



Advancing futures

New senior assessment and tertiary entrance systems in Queensland

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Popular questions

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 Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) will develop and implement a new model of senior assessment that uses common external assessment and strengthened school-based assessment.

The Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) will administer a new tertiary entrance system based on a single rank for school leavers, known as the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). The ATAR will replace the Overall Position (OP).

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 2019. These are the 2016 Year 8 students.

The first students to receive an ATAR instead of an OP will graduate from Year 12 in 2020.

Why has the start date been changed?

Consultation has provided a clear message that teachers, students and parents need time to understand and familiarise themselves with the new arrangements. Commencement from 2019 will ensure that teachers and students are fully prepared for these changes. In particular, it will mean students are aware of new senior subjects and assessment arrangements as they plan their senior pathways.

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

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

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What will be different about senior assessment?

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 QCAA.

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

In the new system, the external assessment results will generally contribute 25% towards a student's result in most subjects. In mathematics and science subjects, they 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.

How will school-based assessment be strengthened?

New processes will be adopted to strengthen the quality and comparability of school-based assessment.

The QCAA will provide more specific parameters for developing school-based assessments in each subject. This will include the type of assessment, the conditions under which it should be administered and a common marking scheme.

All school-based assessments will be subject to endorsement by the QCAA before they are used in the classroom. This will ensure that all assessments provide sufficient opportunities for students to demonstrate syllabus requirements and to build teachers' capacity to develop high-quality assessments.

The QCAA will select representative samples of completed student responses from each school. Expert assessors will then review a sample of student work to check the accuracy of grades awarded by teachers. Importantly, the QCAA will select the student work to be reviewed.

How are the syllabuses changing?

The QCAA is reviewing all senior syllabuses to ensure they reflect the knowledge and skill sets required for further study and employment in the [21st century](#).

Some subjects will be renamed, others combined to better describe what the subjects are about, and some new ones will be developed. For example:

- Prevocational Mathematics and Mathematics A, B and C will be replaced by the Australian Curriculum-aligned subjects of Mathematics Essential, Mathematics General, Mathematics Methods, and Mathematics Specialist
- existing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) subjects will be redeveloped into a single digital technology and computational thinking subject called Digital Technology, and a new subject — called Design — will incorporate valued learning from Graphics, Technology Studies, Home Economics and Information Technology Studies
- a new subject of Psychology will be developed.

The new syllabuses will include greater detail on what students must know and be able to do. They will also contain common requirements for the development of school-based assessments and common marking guides to support teachers in making judgments about student learning.

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Why will external assessment contribute differently in mathematics and science subjects?

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.

How will students' results be calculated and reported?

In each senior subject, numerical results from the three school-based assessments and the external assessment will be added together to calculate a final subject result. Following completion of the subject, students will be provided with their overall numerical result as well as a corresponding level of achievement.

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

Currently, Year 12 students complete up to seven assessments in each subject. Under the new system, 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.

External assessments will not be 'one-shot' activities where an entire course of study comes down to performance over a few hours. They are designed to give an extra layer of information about what students have learnt and can do in a subject.

What will be different about tertiary entrance?

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 2019.

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 by QTAC is still to be finalised.

What's the difference between the OP 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.

How will ATARs be calculated?

QTAC will calculate ATARs based on either:

- a student's best five Authority subject results, as is currently the case for the OP system or
- a student's best results in a combination of four Authority subject results, plus
 - a result from a completed vocational education and training (VET) qualification at an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate III or above or
 - a result from a subject based on a QCAA Subject Area Syllabus — commonly referred to as a SAS subject.

In the new system, eligibility for an ATAR would require satisfactory completion of a QCAA English subject.

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Satisfactory completion would require students to attain a result that is equivalent to a Sound Level of Achievement in one of five QCAA English subjects — English, Essential English, Literature, English Extension or English as an Additional Language. While students must meet this standard to be eligible to receive an ATAR, a student's English result will not be a mandatory inclusion in the calculation of their ATAR.

How should students choose their subjects?

As in the current system, students should choose subjects according to their learning goals, and what they enjoy and are good at. They should pay close attention to the prerequisite requirements of the courses they are considering for tertiary study. For all students intending to go on to tertiary study, achieving a satisfactory grade in English will be a prerequisite for receiving an ATAR. However, it will not be mandatory for a student's result in English to be included in the calculation of their ATAR.

What preparations are being made for the new systems?

The QCAA is developing new senior assessment processes through:

- redeveloping senior syllabuses that reflect a new assessment model and 21st century skills
- trialling external assessments in a range of subjects with thousands of students at hundreds of 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.

How are teachers and students being prepared for the change?

Thousands of teachers and students are currently involved in trials and activities that will continue throughout the transition period.

An extensive professional development program will support schools to implement the new and redeveloped syllabuses. It will involve approximately 16,700 senior secondary school teachers and school leadership teams.

Is there support for the changes?

Before reaching its decision, the government consulted extensively with teachers, 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.

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

A working group of principals and school leaders will provide advice to schools with composite classes.

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.

More information

For further information on the implementation of the new systems of senior assessment and tertiary entrance, visit the QCAA website:

www.qcaa.qld.edu.au