

## QTU Response to Redesigning the secondary-tertiary Interface: Queensland Review of Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance Processes

The Queensland Teachers' Union is the professional and industrial voice of more than 43,000 teachers and school leaders in state schools and TAFE institutes across Queensland. The QTU, as a key stakeholder in education in this state, believes that it is important to provide a response to the key recommendations outlined in the Australian Council for Educational Research report : *Redesigning the secondary-tertiary interface: Queensland Review of Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance*.

### Preamble

The QTU strongly supports the retention of a standards-referenced, externally moderated, school-based assessment model as the primary mechanism for determining Queensland student educational achievement in senior subjects. It is a system that is highly regarded for its quality assurance of educational standards and one which affirms the role of teachers as highly skilled professionals. Assessment that is devised by teachers to form an integral part of the learning process is the most powerful assessment.

It is imperative that any changes be made in consultation with the QTU. The QTU recommends the formation of a genuine 'stakeholder reference group' with QTU nominated representatives to oversee implementation that is able to be properly supported. There will be a strong need for the involvement of practising teachers and curriculum leaders in further decision making about the recommendations.

Furthermore, the QTU also calls on the Government to ensure QTU nominees are present on all committees, panels and the like, composed of state school teachers from metropolitan, regional and remote areas of Queensland. Representation on these bodies must reflect the proportion of state school teachers working in classrooms and no one individual schooling sector should have more influence over another.

The QTU believes it is essential that any new system of senior assessment and tertiary entrance be funded by additional investment in education by the government and not re-allocated from current resource allocations. Additional funds must also be provided to improve and strengthen moderation processes. The QTU notes the exorbitant costs of developing, setting and marking external exams in other states and calls on the Queensland government to increase funding to schools and to the QCAA to ensure that adequate resources will be available.

The planning for the rollout of any new system of senior assessment and tertiary entrance must bear in mind the significant workload pressures in schools, particularly those such as the roll-out of the new National Curriculum in senior secondary and must be over an extended time period of time to allow a high quality and resourced professional development program for teachers, curriculum leaders and principals, and be accompanied by an education program for students and parents of future Year 12 cohorts.

Dedicated professional development during school time must be provided to teachers and administrators in the lead up to implementation of any new system, in order for teachers to become familiar with and confident to work within a revamped senior assessment system.



Any new system should be introduced no earlier than 2018, which will affect students who are currently in year 8 in high schools.

## Assessment

The QTU is concerned at the movement from a criteria/standards-based approach to a mark out of 10 for knowledge, understanding and skills.

The QTU notes the recommendation that school assessments be marked on a scale of 1 to 10, based on five levels with accompanying descriptions of performance developed by the QCAA. Apart from the logic behind a simple addition of school-based and external assessments, the QTU questions why a total score of 60 is chosen for any individual student subject result.

The QTU supports a process for endorsing school based assessment before use in a school to assist consistency and reliability of the data derived from the assessment. However, this process should be more collaborative with schools and not be reliant on the approval of a single person, an Assessment Supervisor. For example, it may be that there is a role for Expert Subject Groups to preview school-based assessments and provide the necessary feedback.

The QTU opposes high-stakes, HSC-style external examinations, however we note that the types of external assessment proposed in the report take a different form to an external exam. The types of suggested assessment pieces include a multiple choice test, an essay, a practical performance etc. We note the recommendation that an external assessment may contribute 50% of the student's individual subject result and that three other school-based assessment contribute the remaining 50%. The QTU recommends that, where appropriate, for some subject areas, external assessment contribute up to a maximum of 25% of the total mark (as opposed to 50/50). The QTU believes that teacher-developed school-based assessment should form the majority of the overall subject result.

The QTU supports the trial of external assessments in particular subject areas, where schools can volunteer to participate and provide feedback to the QCAA. The trials must be properly evaluated and the results used to further refine processes and protocols. Such participation must not disadvantage the student cohort in terms of their overall result at the end of year 12.

The QTU notes the report recommendations that External Assessment may be introduced on a graduated basis to particular subjects only, such as high enrolment and/or university pre-requisite subjects. The QTU agrees with the Report observation that *"developing External Assessments for some subjects but not others risks creating two classes of senior subjects which may be treated differently by users"* and so the QTU urges that measures be taken to prevent this occurring.

The QTU strongly supports the recommendation that school assessments should not be statistically scaled against external assessment.

We support the introduction of Expert Subject Groups made up of qualified, registered, practising teacher professionals and believe, if planned and resourced appropriately, these groups may have an expanded role in the senior assessment process. For example, their recommended role of determining the percentage of external assessment (EA) in each subject area and the development of marking schemes for external assessments may be extended to involvement in the moderation process.

## The moderation process

A moderation process involving school-based teachers similar to the current review panel process is supported by the QTU. The report recommends a departure from a process of consensus of a group of teachers and then collaboration and negotiation with schools to one of investing considerable power in the decision of a single entity, the Assessment Supervisor. The QTU believes measures involving groups of teachers such as Expert Subject Groups should be considered to support Supervisors.

Under the "Confirmation" stage of the three level moderation process, the QTU is concerned at "where a problem is identified, all student work in that subject in that school is re-marked." This has the potential for very significant increased workloads on teachers;



The QTU believes a process of negotiation and re-consideration similar to the current process represents a more professional mechanism.

The QTU supports a strong and collaborative model for moderating standards of student work between schools, which invokes professionally respectful dialogue between all involved and results in high standards of quality assurance and consistency of decision-making. It is important that collaborative processes are adequately funded to ensure their effectiveness.

### **Tertiary selection**

The QTU notes that the recommendation that tertiary institutions may choose to construct an ATAR using an inter-subject scaling of Subject Results based on four not five subjects. In essence, this would appear to override the apparent desired effect of removing the OP system, as in this instance; OPs will be replaced by ATARs.

The QTU remains very concerned that university responsibility for student selection to tertiary courses will have significant 'backwash effects' on the senior curriculum taught in schools,

Disbanding the OP system and replacing it with two systems of student result certification and tertiary entrance must ensure that there is equal importance is given to all QCAA subjects.

A new system must ensure that all subjects maintain academic rigour, and that all subjects are equally valued.

### **Conclusion**

The QTU is broadly supportive of the need for a re-casting of the Queensland system of senior assessment and tertiary entrance. The QTU also believes that any new initiative should never 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'. The existing system of externally-moderated school-based assessment by a system with the significant and active involvement of classroom teachers and a system of tertiary entrance (OP) that has sought to ensure equity for students across Queensland has many positive aspects. The QTU believes the positive aspects of the existing system should be brought forward to any proposed new system. The QTU remains enthusiastic and ready to assist this process.