

# Introducing new senior assessment and tertiary entrance systems — frequently asked questions

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## Introduction

The Queensland Government has announced the most significant changes to senior schooling in decades. The systems of senior assessment and tertiary entrance will both be strengthened.

The purpose is to improve the Queensland Certificate of Education, thereby giving students more opportunities for success after Year 12.

## What will be different about the new systems?

The new systems will include:

- a model that uses both school-based assessment and common external assessment
- processes that strengthen the quality and comparability of school-based assessment
- a move away from the Overall Position (OP) rank to an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

## Assessment changes

A system of 100% school-based assessment has operated in Queensland for more than 40 years.

In the new system, subject results will be based on a student's achievement in three school-based assessments and one external assessment that is set and marked by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA).

This is fewer assessments than students sit currently — emphasising quality over quantity.

In the new system, the external assessment results will contribute 25% towards a student's result in most subjects. In mathematics and science subjects, it will generally contribute 50%. The school-based assessments will not be scaled by the results of the external assessment when calculating a student's subject result.

The new system will keep all the qualities inherent in school-based assessment while introducing greater consistency and the transparency of common assessments that are sat by students at all schools.

## Tertiary entrance changes

A student's OP is calculated by comparing their results in Authority subjects studied at school with those of other OP-eligible students. Subject results are scaled using Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test results. The final QCS Test will be held in 2018.

ATARs will also be calculated by comparing student results. But instead of the QCS Test there will be a process of inter-subject scaling.

Scaling is necessary so that student results in different types of subjects can be compared. The method of inter-subject scaling to be used is still to be finalised by the Senior Secondary Assessment Taskforce.

## **When will the new systems start?**

The new senior assessment system will start with students entering Year 11 in 2018. These are the current Year 9 students.

The first students to receive an ATAR instead of an OP will graduate from Year 12 in 2019.

## **Why are new senior assessment and tertiary entrance systems being introduced?**

The senior assessment system in its current form began in the early 1980s. The tertiary entrance system — commonly known as the OP system — was introduced in 1992.

In a report released in 2014, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) found that while existing arrangements had served Queensland students well and remained fair and reliable, they would not be sustainable over the longer term. ACER recommended changes to achieve greater rigour and simplicity.

## **What about the students who will finish before the changes are introduced?**

Families with children who will be completing school under the current system can be assured that it remains fair and reliable. In no way will it be compromised by the changes.

## **Why will there be 50% external assessment in mathematics and science subjects but 25% in others?**

Variation between subjects reflects the kinds of learning particular to those subjects and how achievement is most appropriately assessed. It would be inappropriate to assess all subjects in the same way.

Variation exists in other states although few share exactly the same approach.

## **What's the difference between the OP rank and ATAR?**

The ATAR is a finer-grained rank order of students than the OP and is commonly used in other states and territories. It's a number between 0.00 and 99.95 with increments of 0.05, whereas the OP consists of 25 bands. The Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) will be responsible for calculating students' ATARs.

## **Are teachers supportive of the changes?**

Before reaching its decision, the government consulted extensively with education stakeholders and the wider community. The feedback indicated strong support for changes to the way students are assessed.

There was also strong support among Queensland universities for eligible Year 12 students to be provided with an ATAR rather than an OP.

## **What preparations are being made for the new systems?**

The QCAA is developing new senior assessment processes through:

- redeveloping senior syllabuses reflective of a new assessment model and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills
- trialling external assessments with about 20,000 students at more than 250 schools
- trialling processes for improving the quality and comparability of school-based assessment.

Teachers and students will be well supported in the transition to the new system. The education community in general has been an important driver of the changes.

## **Will students be subject to more assessment and high stakes exams?**

Year 12 students typically complete up to seven assessments in each subject. Under the new model, students will be expected to complete four pieces of assessment per subject. Three will be school-based assessments and one will be externally set and graded. All four assessments will count towards a student's final result.

These will not be 'one-shot' external exams where an entire course of study comes down to performance over a few hours. External assessments are designed to give an extra layer of information about what students have learnt and can do in a subject. Queensland is introducing a progressive system that embodies the best of school-based and external assessment.

## **How are students being prepared for the change?**

Hundreds of schools and thousands of teachers are currently involved in trials and professional development activities that will continue throughout the transition period. There will be further opportunities for participation before full implementation.

## **How should teaching and learning in composite Year 11 and 12 classes be managed under the new system?**

A working group of principals with experience in schools with composite classes will be considering the issue and providing advice to schools in due course.

## **How will Variable progression rate (VPR) procedures be applied for students who will be in senior under the current and new systems?**

The QCAA is currently considering options for measuring the achievements of students who, for various reasons, will complete their senior studies over three years and consequently be taught and assessed under the current and new assessment systems.