



Revitalising senior assessment and tertiary entrance in Queensland

A guide for parents and carers

April 2016

Introduction

The Queensland Government has announced a steady and considered transition to revitalised senior assessment and tertiary entrance systems. Designed to meet the needs of current and future students, the features of these systems will be:

- a model that uses school-based assessment and common external assessment
- new 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).

Why is it time to change the current systems?

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.

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

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.

What will be different about the new assessment system?

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%.

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.

The school-based assessments will not be scaled by the results of the external assessment when calculating a student's subject result.

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.

Will students be subject to more assessment and high stakes exams in the new system?

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.

What preparations are being made for the new assessment system?

The QCAA is developing new senior assessment processes through:

- redeveloping senior syllabuses reflective of a new assessment model
- 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.

When will the trial of external assessment start?

The external assessment trial will be held from 27 May to 6 June 2016. The subjects involved are Chemistry, English, Geography, Mathematics B and Modern History. All of the external tasks will be developed and marked by the QCAA.

Will my child have to do an external assessment if their school participates in the trial?

No, but the greater the number of students who participate, the more useful the trials will be. Parents and carers are encouraged to discuss participation with their school before requesting that their child is not involved in the trial assessment group.

Will a student's performance in a trial assessment count towards their Year 12 level of achievement?

No. As the trial will involve Year 11 formative assessment only, there will be no impact on a student's Year 12 exit result in the subject.

What certificates will students receive in the new system at the end of Year 12?

The Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) will remain as Queensland's senior school qualification. Students who are eligible will continue to be awarded one at the end of Year 12. Students will also still receive a Senior Statement. It shows all studies and the results achieved that may contribute to the award of a QCE.

What will be different about the new tertiary entrance system?

The ATAR is a finer-grained rank order of students than the OP. It's a number between 0.00 and 99.95 with increments of 0.05, whereas the OP consists of 25 bands. The ATAR is commonly used in other states and territories.

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.

The Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) will be responsible for calculating students' ATARs.

What about the students who will finish school 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.

Who will oversee the implementation strategy?

The Minister for Education chairs the Senior Secondary Assessment Taskforce with representation from schooling sectors, parent groups, principal associations, teacher unions, the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA), the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) and the tertiary sector.

The taskforce will make decisions about the shape of the new system. School communities will be advised throughout this process.

The current systems explained

Students are taught and assessed by schools throughout Years 11 and 12. The QCAA manages the external moderation processes that ensure all students are treated fairly and standards are comparable from school to school. This involves review panels of trained teachers externally moderating students' school-based assessments.

A student's OP is calculated using their subject results and information from the Queensland Core Skills Test.

More information

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