

Queensland's Tertiary Admissions System Is Shaping Secondary Education

Key findings and priorities for action

Coalition of Queensland Arts Professional Teacher Associations | 25 August 2026

THE KEY MESSAGE

Queensland’s tertiary admissions system should determine access to higher education, not define secondary education. It must support student choice, protect curriculum breadth and enable a broad and balanced secondary education.

The evidence indicates that urgent and significant reform is needed.

The effects of ATAR and inter-subject scaling now extend beyond the calculation of individual ranks. Evidence indicates that the system is influencing what students choose to study, what schools can sustain and offer, and students' access to a broad and balanced senior secondary education.

Two longitudinal patterns across every General Arts subject

PARTICIPATION			SCALING	
General Arts subject	Enrolment change 2020-25	Avg raw-to-scaled movement 2020	Avg raw-to-scaled movement 2025	More downward by 2025
Dance	-25.9%	-18.20	-24.48	6.28 pts
Drama	-38.6%	-8.85	-15.88	7.03 pts
Film, Television & New Media	-15.1%	-11.76	-18.10	6.34 pts
Music	-13.6%	-6.05	-12.45	6.40 pts
Visual Art	-10.4%	-5.24	-12.52	7.28 pts

General Arts enrolments fell by 20.3% between 2020 and 2025, representing 2,950 fewer subject enrolments.

What this shows: participation declined in every General Arts subject since the introduction of the ATAR system, while average downward movement from raw to scaled results became more pronounced in every subject.

Survey evidence from a member association (n=1279) indicates that students feel pressured to choose subjects they do not want to study because of perceived scaling advantages, moving them away from their interests and areas of strength.

71%	61%	89%
of students surveyed said scaling impacted their senior subject choices	of students would choose an Arts subject if scaling were not an issue	of students who wanted to study an Arts subject but chose not to said scaling influenced their decision

The issue is no longer simply how individual subjects are scaled. It is the cumulative effect of tertiary admissions practices on students’ subject choices, future pathways and workforce pipelines, contributing to an increasingly homogenised senior secondary curriculum across Queensland.

Two priorities for action

1. ACTION NOW

Stop and begin reversing the decline.

Urgent action is required to reduce the influence of scaling on subject-selection behaviour and prevent further erosion of curriculum breadth.

The shifts documented since 2020 are already affecting school provision. Waiting for longer-term reform risks allowing subject avoidance, declining enrolments and course closures to become further entrenched.

Subject closures are leaving arts teachers without viable teaching loads and contributing to their departure from the profession, compounding Queensland's teacher shortage.

The immediate priority should be for QTAC and Queensland universities to reform scaling and tertiary admissions processes to improve equity and enable students to choose subjects aligned with their strengths, interests and future aspirations.

2. REFORM NEXT

Investigate fairer tertiary admissions approaches.

Queensland should undertake a broad, transparent investigation of tertiary admissions approaches that promote equity, curriculum breadth and successful transition to further study.

Immediate reform of the scaling methodology is essential, but broader changes to tertiary admissions may also be needed to reverse entrenched patterns of strategic subject selection.

The investigation should consider approaches that give appropriate weight to demonstrated QCAA achievement, prerequisite knowledge, contextual factors, alignment with intended pathways and diverse student capabilities.

The August meeting with QTAC

On 13 August 2026, coalition representatives met with QTAC CEO Chris Veraa. QTAC confirmed that its Technical Working Group has undertaken a 12-month study of the ATAR methodology and acknowledged concerns about the impact of scaling on student subject choices and the urgency of the issues raised.

QTAC advised that alternative approaches have been investigated using previous data, including removing non-ATAR eligible students from the scaling methodology, grouping cognate subject cohorts into scaling bands, and potentially removing inter-subject scaling and using QCE results. These were approaches examined, not agreed recommendations.

The meeting confirmed two things: the concerns are understood, and alternatives are possible. However, there is currently no commitment to change the ATAR or inter-subject scaling methodology, while clearly documented negative impacts continue.

Responsibility is shared

QTAC emphasised that it operates within a broader education and tertiary admissions system and cannot make significant changes in isolation. Responsibility therefore extends across QTAC, Queensland universities, QCAA, government and the schooling sectors.

Coordinated action is required from the institutions that collectively shape and sustain Queensland's tertiary admissions framework.

Community-developed evidence

The submission also draws on analysis developed by members of the Queensland education community through The Hive Assembly, including statewide and subject-level visualisations of changing senior subject enrolments. This work complements QCAA and QTAC data, student and teacher surveys, academic research and professional association evidence.

The Hive Assembly: thehiveassembly.com

Reform must begin now, before declining enrolments, subject closures and the loss of specialist teachers become even harder to reverse.

Data note: 'Average movement' is the mean difference between the five raw-score reference points published in QTAC's annual scaling report and their corresponding scaled results. It is not an enrolment-weighted average of the scaling experienced by every student.

Full evidence paper: [The Unintended Educational Consequences of Subject Scaling in Queensland \(20 July 2026\)](#).