

Senior Secondary Assessment Taskforce



This is the second 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 which will combine school-based assessment with external assessment set and marked by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA);
- strengthen the quality and comparability of school-based assessments; and
- provide students seeking tertiary entrance with an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) instead of the current Overall Position (OP) rank.

The Minister for Education has established the Senior Secondary Assessment Taskforce to guide the implementation of these historic reforms. The Taskforce is chaired by the Minister and includes representation from key groups, including schools and school systems, parent groups, secondary principal's associations, teacher unions and tertiary institutions. The group also includes representation from the bodies who will administer the new systems – the QCAA and the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC).

Taskforce Meeting 2 – Key outcomes and points of discussion

At the first Taskforce meeting on 8 September 2015, members endorsed formal Terms of Reference and a forward agenda that will enable the group to consider key aspects of senior assessment and tertiary entrance arrangements. Based on this agenda, the second Taskforce meeting on 11 November 2015 focused on two fundamental senior assessment issues:

- future processes to strengthen the quality, comparability and reliability of school-based assessment; and
- the respective contributions of school-based and external assessment to senior subject results.

Findings and recommendations from the 2014 Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) review of senior assessment and tertiary entrance were used as a starting point in these discussions.

Taskforce members expressed strong and consistent support for all senior subject results to be based on a combination of four summative assessment activities. This would represent a reduction in existing assessment requirements, which typically involve between four and six summative assessments. The

Taskforce noted that an overall reduction in assessment workloads has the potential to allow a greater focus on other aspects of teaching and learning.

New processes to support the comparability and quality of school-based assessment also received broad support. This included the use of more specific common parameters for the development of school based assessment, and the proposed pre-approval ('endorsement') of assessment activities by the QCAA prior to their use in the classroom. The Taskforce noted that the endorsement process has received positive support in initial trials conducted in the first half of 2015.

The Taskforce also provided in-principle support for new processes to ensure the comparability of teacher judgements, subject to further trialling and evaluation by the QCAA. This included ACER proposals for a stratified sample of completed school-based assessment activities to be selected by the QCAA and subject to blind independent re-marking by trained assessment supervisors.

Taskforce members noted that QCAA is currently piloting new processes of accreditation and training for moderation panel members, secondary teachers and curriculum leaders. These processes will strengthen the existing moderation system, and will also provide a pool of expertise to support the introduction of new quality assurance processes.

The Taskforce provided general support for ACER's recommendation that school-based assessment results in each subject should not be scaled against the results of the external assessment. Taskforce members recognised that scaling and the proportionate contribution of external assessment to the overall subject result are interrelated. Taskforce members acknowledged that the introduction of stronger processes to ensure the comparability and quality of school-based assessment mean that it is not necessary for school-based assessment results to be statistically adjusted in this manner. The Taskforce also noted that such scaling processes may not recognise genuine differences in student achievement, and could lead to an undue emphasis on preparation for 'high-stakes' external assessment.

A range of issues were discussed regarding ACER's proposal that external assessment should generally contribute 50 per cent of the total result in each senior subject. This included consideration of whether the contribution of external assessment should be uniform across all subjects, or should vary depending on the nature of the subject area. This issue will be the subject of further consideration at the next Taskforce meeting.

Taskforce members also provided feedback on draft Terms of Reference and proposed membership for a new Tertiary Entrance Working Group. The Working Group will provide additional advice and information to support ongoing Taskforce deliberations.

The next Taskforce meeting will be held on 9 December 2015. The Agenda is expected to include further consideration of the proportionate contribution of external assessment, and processes for judging and reporting student achievement.

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