine CCEs tested by the QCS Test are derived from Board subjects. However, senior secondary school students are increasingly taking VET subjects either in addition to, or in preference to, Board subjects. Given the promotion of the value of VET pathways for students in senior secondary schooling and post-compulsory study by current Queensland Government policy, the number of students studying VET subjects at school (either as OP-eligible or as OP-ineligible students) could be expected to increase. It is perhaps timely to consider the extent to which the QCS Test can or should assess a student's achievement on core elements across the breadth of the senior secondary curriculum.

The capacity of the QCS Test to assess skills, knowledge and competencies taught through the Queensland school VET curriculum could be explored. The concerns voiced by OP-ineligible students regarding the abilities, capacities and understandings being assessed by the QCS Test may have some basis. Consideration might be given to using alternative tests e.g. QTAC Ltd.'s Special Tertiary Admissions test (STAT) to combine with students' ranks in order to facilitate their entry into tertiary study.

The utility of the Test in assessing achievement in the development of different core skills could also be considered. While QCS Test results are used for scaling purposes, they are also a report on student achievement. The Viviani report proposed that the Test results would be "more generally useful for selection by TAFE Colleges, other institutions and employers." (1990:43) and this is presumably one of the reasons Test results are reported on the Queensland Senior Certificate.

A reasonable proportion of students who did not sit the QCS Test stated that they could not see any use in doing so. Primarily, open-ended comments indicated that OP-ineligible students in particular did not see any utility for their future in sitting the QCS Test. Some OP-ineligible students commented that they did not feel able to sit the Test and others chose to avoid the stress of doing so. Clearly, some OP-ineligible students are studying in environments which either formally and/or informally communicate to them that the sitting of the QCS Test is only important for students currently considering a future which involves tertiary study.

Further, there is also a belief among students that QCS Test results are not well understood by, nor considered important information for employers. The extent to which the use of such results by potential employers could be expanded bears further investigation. Promoting the use of QCS Test results by a broader audience, including employers, could assist in emphasising the importance of the QCS Test for a broader range of students. However, such broader promotion of the utility of Test results would be most appropriate in a context where it was clarified that:

- the QCS Test effectively measured OP-ineligible students' competencies, knowledges and abilities as well as achievement across the core curriculum elements by OP-eligible students; and
- Test results were used in conjunction with all subject results also reported on the Senior Certificate.

The outcome of the current review of senior certification will be instructive in relation to this issue.

There are some potentially significant ramifications which follow from developing and acting upon such an impression and hence an understanding of the role of the QCS Test in a student's life:

- OP-ineligible students who change their minds following the end of the Year 12 school year and decide to apply for a place in a TAFE program of study will not have the advantage of QCS Test results in boosting calculation of their Rank. Not sitting the QCS Test equates with receiving an "E" on that Test.
- In those environments which do not encourage all students to take the QCS Test there may be a broader undervaluing of those students who choose not to take the Test. This position is reinforced by comments made by some principals and students in both this study and other TEPA research (Porter 2002).

It is considered important that the relevance of the QCS Test to the ever-changing senior secondary and post-compulsory education context be kept under review. Further research is required to establish the extent to which the preliminary findings regarding QCS Test administration and participation are further substantiated, particularly findings from the Phase 2 student survey. It is also important to assess to what extent key stakeholders in the educational system believe that the scope of the QCS Test, and the way in which is

administered, could, or should, be changed. The survey data reported here provide critical benchmark data regarding the QCS Test administration and participation against which future data will be able to be compared.

5: Recommendations

The findings of the current research have clear implications not only for students but also for schools and broader community stakeholders in Queensland. These implications and some consequent recommendations are summarised below and are relevant to specific stakeholder groups.

Students, Teachers and Parents

Implication 1

There is a clear need for direct and more explicit advice on the advantages of sitting the QCS Test to be provided to students and, in particular, to OP-ineligible students, their parents and teachers. The current informal “principle” that the sitting of the QCS Test is really only *important* or *necessary* for students currently considering a future which involves university study, must be revisited if multiple pathways to tertiary entrance are to be encouraged.

Recommendation 1

Given that the QCS Test may offer OP-ineligible students a pathway to tertiary entrance via an enhanced rank, as well as additional information on their Senior Certificate regarding achievement in five broad areas, *it is recommended that the utility of the QCS Test for all Year 12 students, rather than its relevance only to OP-eligible students, be further explicated and communicated to all relevant stakeholders.*

This communication strategy must target students, their parents and senior secondary school teachers. Management of the provision of information services by TEPA across the last ten years suggests that different types of communication and/or different communication strategies may need to be developed. In order to achieve maximum impact of such a strategy, that is, to bring about change in understanding the utility of the QCS Test among students, parents and teachers, *it is recommended that a coordinated communication strategy be developed. Peak educational groups, e.g. counsellor and guidance officer associations, should play an important role in promoting the primary emphasis of the communication strategy and in coordinating that strategy.*

Consultations should be held with relevant stakeholders, e.g. educators and providers of information to senior secondary school students, regarding establishing the preferred format and content for the information developed and the optimal timing for the distribution of that information.

Key advantages of QCS Test participation to be emphasised include the following:

- the potential for the QCS Test result to be utilised as a key indicator of senior secondary schooling alongside the Senior Certificate, vocational education certificates, etc., rather than as:
 - simply a scaling device; or
 - as just a test, the taking of which establishes a hierarchy distinguishing good from poor students.
- the utility of a QCS Test result in boosting the ranks for entry into university and TAFE; and
- the utility of a QCS Test result in communicating to potential employers information regarding a student's generic skills.

Community Stakeholders

Implication 2

A monocular focus on the role of the QCS Test as a scaling device vis-a-vis the calculation of OPs has, to date, resulted in less than optimal usage of the information it provides in a broad sense. QCS Test results provide important information about the generic capabilities of students exiting from senior secondary schooling. In line with the State Government's current review of senior certification and broader community concerns regarding the utility of that certification to groups other than educational institutions, e.g. to employers and community groups, it is essential to develop a strategy to improve understanding in the broader community regarding the significance and utility of QCS Test results.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that:

- *An information or awareness-raising program emphasising the significance and utility of QCS Test results be developed and implemented targeting different stakeholder groups external to the school environment, e.g. employers, parents and community associations.* The development of this program could be guided by the information program and promotional documents prepared as a part of the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority's 1992-94 awareness-raising program targeting employers (Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority 1992). The aim of this program was to promote the Student Education Profile (SEP) as a tool for improving staff selection. A copy of some of the documents used as a part of that campaign is reproduced in Appendix 5.
- *A program of research, both pre- and post-awareness raising, be undertaken to monitor and evaluate the extent to which there is change in employers' use of, and satisfaction with, QCS Test results as a discrete element of the Student Education Profile (SEP).*

Schools

Implication 3

The current research also highlighted issues in relation to the timeliness and effectiveness of QCS Test preparation offered by and implemented across schools in Queensland. Third term of Year 12 was considered by the students involved in the current research to be too late for worthwhile preparation to be able to be completed. The types of preparation in which students surveyed participated were practice tests, timetabled sessions, and preparation embedded in the curriculum (although students were not necessarily aware of this last form of preparation). Students particularly commented on the value of practice tests (with and without trained markers).

Recommendation 3

Given the generic underpinnings of the Test and the kinds of preparation valued by students in the current research, schools should be encouraged to review and refine approaches to QCS Test preparation to ensure all students are provided with adequate support and assistance to take and perform effectively in the QCS Test.

Authority responsible for developing the QCS Test

Implication 4

The findings from the current research suggest that the current relevance and appropriateness of the QCS Test for all students may be open to question. The introduction of VET subjects into the senior secondary school curriculum, in association with an increase in the number of students taking these subjects, arguably calls into question the underpinnings of the QCS Test and the intent of the report stemming from the 1990 Viviani review of tertiary entrance in Queensland (Viviani 1990). Since that review, a broader based curriculum has developed and multiple post-school pathways are now options. In addition, open-ended responses provided by some OP-ineligible students to the Phase 2 survey component of the current research suggest that they found the QCS Test outside their range of learning and comprehension.

Recommendation 4

Given that the QCS Test is derived from the forty-nine CCEs underpinning the senior secondary Board subject offerings in Queensland, it would therefore be timely to investigate the relevance and appropriateness of the QCS Test to all students in the context of non-OP pathways.

Education Researchers

Implication 5

Participation in the QCS Test is currently a critical (major) component of a student's pathway to post-compulsory education. While it is possible for students who do not sit the Test to pursue further education following the completion of Year 12, it can be to their disadvantage not to sit. In addition, the current research suggests that, while the evidence is not definitive, there may be broader issues of the valuation of certain categories of students and their pathways, particularly OP-eligible students, above other categories of students and their pathways.

The current research established benchmark data relating to factors affecting student involvement in QCS Test and, in particular, OP-ineligible students' participation in that test. A two-phase survey research methodology was piloted and its strengths and weaknesses highlighted.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that further survey research regarding administration of the QCS Test in schools be conducted in order to:

- collect data from a larger sample of Year 12 students;
- cross-validate the findings of the current research; and
- further investigate the extent to which OP-eligibility, difference between schools (e.g. geographical location, school sector, school size and sex of school population), as well as differences in student characteristics, affect participation in the QCS Test.

It is also recommended that additional research be conducted into a number of key areas relating to QCS Test administration and participation including:

- the types of QCS Test preparation and the timing of QCS Test preparation which appear best to assist students to ready themselves for taking the Test. This study should investigate whether there are different types of preparation which are better suited to the needs of OP-ineligible students in comparison with OP-eligible students. This research could be informed by previous TEPA research in this area (see Mullins, 1993).
- the extent to which different school and community cultures affect how the QCS Test is understood and valued by students, parents and teachers, as well as how it is administered in Queensland schools.

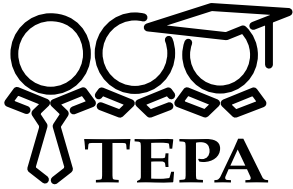
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Appendix 1

Principals' survey - Phase 1



Factors which affect student participation in the QCS Test

All information provided in this questionnaire will be treated in the strictest confidence. The survey number will only be used to identify the school for the purposes of comparison. TEPA guarantees your anonymity in the conduct and reporting of this survey.

CONFIDENTIAL

Section A

The following questions aim to identify the Year 12 student population in your school.

1. Please insert your school ID number (QBSSS ID no.)
2. Students attend different types of schools. Please indicate your school type by placing an 'x' by the appropriate response
 - I. high school
 - II. secondary department
 - III. senior college
 - IV. Other (please specify)
3. Please indicate the total number of students in Year 12 using the appropriate classification listed.
 - I. males
 - II. females
 - III. total
4. Please indicate the number of **OP-eligible** Year 12 students using the appropriate classifications listed
 - I. males
 - II. females
 - III. total
5. Please indicate the number of **OP-ineligible** Year 12 students using the appropriate classifications listed
 - I. males
 - II. females
 - III. total
6. Please indicate the number of **OP-ineligible** Year 12 students who intend to sit for the QCS test.
 - I. males
 - II. females
 - III. total

Section B

This section of the questionnaire aims to identify how QCS Test preparation is organised in your school.

7. Schools have a number of strategies in place to prepare students for the QCS Test. Please place an 'x' by the appropriate response(s).
 - I. The preparation is embedded in the curriculum.
 - II. A specific time is timetabled for QCS Test preparation.
 - III. If there are any other methods your school employs for QCS Test preparation, please comment (e.g., outsource to agencies).

8. When does timetabled QCS Test preparation commence? Place an 'x' by the appropriate response.
 - I. Year 11 semester 1
 - II. Year 11 semester 2
 - III. Year 12 semester 1
 - IV. Year 12 semester 2

Section C

In this section, we wish to identify which students access preparation time.

9. Are **all** Year 12 students advised to sit the QCS Test? Please place an 'x' by the appropriate response.
 - A. Yes
 - B. NoIf no, please comment.

10. Do **all** Year 12 students have access to QCS Test preparation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. NoIf no, please comment.

11. Of those Year 12 students who do not sit for the QCS Test, please indicate their reasons (if known).

12. Any other comments regarding access to, preparation of, and participation in the QCS Test would be most helpful.

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Please complete this section.

I am willing/not willing (delete which is not applicable) for Year 12 students at (insert school name) to participate in the student survey (Phase 2).

Appendix 2

Year 12 Students' survey - Phase 2

Factors which affect student participation in the QCS Test

All information provided in this questionnaire will be treated in the strictest confidence. The survey number will only be used to identify the school for the purposes of comparison. TEPA guarantees your anonymity in the conduct and reporting of this survey.

CONFIDENTIAL

The following questions are to find out about your participation in the QCS Test.

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. Are you OP-eligible? (Please circle your response) | YES | NO |
| 2. Did you sit for the QCS Test? (Please circle your response) | YES | NO |

Go to question 3

Go to question 4

3. There are different reasons why students sit for or intend to sit for the QCS Test. If you did sit for or intended to sit for the test, please indicate which statements best fit your reason(s):

- | | | |
|---|-------|----------|
| a) because it was compulsory. | agree | disagree |
| b) because I wanted to improve my rank. | agree | disagree |
| c) because I wanted an OP. | agree | disagree |
| d) My school encouraged me to sit for the test. | agree | disagree |
| e) My parents advised me to sit for the test. | agree | disagree |
| f) to get into university. | agree | disagree |
| g) to get into TAFE. | agree | disagree |
| h) I needed to sit for the Test to help me get a job. | agree | disagree |
| i) Any other reason (please specify) _____ | | |

Now go to Question 5.

4. There are different reasons why students do not sit for the QCS Test. If you did not sit for the QCS Test, please indicate which statements best fit your situation.:

- | | | |
|---|-------|----------|
| a) I didn't see the point of sitting for the QCS Test. | agree | disagree |
| b) I'm OP-ineligible, so I didn't think I needed to sit for the test. | agree | disagree |
| c) I didn't want a QCS Test result on my Senior Certificate. | agree | disagree |
| d) I didn't need a QCS Test result. | agree | disagree |
| e) I wasn't advised to sit for the test. | agree | disagree |
| f) A teacher (or teachers) advised me not to sit for the test. | agree | disagree |
| g) My parents didn't want me to sit for the test. | agree | disagree |
| h) It wasn't necessary, because I don't want to go to university. | agree | disagree |
| i) It wasn't necessary, because I don't want to go to TAFE. | agree | disagree |
| j) It isn't of any help to my future job career. | agree | disagree |
| k) Any other reasons (please comment) _____ | | |

Now go to Question 5.

5. People receive information about the QCS Test from a variety of sources. Please tick the options that apply to you. You may tick more than one.
- a) Guidance Officers / Counsellors
 - b) Career Advisor
 - c) Teachers
 - d) Parents/family
 - e) Friends
 - f) VET coordinators/teachers
 - g) Principal/Deputy Principal
 - h) I didn't get much (if any) information
 - i) Other (please specify) _____
6. Different schools approach QCS Test preparation in different ways. Please indicate what happened at your school (*Please tick your responses*).
- a) QCS Test preparation was covered in most school subjects.
 - b) There was a special period set aside each week, and I participated.
 - c) There was a special period set aside each week, but I didn't participate.
 - d) There was a special period set aside each week, but I couldn't participate, because I wasn't at school during that time.
 - e) Other (please comment) _____
7. After Year 12, what do you intend to do? (*Please tick your response or responses*)
- a) Go to University
 - b) Defer university study
 - c) Go to TAFE
 - d) Obtain an Apprenticeship or Traineeship
 - e) Go to a college (e.g., Lorraine Martin College)
 - f) Get a job
 - g) Other (please specify) _____
8. We would like to ask you details about yourself to help us better understand your responses.
- a) What is your age? _____
 - b) Are you: Male or Female (*Circle your response*)
9. If you have any comments regarding the QCS Test (e.g., participation, preparation, access, or any thing else), we would be very interested.

Thank you for your participation

Appendix 3

COMMENTS MADE BY PRINCIPALS FROM SCHOOLS THAT DID NOT ADVISE ALL STUDENTS TO SIT THE QCS TEST

A. Schools with LOW level of intended participation to sit 2000 QCS Test by OP-ineligible students (0% to 10.69%)

Question 9a - If all Year 12 students NOT advised to sit QCS Test, please comment

advantages and disadvantages discussed - left to student and family
advised to undertake prep to enable them to make decision on whether they're likely to get C or better, if D or E suggested negative on cert
all advised they can sit
all are told they may sit. OP-ineligibles may choose. Certainly no time they are told they cannot sit.
all encouraged to sit, however significant no of our students do a majority of voc ed subj & do not see value of sitting QCST
all OP elig advised, non OP elig advised to sit if intend going to TAFE, all know they can sit
all OP elig students are advised
all OP inel made aware of Test, individual students determine own choice, letter signed by parents to indicate informed decision was made
all students invited to sit but are told only OP-eligible students are required to sit
all students offered opportunity
all students told they are able to sit the Test if they wish but that they do not have to do it.
All Yr12s are advised they can sit for QCS, but students make the final choice
benefits of sitting test & reasons why students may choose not to sit are discussed with OPinel in Feb Y 12
choice remains with students after discussions with HOD Senior Schooling G.O., etc
decision made by parents & students based on information sessions, the purpose of QCS & the process of preparation
emphasis to sit, but if identified as non academic counselled as to options & skilled in responses, but allowed to choose
encouraged, but students have final say
information given to all students, then up to the student
It is totally the students' choice
Missing
non-OPs are told they MAY sit the Test but it is not necessary
not advised, but benefits are discussed
not if students are ineligible and feel they will get an E on QCST
OP-ineligibles advised to sit if they are considering tertiary study
OP inel encouraged to NOT sit - most are involved in SATs or work experience
OP-ineligible are invited if they wish
OP-ineligible students make their own decision
OP-ineligibles are given the option of sitting
OP-ineligibles given option
option given to OP-inel

Students are given the opportunity to sit the Test with the facts given at the time. Classes are then QCS or Career Ed Classes.
students choose on the basis of information and advice from school, etc
voc ed very strong in school, some students do 6voc ed subjects, they do not see any relevance in sitting the Test
Total - 35 schools / 34 comments

Question 11 - Reasons for not sitting the QCS Test

assume they feel they are not good enough or that they will not need it (result in QCS Test)
chose not to sit
effect upon appearance on Senior Certificate of D or E, apathy
exchange student, ineligible, 1 eligible didn't want to sit
going to work - do not see any need to sit
inel or do not require an OP for tertiary study
ineligible, therefore no need, no interest in OP and tertiary entry
irrelevant for their chosen pathway eg, work, TAFE, private courses; some believe it is too stressful
Judging by the subjects they take and the general attitude they would not do anything they didn't have to do
likely poor result, see QCS result as being less important than subject results
many feel test is too difficult, D or E not wanted on Senior Certificate, not desirable need for choice of vocation
most of OP-inel do not study Board subjects , but take TAFE modules, therefore are concerned by their ability to cope with the demands of the test
non OP elig
not known
not necessary for them to sit
Not OP-eligible
not relevant to post school intentions, do not wish to record low result ie E for no purpose
OP inel & feel no need to have a QCST result for the future, students doing mainly voc ed feel they don't have sufficient background in their subjects
OP inel, 6 OP inel who were going to sit didn't sit on the day, 2 medicals, 1 OPelig did not turn up
OP-ineligible and do not wish to continue to tertiary study after Year 12
Pursuing Vocational courses, an OP is not relevant at this stage for their future studies (over the next few years or so)
students feel that it is of no benefit
too long & too hard, not looking for an OP score, no intention of tertiary study, not seen as relevant
Unknown
variety, mainly no interest as are OP-ineligible
voc ed don't see need
Vocationally oriented student with no need for University
work placement students don't sit the Test.
Total - 35 schools / 28 comments

B. Schools with MEDIUM level of intended participation to sit 2000 QCS Test by OP-ineligible students (10.70% - 44.21%)

Question 9a - If all Year 12 students NOT advised to sit QCS Test, please comment

all are given the opportunity
all are invited to sit the QCS Test
all students invited to sit, OPelig told to sit
all students invited, GO explains advantages of sitting
All year 12 non eligible students invited to sit Test, final decision left to student & their parents
although all are advised they can sit, some choose not to do the QCS
I have just found out that people involved did not do this. I am a new principal & will be discussing this with staff for next year
inel students are given all available info regarding use of QCS for ranking schedules, then allowed to make own decisions, no advice given
information given to all students, then up to the student
non OPs are given a choice
OP inel students are advised of the benefits after sitting for a trial test
OP inel students are given a clear choice
self determined
Since QCS Test is optional for OP-inel students we allow them to opt out but strongly recommend it for some OP-inel students
students advised of their options regarding the purpose of the QCST & given the choice; no student discouraged from sitting
students make choice, advice is they have a choice if they are OP-ineligible, possible consequences of not sitting are discussed
students with known literacy and numeracy needs are not encouraged to sit the Test. However, they may do it if they wish.
they are made fully aware of their choices
Total - 19 schools / 18 comments

Question 11 - Reasons for not sitting the QCS Test

choose not to
felt they may have scored an E & could see no benefit.
given information & participate in preparation, but simply decide not to sit.
most do not want access to degree or diploma courses (ie are non OP) & therefore see little need to do Test; others who are OP & don't sit say the same
most don't want to go onto tertiary or further study
not intending to continue into tertiary education
not interested in tertiary education, already have a job so see test as irrelevant
not interested, one OP elig student perceived he would bring the class down - his comment (NOT the school's)
not known
not OP elig so often see no point, don't need result for TAFE or work
OP inel
OP inel opt out, many are scared of "failing" & consider QCS Test even too difficult to attempt
OP-ineligible
personal and family choice
some don't wish to have low QCS Test score on Senior Cert, others who are not pursuing tert studies see little point in attempting test
Total - 19 schools / 15 comments

C. Schools with HIGH level of intended participation to sit 2000 QCS Test by OP-ineligible students (44.22% +)

Question 9a - If all Year 12 students NOT advised to sit QCS Test, please comment

ineligible students are advised whether or not to sit based on future career aspirations & practice test results.
students who want OP told to sit, may sit if don't want OP, their choice, not persuaded either way
Total - 2 schools / 2 comments

Question 11 - Reasons for not sitting the QCS Test

no desire to undertake further study, have career paths (apprenticeships, etc) mapped out
Total - 2 schools / 1 comment

Appendix 4

COMMENTS MADE BY STUDENTS IN RELATION TO REASONS FOR SITTING OR NOT SITTING THE QCS TEST

Question 3 – Reasons for sitting the QCS Test

Wish I hadn't done maths, thought it was high scoring class. Later told that all board subjects ranked the same
Valued test experience, acquire new knowledge, challenge myself
Tradition to do it, I've always thought I would
To test my true ability
To take any chance to help improve my final outcome.
To show myself that I believe I can succeed.
To see what it was like and what OP I would get
To see how I would go
To see what kind of mark I would get
To help the school
To help the rank of the school
To help me to do the best I can
To help have a chance of getting an apprenticeship
To get into uni
There was no specific reason. I just wanted to see what I could achieve on the test.
The teachers pressured us
The school's best interest.
The multi-choice are fun
Something to do
So that I wasn't closing off any opportunities
Shows that I can do it
Show future employers that I at least had a go.
Senior Certificate
Senior Certificate
See how I would do
School told us to
School forced me to sit QCS
Right thing to do
Personal gain
My own well being
Just what everyone does
Just because I thought I'd have a go - nothing to lose by doing it.
It's for my own benefit.
It would open up my choices next year
It would look better to say that I sat for it.

It would be fun
It just helps out all around
It is essential for me to know
It is a good thing to write on a reference.
Improve test skills
Improve schools rank
If I didn't sit, later on I would regret it.
I wished to keep my options open
I wasn't going to lose anything so I thought I may as well just in case I need it
I was OP-eligible and had to but did not want to.
I was only there for half an hour.
I wanted to sit for the Test for my mother because I know she would of wanted me to (she is now dead)
I wanted to sit for the QCS to see what it was like and see what kind of mark/rating I could achieve
I wanted to help my mates
I wanted to go to uni through the fastest option
I wanted to finish school
I wanted to
I want to have a back up
I thought it would be interesting/fun
I thought (& my school thought) that I was OPel up until 2 weeks AFTER QCS Test
I personally wanted to
I never even thought of not doing it. It was just something everyone did. I never knew we had a choice.
I need it for uni
I just wanted to see what the big deal was all about
I had to
I felt it was necessary
I felt it was in my best interest to find a career.
I enjoyed the QCS
I did not really consider not doing it an option
I believe it would help my job prospects
Good experience
Free food
Free brekka
Everyone else did
Everybody else was doing it
Didn't know there was an option
'Cause just in case I need it later
Because it's QCS and 'cause nobody said what would happen if I didn't apart from not getting an OP
Because it was fun
Because it gives me a number
Because I wanted to

Question 4 – Reasons for not sitting the QCS Test

What's the point of doing it if you're not set on going to uni?
Waste of time and effort
Wasn't eligible
Was not necessary for me
Unnecessary
Too much stress
Too much stress when it wasn't a necessity
To be what I want doesn't require an OP
Thought it would be useless as I'm not able to get an OP
Personal reason
Not OP-eligible
Not going to uni
No point for me
No point
Just didn't want to?
I've got an apprenticeship
It was of no importance to my future
I'm not OP-eligible so there's no point stressing.
I'm not going to uni so I don't need an OP.
I wasn't OP
I wasn't capable of sitting for QCS
I thought you didn't need it for TAFE -ineligible [STUDENT'S SPELLING]
I knew I would get a low mark
I felt there was no need to sit for the test.
I don't want to.
I don't need to do the Test for my career
I do not need an OP for the job I will be doing
I didn't want to
I didn't think it was necessary
I didn't think I would need it
I couldn't as I wasn't eligible
Going to TAFE
Don't need to for future career
Don't need it
Do a bridge course through TAFE
Didn't want to.
Didn't want a bad OP
Didn't think I needed it
Didn't need to sit the test
Didn't need to
Did not have an OP
Coz I don't know anything
Because you don't get help/questions are too hard
Because none of my subjects I take is board subjects
Because it didn't feel that important
Because I'm not going for an OP
Because I'm not getting an OP

Because I would bring my classmate's score down
Because I have no intention of going to uni or get an OP.
Because I didn't think I'll do any good
Because I didn't think I needed to
Because
All reasons above