

Senior Secondary Assessment Taskforce



Communiqué: Third meeting, 9 December 2015

This is the third in a series of updates on deliberations of the Senior Secondary Assessment Taskforce, which has been established to guide the development of new Queensland senior assessment and tertiary entrance systems.

Background

The Queensland Government will introduce new systems for senior assessment and tertiary entrance, which will commence for students entering Year 11 in 2018. They will provide a new approach to senior assessment, combining school-based assessment with external assessment set and marked by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA). Students will be provided with an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) instead of the current Overall Position (OP) rank.

A Senior Secondary Assessment Taskforce has been established by the Minister for Education, who chairs the Taskforce to guide these historic reforms. The Taskforce includes stakeholders from key groups including schools, school systems, parent groups, secondary principals' associations, teacher unions and tertiary institutions, as well as QCAA and Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC).

At the first Taskforce meeting on 8 September 2015, members endorsed formal terms of reference and an agenda to consider key aspects of senior assessment and tertiary entrance arrangements. Findings of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) review of senior assessment and tertiary entrance will provide a starting point on these issues.

At the second Taskforce meeting on 11 November 2015, Taskforce members discussed processes to strengthen the quality, comparability and reliability of school-based assessment, and contributions of school-based and external assessment to senior subject results. Taskforce members supported all senior subject results being based on a combination of four summative assessments, and new processes to enhance the comparability and quality of school-based assessment and the comparability of teacher judgements. Taskforce members gave general support to the ACER recommendation that school assessment results should not be scaled against external assessment results.

Taskforce Meeting 3 – Key outcomes and points of discussion

At the third Taskforce meeting on 9 December 2015, Taskforce members discussed judging and reporting on student attainment; the contribution of external assessment to overall subject results; and external senior examinations.

Judging and reporting on student attainment

The Taskforce endorsed that senior syllabuses for each subject will continue to provide objectives and standards. These will be used as a basis to develop instrument-specific marking guides for each of the four assessment activities, i.e. the three school assessments and the external assessment.

Taskforce members considered options for expressing judgements of achievement. ACER had proposed that each school assessment would be marked on a 10-point scale. Modelling of actual results showed that results marked on this scale would lead to difficulties in distinguishing between the achievements of students.

A 15-point scale (A+, A, A-, etc) would reduce the number of students tied for any ATAR rank. However, greater discrimination is still required between the higher achieving students. A “non-linear” 15-point scale, which gives a greater range of points to higher bands, would allow finer distinctions to be made at the top end of achievement and result in fewer ties in the tertiary rank order.

The Taskforce endorsed standards for each school assessment being linked to scores on a non-linear 15-point scale. QCAA would map the non-linear scores to performance standards. Regardless of the relative contributions of school-based and external assessments in each subject, all overall subject results would be expressed on a single comparable scale. Based on distributions of current student results, this model would enable strong, valid and reliable moderation as well as sufficient detail for ATAR calculations.

QCAA currently issues each student completing Year 12 with a Senior Statement that shows the student’s levels of achievement in all their subjects. ACER had proposed that the Senior Statement would feature numerical Subject Results, possibly with additional information. Taskforce members endorsed the proposal that students be provided with an overall numerical score, and a level of achievement aligned to descriptions of achievement based on syllabus standards.

Contribution of external assessment to overall subject results

The Taskforce continued its discussion of the contribution of external assessment to overall subject results. Views were still mixed on the extent to which external assessment should contribute to the subject’s final result; there was support for some variance across subjects.

External senior examinations

The QCAA currently administers external senior examinations (ESEs) to a small cohort of students. The Taskforce discussed a paper on the future of ESEs within the new regime. ACER had recommended discontinuing ESEs. Taskforce members were of the view that further consideration of this matter is required.

Next meeting

The next Taskforce meeting will be held on Thursday, 11 February 2016. The agenda will deal with issues relating to tertiary entrance, including inter-subject scaling, and the derivation of students’ ATARs from their senior subject results.

Updates will continue to be published as the Taskforce guides the development and implementation of Queensland’s new senior assessment and tertiary entrance systems.