

The Unintended Educational Consequences of Subject Scaling in Queensland

Submission to QTAC's Review of the ATAR Calculation and Scaling
Methodology

20 July 2026

Dear Mr Chris Veraa, Chief Executive Officer, QTAC; Members of the QTAC Board; Vice-Chancellors of Queensland Universities; and Queensland tertiary institutions,

We write on behalf of a coalition of Queensland professional teacher associations who represent the Arts - Dance, Drama, Media, Music and Visual Art to contribute to QTAC's review of the ATAR calculation and scaling methodology.

As professional associations, our role is to represent the expertise of the teaching profession and contribute constructively to conversations that shape education policy. Collectively, our members work with thousands of students across Queensland every day, providing a unique perspective on how policy decisions influence subject selection, curriculum provision and educational pathways in diverse educational settings and in a range of scenarios. Teachers witness systemic impacts of the ATAR system firsthand through subject selection processes, classroom practice, curriculum planning, resource allocation (including school timetabling, staffing, budgets) and ongoing conversations with students and families. Their collective experience constitutes an important body of professional evidence that we believe complements the statistical and technical analyses of the ATAR Technical Working Group informing this review.

Since the introduction of ATAR in 2020, QTAC's inter-subject scaling has driven students away from subjects perceived to "scale poorly" and towards subjects that "scale well." As some of the lowest-scaled subjects in Queensland, the Arts have experienced substantial declines in enrolments, with many students abandoning these subjects because of the perceived disadvantage they create for ATAR outcomes. Gattenhof and Saunders (2026) found that Queensland experienced the largest decline in Year 12 Arts enrolments nationally, with enrolments falling by 45% between 2015 and 2023. As a result, fewer students are choosing Arts subjects in senior secondary school, fewer schools are offering these subjects, and Queensland universities are experiencing declining undergraduate enrolments in the creative arts.

We therefore welcome QTAC's decision to review the current scaling methodology. Given the significance of this review, however, we are concerned that awareness of the process has been limited across the profession. Information about the review was not publicly available on QTAC's website, and opportunities for organisations and individuals to make submissions were not publicly communicated. As a result, many key stakeholders were unaware that the review was taking place. We acknowledge that there is no single approach to managing tertiary admissions or inter-subject comparability. Other Australian jurisdictions have adopted different methodologies, and we encourage QTAC to consider these alongside emerging national and international evidence as part of this review.

Given the importance of this work, we believe the review should be informed by the broadest possible range of evidence and stakeholder perspectives. It is in this spirit of constructive collaboration that we submit this paper. Through this submission, we seek to:

- Contribute evidence gathered by six professional teaching associations and academic colleagues to assist QTAC and its stakeholders to understand the complexity, breadth and significance of the educational and wider societal impacts associated with the current ATAR system;
- Request consideration of whether adjustments to the current scaling methodology alone will be sufficient to address these impacts; and
- Encourage the investigation of leading tertiary admissions approaches that value diverse student strengths, support wellbeing and curriculum breadth, improve equity of access, and better prepare students for success in higher education, the workforce and society.

Our purpose is to advocate for a tertiary admissions system that is equitable and enables students to select and study senior subjects based upon their interests, strengths, and aspirations rather than perceived admissions advantages that narrow and limit their education. We advocate for both ATAR and non-ATAR-eligible students to be supported to access a rich and diverse education and call for the review to explore other approaches to ensure a more equitable and fit-for-purpose tertiary admissions scheme.

The accompanying submission presents evidence gathered from Queensland teachers, QCAA enrolment data, student survey findings, relevant research literature and a number of considerations that we believe warrant examination as part of the current review. Although much of this evidence is drawn from Arts education, other disciplines also report significant impacts, and the Arts can provide a clear case study of the broader educational consequences that can emerge when tertiary admissions processes begin to shape student subject selection.

Fundamentally, we believe that Queensland's tertiary admissions system should support students' educational choices, not shape them. We do not see that the current methodology is fair, and we argue that it is leading to a homogenised secondary schooling approach in Queensland.

We disagree with QTAC's assertion that:

"Scaling adjusts for the fact that it is more difficult to obtain a high result in some subjects than in others. This is not because some subjects are inherently harder or easier; it is because some subjects attract a more competitive cohort of students. Scaling ensures that students are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged based on the subjects they choose." (QTAC, n.d.-a).

In practice, however, QTAC's scaling methodology produces the opposite outcome. Large adjustments between students' raw and scaled scores create clear advantages for students undertaking some subjects and corresponding disadvantages for those undertaking others. The scale of these adjustments reinforces the perception that some subjects are more academically valuable than others, despite QTAC's assertion that no subject is inherently harder or easier.

This approach also appears inconsistent with the design of Queensland's senior curriculum. QCAA developed the General syllabi using a common cognitive demand framework, underpinned by a shared taxonomy of cognitive verbs, to ensure that standards are comparable across subjects. If comparable standards are embedded within the curriculum and assessment system, it is difficult to reconcile why substantial post hoc scaling adjustments remain necessary.

Across our organisations, we are observing remarkably consistent patterns. The current scaling methodology is having a profound influence on student subject selection, reinforcing a perceived hierarchy between subjects and contributing to the homogenisation of secondary education. As enrolments decline, schools are increasingly reducing or discontinuing Arts offerings, with significant consequences for curriculum diversity and educational opportunity.

The evidence presented in this submission suggests that the current scaling methodology has contributed to a range of unintended consequences that extend beyond individual subject enrolments to curriculum provision, student decision-making, educational equity and future workforce development.

Key findings include:

- Scaling is materially influencing student subject selection, with students choosing subjects for perceived ATAR advantage rather than their interests, strengths or intended pathways.
- Subjects that consistently scale down are experiencing declining enrolments and reduced school provision, while many subjects that scale up are growing.
- These effects are not evenly distributed and raise concerns about educational equity, student wellbeing and access to a broad senior curriculum.
- The consequences extend beyond schools, weakening tertiary pathways and future workforce capacity, particularly across Queensland's arts and cultural sectors.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that the effects of scaling extend well beyond the calculation of individual ATARs. The current methodology is shaping student behaviour, school curriculum provision and tertiary pathways. We therefore ask the review to consider not only technical adjustments to the scaling methodology, but whether Queensland's broader tertiary admissions system continues to serve students, universities and communities as intended.

We note that QTAC's published values of Passion, People First, Adaptability and Integrity provide an important lens through which the evidence in this submission can be considered. Passion for education means enabling students to pursue subjects aligned with their interests, strengths and aspirations. A People First approach requires attention to the real-world consequences of the current scaling methodology, including reduced subject choice, discontinued programs and students being discouraged from pursuing subjects they value. Adaptability means responding when evidence indicates that a system is producing unintended consequences. Integrity requires transparency, openness to evidence and a commitment to ensuring Queensland's tertiary admissions system continues to serve the best interests of students.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important process and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the issues raised in this submission further.

Yours sincerely,



Helen Mullins PSM

Chair

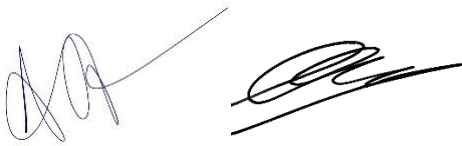
Ausdance Educators Queensland (AEQ)



Dr Malcolm Cole

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Australian Society for Music Education (ASME) Queensland Chapter



Aimee Gust & Kelsey Hall

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Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Queensland



Scott Andrews

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Drama Queensland



Rossina Moore

President

Queensland Art Teachers Association (QATA)



Dr John Nicholas Saunders

Chair

National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE)

Who We Are: The Coalition of Queensland Arts Professional Teacher Associations

Ausdance Educators Queensland subcommittee (AEQ)

Ausdance Educators Queensland, a subcommittee of Ausdance Queensland, is dedicated to supporting dance education in Queensland across primary, middle, and senior secondary schools in all schooling sectors. The committee is made up of a passionate team of volunteers who champion excellence in dance education by designing and delivering in-person and online professional development activities, fostering strong networks and advocating for dance in schools.

Ausdance Queensland (ADQ)

Ausdance Queensland (ADQ) is Queensland's peak body for dance, championing the artform and advancing its Cultural, social and economic value across the state. As the recognised voice of Queensland's dance sector, ADQ provides leadership, advocacy and strategic direction, supporting professional dance companies, independent artists, educators, community practitioners, young people and emerging artists. Working in partnership with government, industry and communities, ADQ shapes policy, informs sector development, and drives initiatives that strengthen a vibrant, inclusive and sustainable dance ecosystem for all Queenslanders.

Australian Society for Music Education – Queensland Chapter (ASME)

ASME encourages and advances music education at all levels as an integral part of general education and community life, and as a profession within the broad field of music. ASME seeks to support the right of every person in Australia to access a quality music education, foster the development and extension of professional knowledge and skills in music education, and provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas and research from early childhood through to tertiary and community settings.

Australian Teachers of Media – Queensland Chapter (ATOM QLD)

The Australian Teachers of Media Queensland (ATOM QLD) is dedicated to advancing media education across Queensland and Australia. We support educators by fostering collaboration, advocating for curriculum, and providing professional learning opportunities that keep pace with the ever-evolving media landscape. Through professional development workshops, networking events, and industry partnerships, we empower educators to inspire the next generation of media-savvy students.

Drama Queensland

Drama Queensland – Queensland Association for Drama in Education Inc. is a non-profit professional association supporting Drama educators in the K–12 and tertiary sectors. We represent the voice of Queensland Drama teachers, responding to their needs and concerns and advocating for Drama education across a range of educational settings. Drama Queensland also collaborates with the arts industry through projects involving companies, artists and arts venues. We represent and support more than 260 members, maintain partnerships with over 14 Queensland arts organisations, and are part of the national network of professional associations through Drama Australia. Through our professional development and resource support, we engage with more than 600 educators annually.

National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE)

The National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) is a coalition of national professional teacher associations across Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts. Together, we represent more than 10,000 teachers working across primary, secondary, tertiary and community contexts.

Queensland Art Teachers' Association (QATA)

The Queensland Art Teachers' Association (QATA) is governed by a volunteer executive comprising 13 members and represents a growing subscription membership of 666 visual arts educators, artists and industry professionals from Queensland and interstate. Members access a wide range of professional resources and participate in conferences, camps, exhibitions and professional learning opportunities that support excellence in education.

Executive Summary

Queensland's current ATAR calculation and inter-subject scaling methodology is producing unintended educational consequences that extend beyond the calculation of individual tertiary admission ranks. Evidence from enrolment data, scaling reports, teacher and student surveys, academic research, and the collective experience of professional associations indicates that scaling is influencing student subject selection, reducing curriculum diversity and contributing to inequitable educational outcomes. Although these consequences are particularly visible in Arts education, the Arts provide a clear case study of broader concerns about the relationship between tertiary admissions, senior curriculum provision and student opportunity.

Key findings

- **Scaling is materially influencing subject selection.** Students report choosing subjects for their perceived ATAR advantage rather than their interests, strengths and intended pathways.
- **Participation is shifting towards subjects that generally scale up and away from those that generally scale down.** General Arts enrolments declined by 20.3% between 2020 and 2025, representing 2,950 fewer subject enrolments.
- **Downward scaling across every General Arts subject became more pronounced between 2020 and 2025.** The growing difference between raw and scaled results substantially alters how students' standards-based achievement contributes to their ATAR.
- **Declining enrolments are reducing curriculum access.** Schools are combining or discontinuing subjects, meaning future students lose the opportunity to select them regardless of their interests, strengths or aspirations.
- **The effects may be unevenly distributed.** Students in regional, remote and lower socioeconomic communities may have less capacity to respond strategically to scaling. Female and Indigenous students are also more highly represented in several subjects that generally scale down.
- **The consequences extend into tertiary education and workforce development.** Reduced school participation is occurring alongside declining Creative Arts enrolments, course closures and diminished tertiary provision, weakening pathways into Queensland's arts, cultural and creative workforce.
- **Scaling-related pressures are affecting student agency, engagement and wellbeing.** They are also adding to the workload, professional tension and employment insecurity experienced by specialist teachers.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that scaling has become more than a technical process used to calculate tertiary admission ranks. It is shaping student behaviour, school curriculum provision, tertiary pathways and perceptions of the relative value of different fields of learning. These consequences are difficult to reconcile with QTAC's stated principle that students should be neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by their subject choices.

The coalition asks QTAC and its stakeholders to:

1. Address the immediate inequities and unintended consequences identified in the current scaling methodology.
2. Improve transparency and stakeholder consultation in the current and future reviews of Queensland's tertiary admissions system.
3. Examine whether adjustments to the scaling methodology alone will be sufficient to reverse established patterns of strategic subject selection, subject avoidance and declining curriculum provision.
4. Investigate broader tertiary admissions approaches that recognise subject-specific achievement, prerequisite knowledge, contextual factors and diverse student capabilities.

Submission to QTAC's Review of the ATAR Calculation and Inter-Subject Scaling Methodology

This submission argues that Queensland's current ATAR calculation and inter-subject scaling methodology is producing unintended educational consequences that extend well beyond the calculation of individual ranks. The evidence is particularly visible in Arts education, which provides a clear case study of how scaling can influence subject selection, reduce curriculum diversity and compound inequity. Drawing on research, Queensland enrolment data, teacher and student surveys, and the collective experience of professional teacher associations, the submission examines the effects on students, schools, tertiary pathways and workforce development before outlining the need for both immediate improvement and longer-term reform.

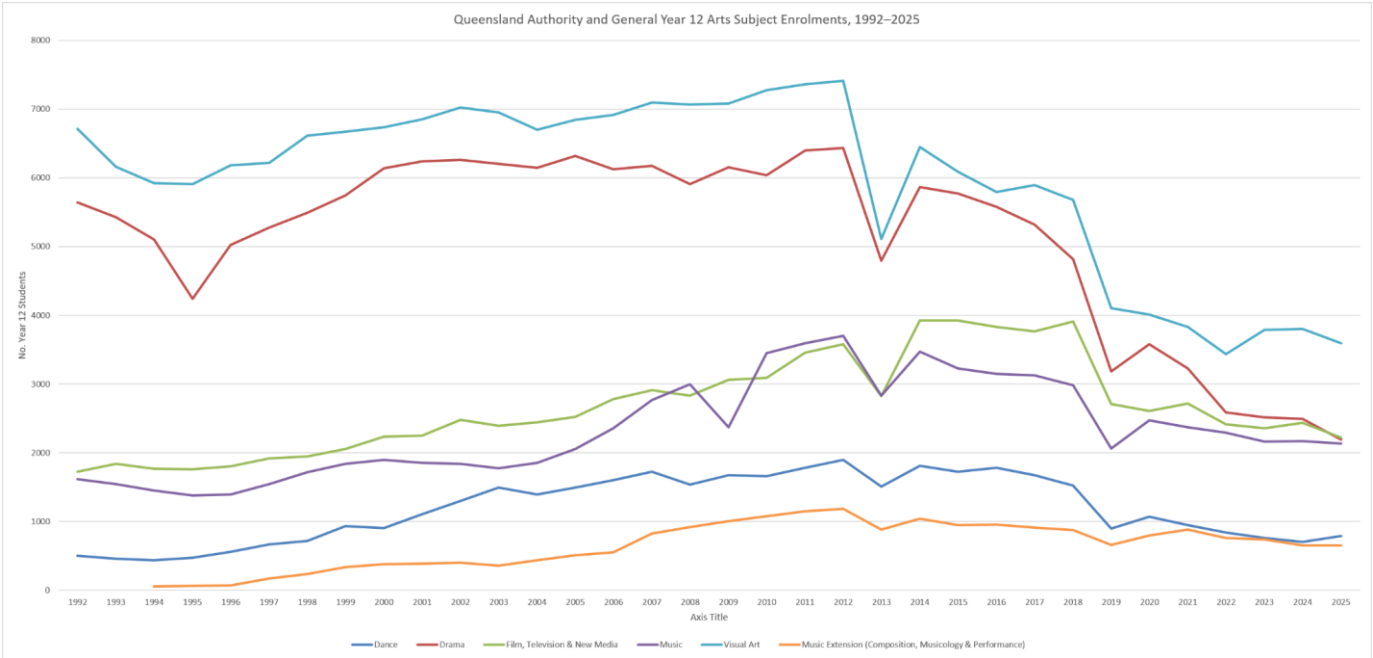
1. Student subject selection is being influenced by subject scaling

1.1 Long-term enrolment data in senior Arts participation

Figure 1 traces Queensland Year 12 Arts enrolments from 1992 to 2025. It shows that participation remained comparatively stable for much of the period before declining sharply following the transition to the current QCE and ATAR arrangements. In 2025, Drama and Visual Art recorded their lowest enrolments since statewide records began, despite substantial growth in the Year 12 population. The significance of the figure lies not in any single year, but in the sustained and simultaneous decline across all Arts disciplines.

The figure treats the corresponding Authority and General Arts subjects as a continuous series to support comparison across the transition to Queensland's new QCE and ATAR arrangements in 2019–2020. It presents Year 12 subject enrolments/completions rather than the proportion of the total Year 12 cohort. The trend does not establish scaling as the sole cause of declining participation; however, its timing and consistency across the Arts warrant examination alongside the scaling and survey evidence presented below.

Figure 1: Queensland Authority and General Arts Subject Enrolments, 1992 - 2025



Source: QCAA (2026b).

1.2 Arts enrolments have declined across every subject since 2020

Table 1 compares enrolments across Queensland's six General Arts subject areas in 2020 and 2025. Collectively, Arts subject enrolments fell from 14,537 to 11,587 over this period, representing 2,950 fewer enrolments and an overall decline of 20.3%. Every Arts subject recorded a decline, ranging from 10.4% in Visual Art to 38.6% in Drama. This is particularly significant because the decline occurred while Queensland's Year 12 population was growing. The table therefore demonstrates that the reduction is not confined to one artform or explained by a smaller graduating cohort; it reflects a system-wide contraction in senior Arts participation since the introduction of the current QCE and ATAR arrangements.

Data from Table 2 indicates that there has been an overall decline of 20.3% enrolments between 2020 and 2025 across the General Arts subjects, highlighting the impact of the system and scaling on subject choice.

Table 1 Year 12 Arts enrolments, 2020 and 2025

Subject	2020 Year 12 Enrolments	2025 Year 12 Enrolments	Percentage Change
Dance	1,067	791	-25.9%
Drama	3,576	2,194	-38.6%
Film, Television & New Media	2,610	2,217	-15.1%
Music	2,471	2,136	-13.6%
Visual Art	4,014	3,595	-10.4%
Music Extension (Composition, Musicology & Performance)	799	654	-18.1%

Source: QCAA (2026b).

1.3 Scaling outcomes and changing subject participation

QCAA enrolment data reveal substantial changes in subject participation since the introduction of the current tertiary admissions framework. The evidence points to three related patterns: increasingly pronounced downward scaling in General Arts subjects, declining student enrolments, and a reduction in the number of schools offering these subjects. Together, these trends suggest that scaling is influencing student subject selection in ways that extend beyond its intended role in calculating tertiary admission ranks, with broader consequences for curriculum diversity and future workforce pathways.

Table 2 compares the proportion of Queensland Year 12 graduates completing selected General subjects in 2020 and 2025, alongside each subject's historical scaling trend. The final column presents findings from a Queensland Art Teachers' Association survey of 1,279 ATAR students, who identified the Arts subjects they would study if scaling were not a consideration. Students could select multiple subjects or indicate "none".

Table 2: Changes in Queensland Year 12 subject participation, historical scaling trends and student subject preferences, 2020–2025

General Subjects most impacted red = declining enrolments green = increased enrolments blue = percentage of students surveyed wanting to take the subject in 2025 (QATA2025)	2020 graduates completing subject	2025 graduates completing subject	Change (Percentage points)	Published scaling pattern, 2020–2025	QATA survey interest, 2025 QATA survey results of 1279 ATAR students who were asked; <i>Which Arts subjects would you like to study if scaling was not an issue? (None was also an option)</i> 2025
Dance	2.10%	1.34%	-0.76	Generally scales down	12.8%
Drama	7.10%	3.7%	-3.4	Generally scales down	18%
Economics	4.41%	7.06%	+2.65	Generally scales up	–
Film Television and Media	5.14%	3.77%	-1.37	Generally scales down	31.4%
Mathematical Methods	20%	21.8%	+1.8	Generally scales up	–
Music	4.93%	3.61%	-1.32	Generally scales down	22.7%
Physical Education	13%	9.33%	-3.67	Generally scales down	–
Physics	11.63%	14.37%	+2.74	Generally scales up	–
Specialist Mathematics	6.51%	8.15%	+1.64	Generally scales up	–
Visual Art	7.95%	6.08%	-1.87	Generally scales down	39.6%

Sources: Queensland Government (2020, 2025); Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2026a); Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (2021, 2026); Queensland Art Teachers' Association (2025).

1.4 Raw achievement produces markedly different scaled outcomes

The following table illustrates the substantial differences between raw and scaled results across selected Queensland General subjects. These differences reinforce a perceived hierarchy in which subjects are characterised as scaling “well” or “poorly”, encouraging students and schools to prioritise ATAR maximisation when making subject-selection decisions.

The table compares selected raw scores with their corresponding scaled results in 2025. Across the reported achievement range, General Arts results are consistently adjusted down, while results in several positively scaled subjects remain comparatively stable or are adjusted upwards. At the highest reported achievement level, for example, a raw score of 100 scaled to 77.83 in Dance, compared with 98.67 in Specialist Mathematics. The scale of this difference helps explain why students, families and schools perceive particular subject choices as creating an ATAR advantage or disadvantage.

Note: QTAC reports five selected raw-score points for each subject. Because these points vary between subjects, the table demonstrates the magnitude and direction of scaling within each subject rather than providing a direct comparison of identical raw scores.

Table 3: QTAC's Raw Score and Scaled Scores for select subjects in 2025.

Subject	Raw Score is in black Scaled Score is in green for scaled up result and red for a scaled down result.				
Chemistry (8682)	76 /77.08	85 /90.36	92 /95.41	96 /97.04	99 /97.88
Physics (7392)	78 /77.17	86 /89.79	93 /95.31	96 /96.67	100 /97.91
Maths Methods (11079)	64 /79.43	76 /86.94	86 /94.93	93 /96.44	98 /97.43
Specialist Maths (4066)	70 /88.94	82 /95.27	90 /97.38	95 /98.20	99 /98.67
Dance (672)	72 /42.54	82 /56.35	91 /68.04	97 /74.82	100 /77.83
Drama (2443)	68 /45.56	80 /63.83	89 /75.54	96 /82.68	100 /85.96
FTVNM (2384)	64 /41.55	75 /56.15	86 /69.76	93 /77.04	100 /82.99
Music (2075)	70 /52.97	83 /71.69	93 /82.53	98 /86.58	100 /87.96
Visual Art (3728)	60 /46.99	73 /61.94	85 /74.03	94 /81.28	100 /85.18
Economics	67 /72.53	79 /88.08	88 /94.11	94 /96.39	98 /97.41
Engineering	62 /71.04	75 /86.87	86 /93.87	92 /96.03	97 /97.25
English	61 /52.67	72 /70.12	83 /83.18	91 /89.48	99 /93.60

Source: QTAC Scaling Report 2025.

1.5 Downward scaling of Arts achievement has become more pronounced over time

Tables 4 to 8 show how the downward adjustment of General Arts results changed between 2020 and 2025. Across every Arts subject, the average difference between the selected raw and scaled scores was greater in 2025 than in 2020. The increase was particularly pronounced in Dance, where average downward movement grew from 18.20 to 24.48 points, and Drama, where it grew from 8.85 to 15.88 points. These tables demonstrate that the scaling disadvantage experienced by Arts students has not merely persisted; it has become more pronounced over the six years of the current system.

For each subject and year, 'average movement' is the mean difference between the five raw-score points published in QTAC's annual scaling report and their corresponding scaled results. A negative figure indicates average downward movement. This measure illustrates changes in the approximate magnitude of scaling over time; it is not an enrolment-weighted average of the scaling experienced by every student in the subject. Although QTAC's reported raw-score reference points vary slightly between years, the same reporting structure enables the direction and approximate magnitude of change to be examined longitudinally.

These scaling trends have coincided with substantial enrolment declines. Between 2020 and 2025, Drama enrolments declined by 38.6%, Dance by 25.9%, Film, Television & New Media by 15.1%, Music by 13.6%, Music Extension by 18.1%, and Visual Art by 10.4%. Considered alongside the survey and professional evidence presented below, the data suggest a strong relationship between increasingly unfavourable scaling outcomes and declining participation across every General Arts subject.

Dance

Table 4: Raw and scaled results and average downward movement in General Dance, 2020–2025.

Year	Score						Average movement
2020	Raw	66.00	78.00	88.00	94.00	100.00	
	Scaled	44.84	59.88	71.23	77.03	81.98	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-21.16	-18.12	-16.77	-16.97	-18.02	-18.20
2021	Raw	68.00	79.00	89.00	95.00	100.00	
	Scaled	42.81	58.52	71.51	78.01	82.55	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-25.19	-20.48	-17.49	-16.99	-17.45	-19.52
2022	Raw	70.00	82.00	90.00	95.00	100.00	
	Scaled	44.37	61.51	71.75	77.24	81.93	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-25.63	-20.49	-18.25	-17.76	-18.07	-20.04
2023	Raw	71.00	82.00	90.00	96.00	100.00	
	Scaled	40.94	57.58	68.88	76.16	80.31	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-30.06	-24.42	-21.12	-19.84	-19.69	-23.02
2024	Raw	71.00	81.00	90.00	96.00	100.00	
	Scaled	42.67	56.51	68.21	74.99	78.93	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-28.33	-24.49	-21.79	-21.01	-21.07	-23.33
2025	Raw	72.00	82.00	91.00	97.00	100.00	
	Scaled	42.54	56.35	68.04	74.82	77.83	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-29.46	-25.65	-22.96	-22.18	-22.17	-24.48

Sources: QTAC Scaling Reports 2020-2025.

Drama

Table 5. Raw and scaled results and average downward movement in General Drama, 2020–2025.

Year	Score						Average movement
2020	Raw	60.00	72.00	83.00	91.00	99.00	
	Scaled	44.22	63.09	77.58	85.23	90.59	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-15.78	-8.91	-5.42	-5.77	-8.41	-8.85
2021	Raw	63.00	74.00	84.00	92.00	98.00	
	Scaled	46.08	63.51	76.86	84.78	89.14	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-16.92	-10.49	-7.14	-7.22	-8.86	-10.12
2022	Raw	64.00	75.00	86.00	93.00	99.00	
	Scaled	47.09	64.13	78.23	84.85	89.13	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-16.91	-10.87	-7.77	-8.15	-9.87	-10.71
2023	Raw	66.00	78.88	88.00	93.00	99.00	
	Scaled	47.02	65.017	77.69	83.49	88.01	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-18.89	-13.86	-10.31	-9.51	-10.99	-12.73
2024	Raw	66	78	89	95	100	
	Scaled	44.94	63.24	77.32	83.19	87.10	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-21.06	-14.76	-11.68	-11.81	-12.90	-14.44
2025	Raw	68	80	89	96	100	
	Scaled	45.56	63.83	75.54	82.68	85.96	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-22.44	-16.17	-13.46	-13.32	-14.04	-15.88

Sources: QTAC Scaling Reports 2020-2025.

Film, Television and New Media

Table 6: Raw and scaled results and average downward movement in General Film, Television & New Media, 2020–2025.

Year	Score						Average movement
2020	Raw	57.00	69.00	81.00	90.00	99.00	
	Scaled	41.00	57.04	71.71	80.45	86.98	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-16.00	-11.96	-9.29	-9.55	-12.02	-11.76
2021	Raw	60.00	72.00	84.00	92.00	99.00	
	Scaled	41.65	57.40	71.79	79.54	84.92	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-18.35	-14.60	-12.21	-12.46	-14.08	-14.34
2022	Raw	60.00	72.00	84.00	92.00	99.00	
	Scaled	42.11	57.13	70.94	78.52	83.88	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-17.89	-14.87	-13.06	-13.48	-15.12	-14.88
2023	Raw	61.00	73.00	85.00	93.00	99.00	
	Scaled	42.17	57.65	71.76	79.39	84.03	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-18.83	-15.35	-13.24	-13.61	-14.97	-15.20
2024	Raw	62.00	73.00	84.00	93.00	100.00	
	Scaled	42.22	56.53	69.82	78.75	84.24	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-19.78	-16.47	-14.18	-14.25	-15.76	-16.08
2025	Raw	64.00	75.00	86.00	93.00	100.00	
	Scaled	41.55	56.15	69.76	77.04	82.99	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-22.45	-18.85	-16.24	-15.96	17.01	-18.10

Sources: QTAC Scaling Reports 2020-2025.

Music

Table 7: Raw and scaled results and average downward movement in General Music, 2020–2025

Year	Score						Average movement
2020	Raw	62.00	77.00	88.00	95.00	100.00	
	Scaled	53.49	73.58	84.19	88.95	91.53	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-8.51	-3.42	-3.81	-6.05	-8.47	-6.05
2021	Raw	67.00	80.00	90.00	96.00	100.00	
	Scaled	54.59	74.92	85.75	90.16	92.38	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-12.41	-5.08	-4.25	-5.84	-7.62	-7.04
2022	Raw	68.00	81.00	91.00	97.00	100.00	
	Scaled	56.49	75.92	68.19	90.38	92.02	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-11.51	-5.08	-22.81	-6.62	-7.98	-10.80
2023	Raw	69.00	82.00	93.00	98.00	100.00	
	Scaled	54.79	73.28	84.55	88.22	90.38	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-14.21	-8.72	-8.45	-9.78	-9.62	-10.15
2024	Raw	70.00	83.00	93.00	97.00	100.00	
	Scaled	53.97	72.23	82.76	85.98	88.05	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-16.03	-10.77	10.24	11.02	11.95	-12.00
2025	Raw	70.00	83.00	93.00	98.00	100.00	
	Scaled	52.97	71.69	82.53	86.58	87.96	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-17.03	-11.31	-10.47	-11.42	-12.04	-12.45

Sources: QTAC Scaling Reports 2020-2025.

Visual Art

Table 8: Raw and scaled results and average downward movement in General Visual Art, 2020–2025.

Year	Score						Average movement
2020	Raw	55.00	66.00	78.00	88.00	98.00	
	Scaled	45.95	61.40	75.91	84.78	90.78	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-9.05	-4.60	-2.09	-3.22	-7.22	-5.24
2021	Raw	55.00	66.00	79.00	88.00	98.00	
	Scaled	47.13	61.30	75.79	83.34	89.40	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-7.87	-4.70	-3.21	-4.66	-8.60	-5.80
2022	Raw	56.00	68.00	81.00	91.00	100.00	
	Scaled	47.24	62.45	76.49	84.50	89.66	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-8.76	-5.55	-4.51	-6.50	-10.34	-7.13
2023	Raw	57.00	70.00	83.00	92.00	99.00	
	Scaled	47.99	63.20	76.17	83.09	87.29	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-9.01	-6.80	-6.83	-8.91	-11.71	-8.65
2024	Raw	58.00	71.00	84.00	93.00	100.00	
	Scaled	46.37	62.30	75.96	83.19	87.52	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-11.63	-8.70	-8.04	-9.81	-12.48	-10.13
2025	Raw	60.00	73.00	85.00	94.00	100.00	
	Scaled	46.99	61.94	74.03	81.28	85.15	
	Shift from Raw to Scaled	-13.01	-11.06	-10.97	-12.72	-14.85	-12.52

Sources: QTAC Scaling Reports 2020-2025

1.6 Declining enrolments are reducing school provision across Queensland

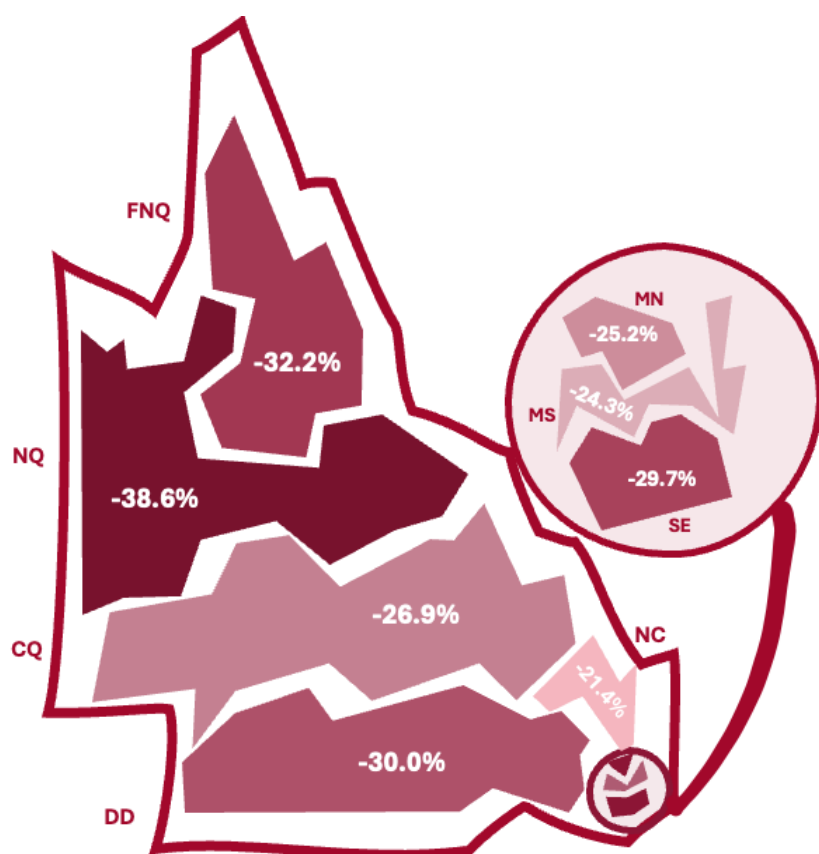
Table 9 shows a broad divergence between subjects that generally scale up and those that generally scale down. Subjects that generally scale up, including Economics, Engineering, Physics, Specialist Mathematics, Mathematical Methods, Geography and Study of Religion, mostly experienced enrolment growth between 2020 and 2025, often accompanied by growth in the number of schools offering them. This pattern is consistent with the proposition that favourable scaling influences student demand and school provision.

By contrast, subjects that generally scale down—including all Arts subjects, Agricultural Science, Food and Nutrition, Design, and Physical Education—mostly experienced declining enrolments and reduced school provision. Drama provides a particularly clear example: 71 fewer schools offered the subject in 2025 than in 2020. Over the same period, Chemistry, which generally scales up, was offered by 28 more schools. Scaling is not the only influence on enrolment, but the consistency of this pattern across subjects warrants close examination.

This matters because declining enrolment does not affect only the students making an immediate subject choice. Once schools discontinue a subject, future students lose access to it altogether. If there is no senior subject offered at a school, often the middle school offering (Years 7 to 10) is also discontinued.

Figure 2 shows the percentage change in Unit 1 General Arts student-subject enrolments across Queensland's Department of Education regions between 2020 and 2025. Every region experienced a substantial decline, ranging from 21.4% to 38.6%, indicating that falling participation in senior Arts subjects is a statewide rather than localised trend. North Queensland recorded the steepest decline (38.6%), followed by Far North Queensland (32.2%), Darling Downs (30.0%), South East (29.7%), Central Queensland (26.9%), Metropolitan North (25.2%), Metropolitan South (24.3%) and North Coast (21.4%).

Figure 2. Around the State: Change in General Arts Unit 1 student-subject enrolments, 2020–2026 (%)

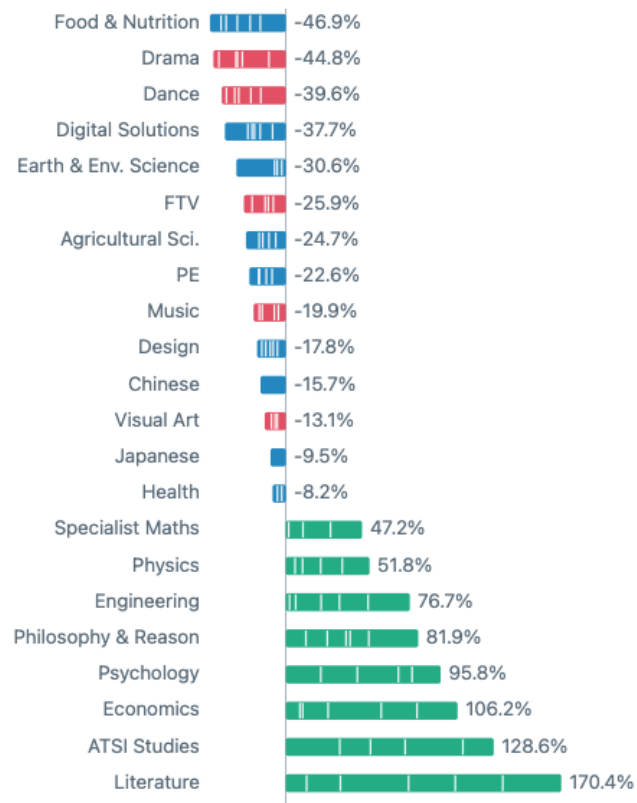


Source: Pennay, *The HIVE Assembly*, *Seeing Red Report*, n.d.

Figure 3 shows substantial variation in Unit 1 enrolment trends between subjects from 2020 to 2026. All five General Arts subjects experienced declines: Drama (44.8%), Dance (39.6%), Film, Television & New Media (25.9%), Music (19.9%) and Visual Art (13.1%). Drama and Dance recorded the second- and third-largest declines of all subjects shown, surpassed only by Food & Nutrition (46.9%). Notably, every subject shown as experiencing an enrolment decline typically scales down. Conversely, most subjects recording enrolment growth typically scale upwards, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and Psychology being the principal exceptions. Although

this pattern does not establish causation, it indicates a strong association between scaling outcomes and changing patterns of subject participation.

Figure 3. By subject: Unit 1 enrolment fluctuation 2020–2026 (%)



Source: Pennay, The HIVE Assembly, Seeing Red Report, n.d.

Table 9. Changes in Unit 4 enrolments and school provision by historical subject-scaling trend, 2020–2025

Counts are student-subject enrolments, rather than unique students. Unit 4 generally corresponds with Year 12.

Subject	No. Students Enrolled in Year 12 (Unit 4 student-subject enrolments)								No. Queensland schools with Year 12 enrolments		
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Change		2020	2025	Change
Selected subjects with generally higher published scaling references											
Biology	13,146	13,637	13,649	13,804	13,883	14,125	+7.4%		434	446	+2.8%
Chemistry	8,104	8,269	8,517	8,763	8,785	9,379	+15.7%		403	415	+3.0%
Economics	2,209	2,433	2,534	2,923	3,641	4,112	+86.1%		96	125	+30.2%
Engineering	1,255	1,376	1,341	1,606	1,816	2,040	+62.5%		92	107	+16.3%
Geography	2,563	3,201	2,824	2,591	2,739	2,993	+16.8%		189	187	-1.1%
Mathematical Methods	9,988	9,879	10,228	10,945	11,572	12,666	+26.8%		416	418	+0.5%
Physics	5,817	6,091	6,474	6,943	7,489	8,453	+45.3%		390	410	+5.1%
Specialist Mathematics	3,249	3,094	3,210	3,640	4,085	4,758	+46.4%		324	308	-4.9%
Study of Religion	3,371	3,252	3,285	3,539	3,771	3,973	+17.9%		87	94	+8.0%
Selected subjects with generally lower published scaling references											
Agricultural Science	480	414	430	442	452	388	-19.2%		52	46	-11.5%
Food & Nutrition	1,183	993	907	830	782	735	-37.9%		112	68	-39.3%
Design	3,667	3,412	3,151	3,041	3,293	3,253	-11.3%		242	221	-8.7%
Health	2,274	2,175	2,373	2,245	2,248	2,227	-2.1%		125	134	+7.2%
Physical Education	6,559	6,160	5,869	5,677	5,584	5,565	-15.2%		375	351	-6.4%
Psychology	2,948	3,698	4,244	5,022	5,286	5,956	+102.0%		116	237	+104.3%
General Arts and Music Extension subjects											
Dance	1,067	944	842	762	703	791	-25.9%		122	103	-15.6%
Drama	3,576	3,229	2,588	2,514	2,490	2,194	-38.6%		323	253	-21.7%
Film, Television & New Media	2,610	2,715	2,451	2,360	2,433	2,217	-15.1%		179	172	-3.9%
Music	2,471	2,373	2,295	2,161	2,170	2,136	-13.6%		287	274	-4.5%
Music Extension: Composition	191	234	218	170	188	159	-16.8%		87	78	-10.3%
Music Extension: Musicology	21	12	8	11	8	8	-61.9%		16	7	-56.3%
Music Extension: Performance	587	636	535	555	453	487	-17.0%		145	131	-9.7%
Visual Art	4,014	3,828	3,433	3,786	3,802	3,595	-10.4%		354	339	-4.2%

Notes: Decline/Increase Changes compare 2025 with 2020 and are rounded to one decimal place.

School counts exclude overseas providers and count distinct Queensland centres with at least one recorded Unit 4 enrolment. Scaling groups are descriptive: QTAC scaling varies by year and score position.

Source: QCAA Statistics, Subject Enrolments, 2020 onwards. Data captures enrolments in Unit 4: <https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/news-data/statistics>

2. The unintended consequences of ATAR and Scaling data

2.1 Scaling data encourages strategic subject selection

QTAC explains that students, rather than subjects, are scaled. In practice, however, scaling data are published and discussed by **subject**. During subject-selection processes, these reports can therefore operate as de facto rankings of subjects rather than descriptions of changing cohort composition.

The publication of school ATAR results and subject performance tables further encourages optimisation behaviours by students, families and schools.

Because identical raw results can contribute differently to an ATAR depending on the subjects studied, the current model creates opportunities for strategic subject selection without a corresponding improvement in demonstrated achievement (QTAC, 2025, 2026).

Students are encouraged to select subjects with historically favourable scaling, while schools can seek to improve headline ATAR outcomes by directing high-achieving students towards those subjects. QTAC's scaling reports and ATAR Navigator tool make this information readily available (QTAC, n.d.-b, 2025). A methodology intended to promote fairness therefore creates incentives that can advantage students and schools with the knowledge, resources and subject access needed to optimise the system.

These incentives contribute to attempts to 'game' the system, a central criticism of Queensland's former tertiary entrance arrangements in the Matters and Masters (2014) review. The evidence in this submission suggests that strategic behaviour remains embedded in the current system and may be more pronounced because scaling outcomes are now highly visible and easily modelled.

The following view places one student into the picture: Imagine she received **80/100** as a raw result. Between 2020 and 2025, those raw scores were scaled progressively lower across all Arts subjects. By 2025, a raw score of **80** scaled to **69.3**. Had that same student achieved a raw score of **80** in Specialist Mathematics, it would instead have scaled **up** to **94.5**. The difference of **25.2 scaled marks** for the same raw result raises a fundamental question about the assumption that scaling produces comparable outcomes across subjects. The trend is similarly observed at a raw score of 95. At the same time, subject enrolments have followed the same downward trajectory. While correlation alone cannot establish causation, the convergence of enrolment data, cumulative cultural messaging, and qualitative evidence suggests more than coincidence. As visualised overleaf, progressively lower-scaling subjects are consistently becoming the least subscribed.

2.2 Visualising scaling and enrolments together

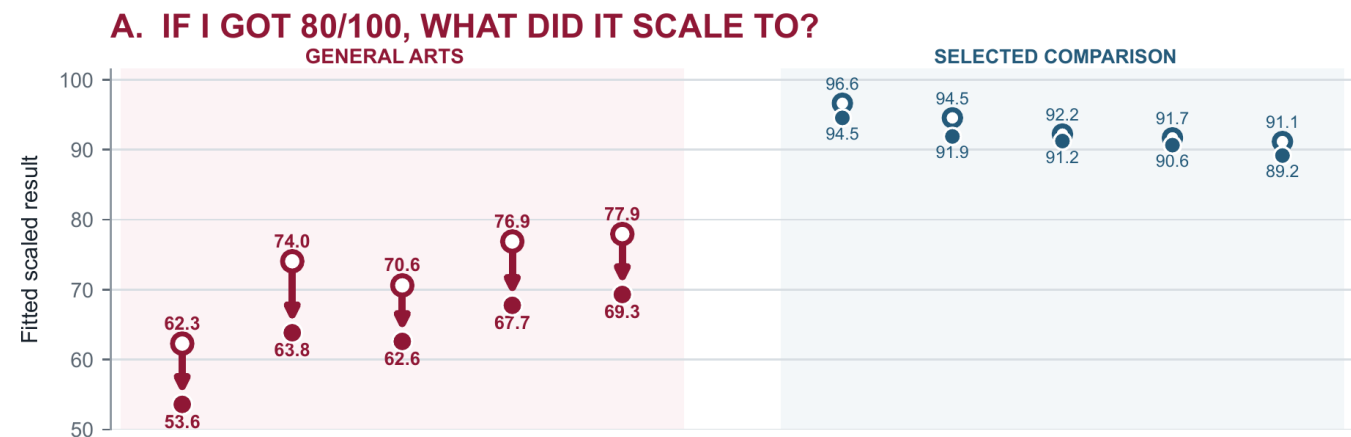
Taken together, the three panels below demonstrate a clear relationship between scaling outcomes and changing enrolment patterns. Between 2020 and 2025, the fitted scaled result for the same raw score declined substantially across every General Arts subject. In 2025, a raw score of 80 was scaled to between 53.6 and 69.3 in the Arts subjects, compared with between 89.2 and 94.5 in the selected comparison subjects. Even a raw score of 95 was scaled down to between 72.7 and 84.3 in the Arts, while the comparison subjects produced scaled results between 96.8 and 98.2.

Over the same period, Unit 4 enrolments declined across all five General Arts subjects, including Drama (-38.6%), Dance (-25.9%) and Film, Television & New Media (-15.1%). By contrast, enrolments increased in each selected comparison subject, most notably Engineering (+62.5%) and Specialist Mathematics (+46.4%). While the figure does not establish that scaling alone caused these changes, the alignment between increasingly unfavourable scaling and declining Arts enrolments indicates a concerning association between scaling outcomes and students' subject choices.

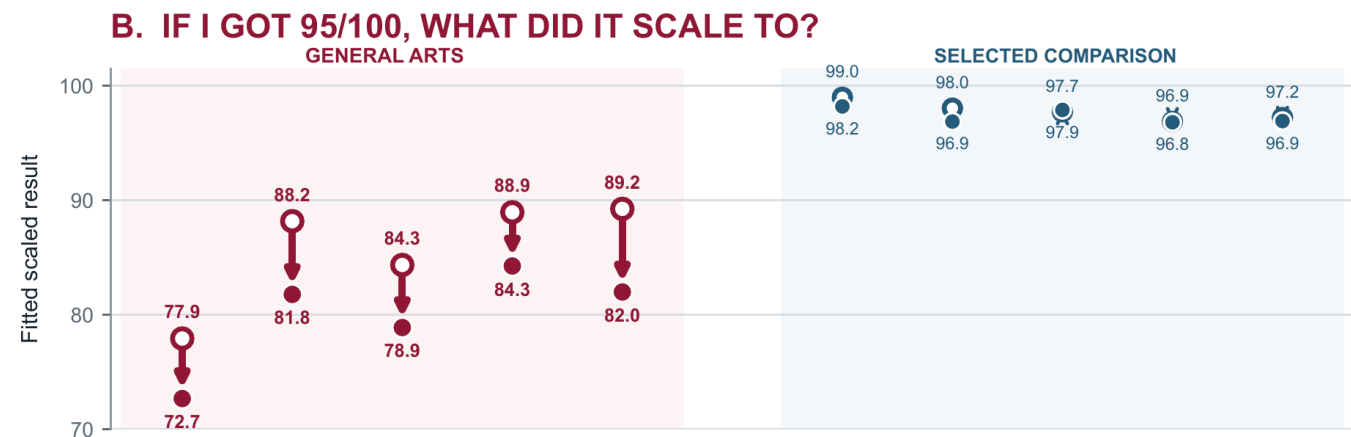
From 2020 (○) to 2025 (●)

Figure 4: Changes in fitted scaled results and Unit 4 enrolments for General Arts and selected comparison subjects, 2020–2025

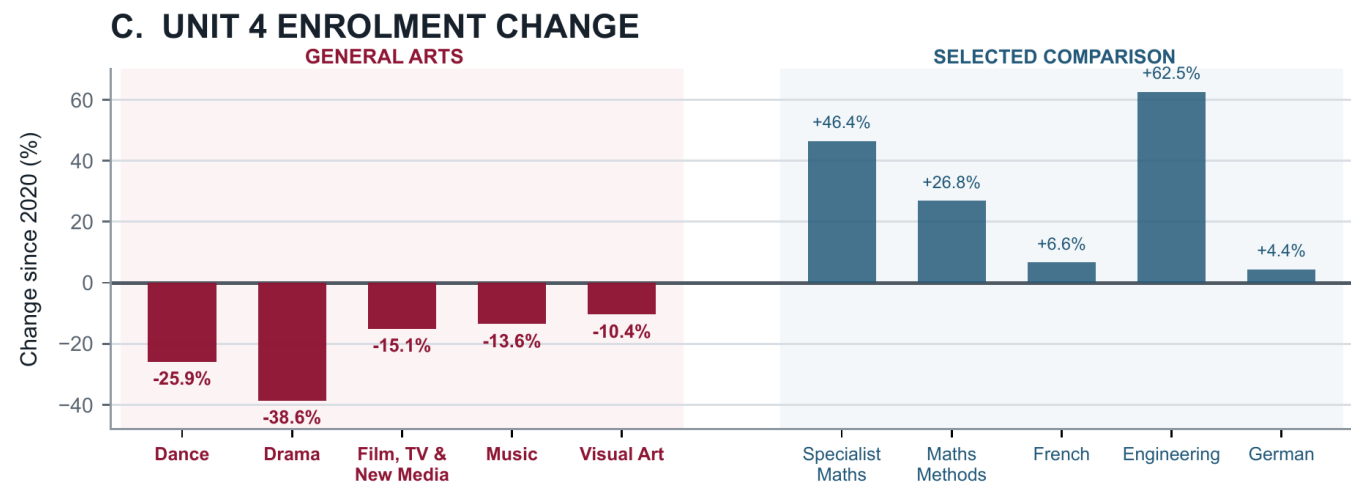
Panel A. Fitted scaled result for a raw score of 80, 2020 and 2025



Panel B. Fitted scaled result for a raw score of 95, 2020 and 2025



Panel C. Percentage change in Unit 4 enrolments by subject, 2020–2025



2.3 Student Evidence: Queensland Art Teachers' Association (QATA) survey

In 2025, QATA surveyed students in Queensland public, Catholic and Independent secondary schools to examine the effects of scaling on subject selection. The student survey received 1,279 responses from students on ATAR pathways and provides direct evidence of how scaling influences their decisions.

QATA Student Survey Findings

Responses were recorded from 1,279 ATAR pathwayed students from Public, Catholic and Independent schools in September 2025.

Question 1. Did subject scaling impact your subject choices for Senior?

70.9% of students agreed that subject scaling impacted their subject choices.

Question 2. If all subjects were scaled equally, would you choose to study an arts subject for Senior- such as Dance, Music, Drama, Film, Television and New Media or Visual Art- please select "yes" if you are already taking an Arts subject for Senior).

61% of students would choose to study an arts subject for Senior if all subjects were scaled equally.

Question 3. If you wanted to choose an Arts subject but didn't, what made you change your mind?

88.98% of students cited subject scaling as the primary reason for not selecting an arts subject.

Question 4. Which Arts subjects would you like to study if scaling was not an issue? Tick as many as you like.

These results appear in blue text in the table above to enable comparison of 2025 enrolments.

The QATA survey provides direct student evidence that helps explain the enrolment patterns shown in the preceding tables. Of the 1,279 participating students, 70.9% reported that scaling influenced their senior subject choices and 61% indicated that they would study an Arts subject if scaling were not an issue. Among respondents who wanted to choose an Arts subject but did not, **88.98% identified scaling as the primary reason**. These findings demonstrate that scaling is not simply being observed retrospectively in enrolment data; students report that it is actively shaping their decisions.

2.4 Discipline-specific evidence: ATOM Queensland Survey

Between May and July 2026, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Queensland surveyed teachers and students about the effects of the new QCE system and ATAR scaling on Film, Television & New Media (FTVNM). The findings provide discipline-specific evidence of the same patterns identified in the QATA data. The surveys received responses from 60 teachers and 162 students.

Teacher responses

- 90% reported that the new QCE system and ATAR scaling had led to a decline in FTVNM enrolments.
- 10% reported that FTVNM was no longer offered at their school because enrolments had become too low.
- 82% said the changes had negatively affected their mental health and wellbeing.
- 31% indicated they were considering leaving the teaching profession.

Student responses

- 38% reported being discouraged from selecting FTVNM.
- 42% said they had changed or decided against studying FTVNM because of the new QCE system and ATAR scaling.

Students identified the following reasons for being discouraged:

- 31% – "It scales poorly."
- 20% – Advice from family, friends, or parents.
- 17% – Perception that there are "no careers/jobs."
- 15% – Advice from a teacher or guidance officer.

In addition, 25% of student respondents said they had chosen a subject that ultimately did not run because of low enrolments, requiring them to select a different subject.

The qualitative responses provide insight into how perceptions of scaling translate into actual subject-selection decisions. Teachers reported that even highly capable students are moving away from FTVNM because they believe it may limit their tertiary options. One teacher described a recent example:

“Just this year my top FTVNM student transferred into Chemistry after one semester, telling me explicitly that he loves FTVNM but that he ‘wants an ATAR of 95+ and this subject makes that hard.’” (Teacher Response).

This account illustrates the tension between educational fit and ATAR optimisation. The student’s decision was not based on a lack of interest, aptitude or achievement in FTVNM, but on the perceived need to protect access to competitive university pathways. Student responses reflected the same concern:

“I almost didn’t take the subject due to scaling, as I wanted to keep my options open for university courses requiring higher ATAR scores.” (Student Response).

These responses reinforce the quantitative findings by showing how scaling influences behaviour at the point of subject selection. Students may perceive that choosing an Arts subject requires them to accept an ATAR penalty or restrict their future options, even when the subject aligns with their strengths and aspirations. When these individual decisions accumulate, they contribute to declining enrolments, composite classes and, ultimately, the discontinuation of subjects within schools.

The ATOM Queensland survey demonstrates how these system-wide pressures are experienced within one subject area. Teachers reported declining FTVNM enrolments, reduced subject provision and negative effects on their wellbeing, while students described being discouraged from selecting the subject because it was perceived to scale poorly. The findings connect the broader enrolment decline to its practical consequences: students losing access to desired subjects, teachers facing increasingly precarious programs, and some schools discontinuing FTVNM altogether.

3. Structural misalignments and inequities in Queensland’s ATAR system

3.1 Scaling outcomes are difficult to reconcile with comparable syllabus demands

Queensland’s General subject syllabuses were developed using Marzano and Kendall’s (2007) New Taxonomy, incorporating a progression from retrieval and comprehension to analysis and knowledge utilisation. Across the suite of General subjects, cognitive demands are intended to be comparable, while being expressed through discipline-specific knowledge and skills.

Analysis of the syllabus objectives indicates that The Arts subjects draw extensively on higher-order cognitive processes, including analysis, evaluation and justification, which reflect higher-order knowledge utilisation. Specialist Mathematics, the highest-scaled subject, assesses fewer distinct cognitive processes, while evaluation and justification also feature prominently in Dance, Drama, Visual Art, Music, and Film, Television & New Media.

One objective of Queensland’s new General syllabus system was to improve consistency across subjects through common syllabus architecture, assessment design, standards, cognitive verbs and external assessment. If these reforms were intended to strengthen comparability, the increasingly pronounced differences in inter-subject scaling between 2020 and 2025 require careful examination.

The following table demonstrates that Arts syllabuses require students to engage with higher-order cognitive processes, including analysis, evaluation, justification and creation. This challenges the perception that substantial downward scaling can be readily explained by lower cognitive demand in Arts subjects.

Note: The number of cognitive verbs is not, by itself, a complete measure of subject difficulty.

Table 10: Cognitive demands in selected Queensland General syllabuses, organised according to Marzano and Kendall’s New Taxonomy, 2025

Subject (number of syllabus objectives)	Retrieval (lowest)	Comprehension	Analysis	Knowledge Utilisation (highest)
Chemistry (6)		Describe	Apply Analyse Interpret	Evaluate Investigate
Physics (6)		Describe	Apply Analyse Interpret	Evaluate Investigate
Maths Methods (6)	Recall Use	Communicate		Evaluate Justify Solve
Specialist Maths (6)	Recall Use	Communicate		Evaluate Justify Solve
Dance (8)	Demonstrate		Organise and Apply Analyse Interpret	Realise Create Evaluate

Drama (8)	<i>Demonstrate</i>		<i>Apply</i> <i>Analyse</i> <i>Interpret</i>	<i>Manipulate</i> <i>Evaluate</i> <i>Justify</i>
FTVNM (9)			<i>Apply</i> <i>Analyse</i>	<i>Create</i> <i>Design</i> <i>Resolve</i> <i>Evaluate</i>
Music (9)	<i>Demonstrate</i> <i>Use</i>	<i>Explain</i>	<i>Apply</i> <i>Analyse</i> <i>Interpret</i>	<i>Evaluate</i> <i>Realise</i> <i>Resolve</i>
Visual Art (9)			<i>Apply</i> <i>Analyse</i> <i>Interpret</i>	<i>Implement</i> <i>Evaluate</i> <i>Justify</i> <i>Experiment</i> <i>Create</i> <i>Realise</i>
Economics (4)		<i>Comprehend</i>	<i>Analyse</i>	<i>Evaluate</i> <i>Create</i>
Engineering (7)	<i>Recognise</i> <i>Use</i>	<i>Describe</i> <i>Explain</i>	<i>Analyse</i> <i>Determine</i> <i>Symbolise</i>	<i>Synthesise</i> <i>Generate solutions</i> <i>Evaluate/Refine</i>

Because all General syllabuses require students to demonstrate comprehension, analysis and knowledge utilisation, substantial differences in scaling outcomes are difficult to reconcile with their stated cognitive demands. In 2025, for example, a raw Dance score of 72 scaled to 42.54. Standards-based raw results are derived from rigorous internal and external assessment and provide the most direct measure of a student's demonstrated achievement within a discipline. The extent to which scaling displaces that achievement therefore raises important questions of validity and equity.

Public discussion of “hard” and “easy” subjects can obscure this issue. The pronounced downward scaling of Arts results exposes a tension between QCAA’s standards-based syllabus design and the outcomes produced by QTAC’s cohort-based scaling methodology. QTAC states that students should be neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by their subject choices. Yet longitudinal Arts data indicate that even highly achieving students can receive markedly lower scaled results. A student capable of excelling in both STEM and Arts subjects may therefore be disadvantaged, for ATAR purposes, by choosing the Arts subject most closely aligned with their strengths and aspirations.

3.2 Scaling outcomes can become self-reinforcing

QTAC’s position that students, rather than subjects, are scaled is technically accurate. In practice, however, scaling outcomes are published and discussed by subject. Scaling reports, ATAR prediction tools and example student profiles repeatedly show particular subjects scaling up or down, reinforcing perceptions about their relative value and influencing subsequent subject-selection decisions.

QTAC’s technical documentation explains that scaled results quantify the competition required to achieve a particular raw result within each subject cohort. Yet the composition of those cohorts is itself influenced by previous scaling outcomes. High-achieving students may be encouraged towards subjects with historically favourable

scaling, while students are discouraged from subjects perceived to scale poorly. Changes in subject selection then alter cohort composition, which influences subsequent scaling outcomes and further reinforces perceptions about each subject.

Perceived scaling advantages may also attract students to subjects for which they have limited aptitude, preparation or interest. This can widen the range of readiness within classes, reduce teachers' capacity to teach at an appropriate pace and depth, and further influence the cohort patterns on which future scaling is based. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle in which past scaling outcomes shape student choices and future scaling outcomes.

3.3 Scaling may compound existing educational inequities

The effects of scaling may not be distributed evenly across Queensland's student population. Students in regional, remote and lower socioeconomic communities may have access to a narrower range of subjects, fewer specialist teachers and less individualised tertiary admissions advice. They may therefore have less capacity to construct subject combinations perceived to maximise their ATAR.

As declining enrolments lead schools to combine or discontinue subjects, these inequities can deepen. The consequences extend beyond ATAR-eligible students: once a subject is no longer offered, students undertaking ATAR, VET and other senior pathways all lose access to it. Scaling can therefore influence not only how students choose among available subjects, but also which subjects remain available for them to choose.

Differences in subject-enrolment patterns also raise equity concerns for female and First Nations students. QCAA's 2025 data show that female students comprise a substantial majority of enrolments in many subjects that generally scale down. These include Dance (97% female), Food and Nutrition, Health and Visual Art (each 80%), Psychology (76%), Design (71%), Drama (68%) and Agricultural Science (61%). By contrast, male students comprise the majority of enrolments in several subjects that generally scale up, including Engineering (82% male), Physics (67%), Economics (64%) and Specialist Mathematics (60%) (QCAA, 2026a).

A similar pattern is evident in QCAA's data (QCAA, 2026a), which use the category "Indigenous students." Subjects that generally scale up tend to have particularly low proportions of Indigenous students: 1% of enrolments in Engineering, Economics, Specialist Mathematics and Mathematical Methods, and 2% in Chemistry and Study of Religion. Higher proportions of Indigenous students are enrolled in several subjects that generally scale down, including Agricultural Science (6%); Dance and Visual Art (5%); and Drama, Film, Television & New Media, Physical Education and Health (4%).

These data do not indicate that gender or Indigenous status is explicitly considered within the scaling algorithm. They do, however, raise important questions about its distributional effects. Because students are not evenly represented across subjects, a methodology that consistently produces more favourable outcomes in some subject areas may indirectly advantage or disadvantage particular groups. Female and Indigenous students are more highly represented in several subjects that attract less favourable scaling outcomes, while many positively scaled subjects have predominantly male enrolments and very low Indigenous participation. The apparent neutrality of the methodology may therefore mask unequal consequences for different groups of students.

4. When “ATAR maxing” displaces educational fit

Students and teachers increasingly use the term “ATAR maxing” to describe the strategic selection of subjects based on their perceived scaling advantage rather than a student’s interests, strengths, aptitude or intended pathway. When ATAR maxing displaces educational fit, the costs are borne most directly by students whose capabilities and aspirations lie in subjects that consistently scale down.

In Dance, Music and languages, students may enter senior study with varying levels of prior experience, just as students enter Mathematics, Science and other subjects with different forms of prior knowledge and preparation. Prior experience, however, does not encompass the breadth of learning and assessment required within these senior subjects.

In Dance, for example, performance is only one component of a rigorous curriculum that requires students to choreograph, analyse, interpret, evaluate and justify while applying discipline-specific knowledge and skills. Prior performance training neither substitutes for this learning nor guarantees high achievement across the course. It is therefore inaccurate to interpret strong cohort performance as evidence that Dance is inherently easier or that students’ demonstrated achievement should carry less weight.

The same principle applies across disciplines. High achievement may reflect student aptitude, sustained effort, quality teaching and deep engagement with the subject. A scaling methodology should distinguish excellence from ease. When strong standards-based results are substantially reduced through scaling, students may reasonably perceive that excellence in some disciplines is valued less than achievement in others.

The publication of subject scaling tables and QTAC’s ATAR Navigator intensifies this concern by making historical scaling outcomes highly visible during subject-selection processes. Students whose strengths lie in subjects that generally scale down may be encouraged to prioritise ATAR maxing over educational fit. This can constrain individual potential, affect engagement and wellbeing, and contribute to declining participation in fields important to Queensland’s workforce, cultural development and economic prosperity.

These pressures are also evident beyond the Arts. In highly competitive pathways such as Medicine, students may avoid Biology despite its relevance to their intended tertiary studies because other subject combinations are perceived to produce a stronger ATAR. This raises a broader question: is senior subject selection preparing students for tertiary study and future careers, or primarily encouraging them to maximise their admission rank?

Queensland teachers frequently report that students are encouraged to choose subjects for scaling advantage rather than educational fit. In an August 2025 QATA member survey, 97% of teachers observed high-achieving students selecting subjects to optimise scaling, 64% reported declining numbers pursuing Arts-related higher education pathways, and 60% identified negative effects on student workload, anxiety and wellbeing. Drama Queensland and ATOM Queensland have received similar reports of capable students being discouraged from selecting Arts subjects by school leaders, guidance officers, parents and teachers.

These pressures can place educators in tension with the Queensland College of Teachers’ ethical obligations to prioritise student welfare and recognise individual strengths and aspirations (QCT, 2026). This concern is reinforced by the QATA student survey, in which 70.9% of 1,279 respondents reported that scaling influenced their senior subject choices. Together, these findings raise important questions about whether the current system adequately supports student agency, engagement and wellbeing.

5. Scaling compounds existing wellbeing and workforce pressures

The subject-selection pressures described above operate within a Queensland education system already experiencing significant wellbeing and workforce challenges. More than 70% of Queensland school leaders reported a decline in student wellbeing and engagement over the preceding 18 months, while 65% of Queensland teachers reported a significant decline in their wellbeing and morale in 2024, the highest proportion of any Australian state (Australian Education Union [AEU], 2024). These findings do not establish scaling as the cause of the broader decline, but they demonstrate the strained context within which scaling-related pressures are being experienced.

The QATA and ATOM Queensland surveys provide more direct evidence of these pressures. In the QATA teacher survey, 60% of respondents identified negative effects on student workload, anxiety and wellbeing. Among the 50 teachers who responded to the ATOM Queensland survey, 84% reported that the new QCE system, ATAR scaling and their effects on FTVNM had negatively affected their mental health and wellbeing. One teacher described the cumulative impact:

“Every day I feel less valuable as a teacher and as a person than someone who works in STEM. When QTAC publishes the scaling report, I get so anxious about coming to class the next day because the students always ask, ‘What’s the point if it scales so bad?’”

These findings suggest that scaling-related subject selection can compound existing wellbeing pressures. Students may enter subjects that are misaligned with their interests and strengths, affecting engagement and classroom dynamics, while Arts teachers face the continuing burden of defending their subjects, maintaining enrolments and supporting students who feel their achievement has been devalued.

Teacher shortages intensify these effects. In 2024, 78% of Queensland principals reported teacher shortages and 54% had unfilled positions (AEU, 2024). Declining subject enrolments can lead to composite classes, out-of-field teaching and increased workloads while reducing students’ access to specialist provision. In the ATOM Queensland survey, 62% of teacher respondents reported having been asked to retrain, teach outside their specialist areas or being told that their position was no longer available. A further 32% indicated that they were considering leaving the teaching profession.

Reduced Arts participation may also have broader implications for student and community wellbeing. Arts engagement is increasingly recognised as a protective factor associated with improved stress management, social connection and healthy behaviours, and with reduced risks of depression, cognitive decline and chronic illness (Fancourt, 2025). A system that discourages Arts participation may therefore diminish access to educational experiences that support individual wellbeing and broader social resilience.

6. Declining Arts participation undermines strategic priorities

Changes in subject participation in The Arts have implications for workforce capacity and the achievement of Queensland and Australian Government priorities. The decline in Arts participation is inconsistent with the ambitions of Australia's National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, and the Queensland Government's *Queensland's Time to Shine: a 10-year strategy for arts and culture 2025-2035*. Both policies depend on a sustainable pipeline of people with the knowledge, skills and experience required to contribute to Queensland's arts, cultural and creative sectors.

Gattenhof and Saunders (2026) identify an interrelated “polycrisis” across Australian arts and creative education, characterised by declining senior secondary Arts enrolments, falling participation in tertiary creative arts courses, and reductions in university programs and subject offerings. Their analysis found that Queensland experienced the largest decline in senior secondary Arts enrolments nationally, with participation falling by 45% between 2015 and 2023. They argue that declining school participation reduces the pool of students progressing into tertiary creative arts education, with long-term implications for Australia's broader “creative ecology” of policies, people, processes, places and products.

This trajectory sits in direct tension with *Revive* and *Time to Shine*, both of which seek to establish secure pathways into cultural and creative careers for young Australians, beginning with Arts education and continuing through vocational and tertiary training, employment and lifelong learning. By discouraging participation in senior Arts subjects and weakening pathways into tertiary study and creative professions, the current scaling system risks undermining the workforce capacity needed to realise these national and state policy ambitions. As Gattenhof and Saunders (2026) conclude, reversing declining Arts participation is not only a matter of cultural access; it is a necessary investment in the creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration capabilities required for contemporary work and society.

7. Tertiary Sector in Queensland

The effects extend from senior secondary schooling into Queensland's tertiary sector. As school Arts participation declines, the pool of students progressing into Creative Arts degrees also narrows. Queensland tertiary institutions have experienced substantial enrolment declines and course contraction. National Advocates for Arts Education data (2026) identify 13 Creative Arts courses discontinued in Queensland since 2020, with a further five experiencing substantial reductions in majors, units or offerings.

Closed courses include:

- James Cook University, discontinued Design and Creative Arts majors within Bachelor, 2023.
- Queensland University of Technology, discontinued Bachelor of Creative Arts: Dance, 2025. (Note: Dance moved from a Major to a Minor).
- Queensland University of Technology, discontinued Bachelor of Dance Performance, 2020.
- Queensland University of Technology, discontinued Bachelor of Technical Production, 2022.
- Southern Cross University, Associate Degree of Creative Writing, paused enrolments for standalone degree 2024. Teach out from 2025. (Number of units reduced, and from 2022 all SCU units moved to a 6-week term, class time was halved from 36 hours to 18 hours, increasingly online delivery only)
- Southern Cross University, discontinued Bachelor Art and Design, 2025.
- Southern Cross University, discontinued Bachelor of Contemporary Music, 2025.
- Southern Cross University, discontinued Bachelor of Digital Media, 2025.
- Southern Cross University, discontinued Honours in Visual Arts, 2021.
- University of Queensland, discontinued Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies, 2025.
- University of Queensland, discontinued Master of Museum Studies, 2025.
- University of Queensland, Major in Popular Music and Technology, 2025.
- University of Southern Queensland, discontinued Bachelor of Television and Radio Production, 2024.

Reductions in majors and units:

- Queensland College of Art and Design (Griffith University), Majors in Jewellery and Small Objects, and Print, significantly reduced and majors removed, 2022.
- Queensland Conservatorium (Griffith University), Bachelor of Music (all majors) reduced units, duration of lectures and lessons.
- Queensland University of Technology, reduction within the Bachelor of Fine Arts Acting course (program has been reduced from 14 specialist units to 8, and from 2025, it will be reduced to 6. Intake has expanded from 16 to 40. Hours in study have been significantly reduced).
- TAFE Queensland, reduction of enrolments/offerings in Diploma of Music, 2024.
- TAFE Queensland, reduction of enrolments/offerings in Diploma of Screen and Media, 2024.

Data from Gattenhof and Saunders (2026) also illustrate that Queensland tertiary institutions have experienced significant declines in student enrolments in undergraduate creative arts degrees. This research analysed undergraduate enrolment data from the Australian Government's Department of Education, comparing figures from 2018 to 2023. Several of the most affected providers are based in Queensland, including:

- **James Cook University, with a decline of 95.3%**
- **Queensland University of Technology, declining by 43.4%**
- **Southern Cross University, declining by 42.9%**
- **CQUniversity, declining by 39.0%**
- **Bond University, declining by 33.1%**
- **Queensland non-university higher education providers, declining by 30.3%**
- **Griffith University, declining by 19.6%**

Together, these data indicate a pipeline challenge rather than an isolated school-sector issue. Declining Arts participation at school is occurring alongside reduced tertiary enrolments, course closures and diminished provision, with long-term implications for Queensland's tertiary programs, creative workforce and cultural sector.

8. An admissions system that serves students and Queensland

Concerns about the narrowing effects of ATAR are not confined to this submission. Principals and education experts have publicly called for the rank to be reconsidered or abolished (Carey, 2023; Taylor, 2022), while international research identifies Queensland's change in credentialling as one factor associated with recent enrolment declines (Thomson, 2024). Queensland research similarly identifies the “excessive attention” given to ATAR calculations and the promotional use of results by schools as narrowing the purpose of senior secondary education (Pratt, 2026, p. 106).

Alternative approaches are already being investigated in Australia. The University of Melbourne's New Metrics for Success partnership is developing validated assessments of capabilities including communication, collaboration, citizenship and quality thinking. Its learner profiles are intended to provide a broader account of what students know and can do, with potential applications to university entrance and employment (Owens, 2022; University of Melbourne, n.d.). This work demonstrates that tertiary admissions can recognise a wider range of student capabilities while retaining rigorous, evidence-informed assessment.

QTAC's published commitment to adaptability recognises that “the education landscape is constantly evolving.” The current review provides an opportunity to act on that value by examining not only technical adjustments to the scaling methodology, but also the feasibility of piloting admissions measures that recognise the breadth of students' achievement and potential.

ATAR provides a moderate prediction of first-year university academic performance but is a weaker predictor of longer-term outcomes such as course completion (Manny et al., 2019; Pilcher et al., 2025). Nor is it designed to measure professional capability, engagement, wellbeing, creativity or long-term career potential. Its usefulness as one admissions measure should therefore not be conflated with a comprehensive assessment of a student's capacity to succeed.

The evidence supports broader consideration of tertiary admissions models that combine discipline-specific achievement, prerequisite knowledge, contextual factors and supported pathway options, rather than relying predominantly on a single aggregate rank. This approach is consistent with admissions principles adopted by UQ and QUT, which recognise prerequisite knowledge, academic capability, alternative pathways and an applicant's potential for success (Queensland University of Technology, 2026; The University of Queensland, 2025, 2026). Contemporary research also indicates that contextualised measures of academic achievement can support student diversity while predicting tertiary success more effectively than decontextualised measures used in isolation (Bastedo et al., 2023).

We therefore encourage QTAC and its stakeholders to use the current review as the beginning of a broader, evidence-informed examination of how Queensland's tertiary admissions system can support student potential, educational breadth, equity and successful transitions into further study.

Conclusion

The evidence presented across this submission reveals a coherent pattern. Since the introduction of the current ATAR arrangements, increasingly pronounced scaling differences have coincided with declining participation in Arts and other General subjects perceived to scale unfavourably. Teacher and student surveys show that these perceptions actively shape subject selection. As enrolments fall, schools reduce provision, tertiary pathways narrow, and inequities in access and opportunity deepen.

QTAC's current review is therefore both timely and consequential. It provides an opportunity to address the immediate effects of the scaling methodology and to consider whether Queensland's tertiary admissions system continues to serve students, universities and the wider community as intended.

The evidence suggests that incremental adjustments alone may not be sufficient to reverse entrenched patterns of subject avoidance and declining provision. More substantial reform should be considered, guided by fairness, transparency, educational breadth and the best interests of students, and aligned with the Queensland College of Teachers' Code of Ethics for Teachers in Queensland.

We urge QTAC and its stakeholders to respond with timely, evidence-informed action. Queensland needs a tertiary admissions system that supports student agency, values diverse forms of achievement and sustains the breadth of education required for future social, cultural and economic prosperity.

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