



QTU Position Statement

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, appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Queensland Independent Review of Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance Processes undertaken by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). This position statement provides a response to the emerging directions of the review, prior to the submission of the final report to government on 31 July, 2014.

School based assessment

The QTU strongly supports the retention of an 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 which confirms 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. The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA), has an important role in supporting teachers, for example, by providing sample assessment items as a way of demonstrating how assessment types are constructed and standards applied.

External assessment

The QTU opposes assessment models which are norm-referenced, external to the school, standardised or national and endorses models which are criteria-based, standards-referenced, school-based, continuous and developmental, dependent on a range of assessment techniques and relate to students as individuals (S.12.3 QTU Curriculum Policy 2013).

The QTU opposes high-stakes HSC-style testing and notes that the ACER reviewers also oppose this form of testing (which currently occurs in NSW and Victoria). The Union acknowledges that there is support among sections of the membership for the introduction of a new type of external assessment to accompany school based assessment for senior students. The external assessment items must not be produced by 'for-profit corporations' who are seeking to profit from any new system.

The QTU also affirms that if external assessments are to be introduced, qualified, registered, practising teaching professionals are best placed to determine the nature of that external assessment (EA) in each subject area and the percentage of the overall subject result that the EA will represent (25%, 50% etc).

Results obtained for a student through external assessment should not be used to alter any existing school rank order of students determined through school-based moderated assessment, nor be used to 'scale' those school based results.

The QTU advocates for the inclusion of practising classroom teachers, HODs and/or subject area coordinators, as experts on any steering committees or other consultative mechanisms that may be set up by government in the future to determine the nature and extent of external assessment in each subject area.



The QTU calls on the government to include QTU representation on the QCAA steering committee set up to oversee the planning and implementation of any new senior assessment system, and on any subject specific advisory committees.

The moderation process

The QTU supports the use of moderation practices across all formal years of learning as best practice. Moderation should occur at individual and cluster schools to support teachers to develop consistency of judgement of assessment. The Department of Education, Training and Employment should provide schools with appropriate funds to allow moderation to occur in school time (S.12.3 Curriculum Policy 2013).

The QTU calls for additional funding to be provided to the QCAA to allow further training and development of teachers involved in the moderation process. The QTU also supports improved remuneration for panelists and increased and resourced time release to allow them to perform their role.

The preferred model of panel training is face to face, however the QTU does recognise that there is a role for supplementary online training for panelists in regional and remote areas, provided that funded time release is provided during working hours to allow these panelists to complete the online training. The QTU reaffirms the long held view that online training should never be a complete substitute for face to face panel training.

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.

Key cross curriculum capabilities testing

The QTU opposes the introduction of any form of key cross-curriculum capabilities testing (KCC) as additional items of external assessment. There is no clear purpose proposed for the introduction of KCC and so its introduction would be an additional form of external assessment, with the concomitant difficulties of workload, resourcing and school comparability.

The QTU is also concerned that these tests will inevitably be used for scaling purposes, similar to interstate models, and will be used to resolve disagreements between school-based and external assessment, even though this was not the original intention.

Finer scale

The QTU does not oppose the expansion of the existing five point scale of student achievement, acknowledging that presently year 12 OP-eligible students are placed on a 200 point scale for large groups and a 50 point scale for small groups to assist calculation of OP scores. With any expanded scale, the QTU would expect all points to be clearly referenced and described in terms of standards of achievement. Any expansion of the existing five point scale should be confined to the senior years of schooling (years 11 & 12).

The QTU believes a 15 point scale may be too fine and require a higher level of accuracy in teacher judgments. Presently, imprecision exists at the four boundary points of the scale. Increasing the number of points on the level of achievement scale will increase the number of judgement boundaries and increase likelihood of an inaccuracy in allocative decision.

Defining a set of 15 interval descriptors on which teachers can make correct “high stakes” judgements is a high, maybe unattainable, expectation of syllabus developers. Further, teachers may have problems translating the wording of this set of descriptors when making a decision to allocate a level of achievement, making it difficult to implement. There are also implications for syllabus/criteria sheet writing if 15 descriptors replace five. As such a subject result will be a ‘high stakes’ allocation, its determination is contestable.

Tertiary selection

The QTU acknowledges the long term efficacy of the overall position score and the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre in determining tertiary education offers to young people who conclude senior schooling and aspire to a tertiary program of study. However, the QTU also acknowledges increasing public and professional concerns with this current system and an increasing number of university programs that no longer make use of it.

In this instance, the QTU does not oppose exploring alternate mechanisms for determining tertiary education offers to young people who conclude senior schooling and want to follow a tertiary program of study. However, the QTU has concerns that making universities responsible for selection to their programs may have unintended effects, including on the existing diversity of the Queensland senior curriculum, a lack of equity for all Queensland young people leaving school and wanting to study at university and a lack of co-ordination in selection mechanisms.

Consequently, the QTU believes any new system for selecting young people to tertiary education programs must meet the following caveats.

- There must be an equitable treatment of students from each of the schooling sectors and from schools in all areas throughout Queensland, such that any student who shows the necessary level of education achievement has the opportunity of the relevant tertiary offer of their preference.
- In order to support the desirable amount of coordinated access to the variety of programs across the range of institutions, tertiary offers should continue to be primarily conducted through a central agency, e.g. QTAC.
- Tertiary selection procedures should not have any significant deleterious effect on the diversity of the Queensland senior school curriculum.
- There should not be any additional workload imposed on schools (and teachers), without satisfactory resourcing.
- There is consideration of the effects on students of any new tertiary selection process (particularly workload and mental health considerations).
- There must be capacity for the recognition of student achievement in vocational education courses.

Conclusion

Senior secondary teachers work extremely hard with the current model of externally moderated school-based assessment, ensuring that it is a well-regarded system with high levels of consistency and public confidence. The QTU supports retention of the best aspects of the current system but accepts that this system can be further improved with appropriate levels of resourcing and support. The QTU remains concerned that any new senior assessment system should not create additional stress and pressure for students, teachers and schools. The QTU believes that the retention and enhancement of the current system, which has served the young people of Queensland so well for 40 years, should be the focus of the outcomes of this review.

It is paramount that the methodology behind any new senior assessment and tertiary entrance system to be introduced in Queensland is fair, transparent and clearly explained and communicated to parents, teachers and students in a timely way.