

Foreword and Summary of Key QTAC Information

The Role of QTAC

The Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd (QTAC) is the outsourced service provider to Queensland and selected interstate tertiary institutions for centralised admissions services. QTAC acts on behalf of participating universities, TAFE Queensland and tertiary colleges to publish course information and entry requirements, to provide application materials, and to receive and process student applications. In total QTAC services 17 institutions. QTAC is a public, not-for-profit company funded mainly through institutions' contributions and applicant charges. QTAC aims to assist tertiary institutions and applicants alike.

A Board of Directors appointed from member organisations, governs QTAC. As at June 2004 the Board comprised the following Directors:

- Professor Paul Thomas, Vice-Chancellor, University of the Sunshine Coast (*Chair*)
- Professor Glenice Hancock, Vice-Chancellor and President, Central Queensland University
- Professor William Lovegrove, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Southern Queensland
- Professor Bernard Moulden, Vice-Chancellor and President, James Cook University
- Mr Douglas Porter, Secretary & Registrar, The University of Queensland
- Mr Colin McAndrew, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Administration), Griffith University
- Dr Carol Dickenson, Registrar, Queensland University of Technology
- Mr Ian Hawke, Director of the Office of Higher Education Queensland as the representative for the Director General, Education Queensland.

Key Statistics:

The *Statistical Report* presents a substantial amount of information for use by multiple parties for multiple purposes. Although one of QTAC's key outcomes is seen as tertiary offers for qualified applicants, the data that supports these offers is also viewed as important. The significant trends apparent from the 2003-2004 admissions year *Statistical Report* are outlined below.

- ***Applications:*** A total of 54,641 applications were received and processed for 2004 first semester entry. This was a decrease of 2.1% on the 55,787 applications for first semester 2003. Approximately 41% of applicants were current Queensland Year 12 students. Table 1 shows summary application figures for the 2003-2004 admissions period and Table 2 gives a comparative analysis of quota applications 1976-2004.

In 2003-2004 the overall acceptance rate was 78.6% while the enrolment rate was 68.6% compared with an acceptance rate of 78.2% and an enrolment rate of 67.8% in 2002-2003.

- *Queensland Year 12 Students:* There were 39,359 students (28,544 OP eligible and 10,815 OP ineligible) reported to QTAC by the Queensland Studies Authority compared with 39,314 (28,170 OP eligible and 11,144 OP ineligible) the previous year.

22,296 (56.6%) of 2003 Queensland Year 12 students applied for entry in 2003-2004 compared with 22,795 (58.0% of 2002 Year 12 students) in 2002-2003. The number of OP eligible students applying to QTAC decreased from 21,598 (76.7% of OP eligible students) in 2002-2003 to 21,316 (74.7% of OP eligible students) in 2003-2004. The number of OP ineligible students decreased by 3.0% and the number applying to QTAC also decreased from 1,197 (10.7% of OP ineligible students) to 980 (9.1% of OP ineligible students).

QTAC is unable to report on the level of institution direct entries that augment the Year 12 tertiary applicant pool. Table 20 shows summary application figures for current Queensland Year 12 students and Table 22 gives a comparative analysis of Queensland Year 12 applications 1976-2004.

In 2003-2004 the overall acceptance rate for Queensland Year 12 applicants was 78.6% while the enrolment rate was 70.5% compared with an acceptance rate of 78.9% and an enrolment rate of 70.9% in 2002-2003.

- *Demand for Courses:* 1,451 courses (an increase of 6.8% over the previous year) were offered through QTAC in 2003-2004. Supply and demand for particular courses and areas of interest varies from year to year, however, there continues to be many university and TAFE courses that are highly competitive. Gauging the real demand for a course is not reflected solely by the number of applicants to places but also by the cut-offs and medians for the course. Table 3 gives an analysis of applications by course. There were 35,874 places at Queensland universities and 8,207 at TAFE institutes.

- *Offers:* Although there were fewer applicants in 2003-2004 than in 2002-2003, there was an increase in both offers and enrolments. A total of 46,333 applicants (an offer rate of 84.8%) received at least one offer of a quota place compared with 45,928 applicants receiving offers (an offer rate of 82.3%) in 2002-2003. Applicants may receive additional offers as a result of more places becoming available in preferences higher than the ones originally offered, or as a result of changing preferences for consideration in later offer rounds.

- *Enrolments:* As at the census date of 31 March 2004, 31,762 applicants had accepted places and were undertaking courses. The enrolment rate overall was 68.6% in 2003-2004 compared with 67.8% in 2002-2003, representing an increase of 623 students enrolled in 2004 compared with 2003. The enrolment rate for current Queensland Year 12 students was 70.5% in 2003-2004 compared with 70.9% in 2002-2003.

- *Deferments:* A further 2,693 offered applicants had sought and been granted deferment of their enrolment until 2005. Those applicants not permitted to defer may re-apply through QTAC the following year.

- *Gender:* The majority of applicants and enrolments were female, accounting for 32,757 (or 59.9%) of total applications and 59.3% of total enrolments. For current Queensland

Year 12 students 12,842 (57.6%) applicants were female as were 8,200 (56.8%) of those enrolled. Table 4 gives an analysis of applications by gender and age group.

- *Mode of Attendance:* The number of commencing students attending classes full-time this year was 27,821 (or 87.6%). Table 5 provides further information on mode of attendance by level of course and institution.
- *Field of Education - Applications:* The decrease in applications for Information Technology courses continued with only 2,239 applicants listing an Information Technology course as their first preference. This compares with 2,785 first preferences in 2002-2003, (a decrease of 19.6%), 3,587 first preferences in 2001-2002 and 4,440 first preferences in 2000-2001, an overall decrease in three years of 49.6%.
- *Field of Education – Acceptance and Enrolment Rates:* The highest acceptance rate was in both the Education and Architecture and Building Fields of Education (83%) followed by Information Technology (82%) and Engineering (81%). The highest enrolment rate was in the Education Field with an enrolment rate of 74%. An analysis of applications by Field of Education including acceptance and enrolment rates is shown in Table 9.
- *Field of Education – Gender and Age Group:* For applicants in all age groups Society and Culture was the most popular Field of Education with 22.1% of applicants listing one of these courses as their first preference. It was the preferred choice of 24.8% of females and 18.1% of males. The second choice for females was the Health Field of Education (21.0%), whereas for males it was Management and Commerce (17.7%). Males continue to dominate in the Engineering (89.7%) and Information Technology (83.4%) Fields of Education. Tables 11, 12 and 13 provide additional data on applications by Field of Education by gender and age group.
- *Field of Education – Queensland Year 12 Students:* For current Queensland Year 12 students the highest acceptance rate was in the Education and Natural and Physical Sciences Fields of Education (both 85%) followed by Engineering and Architecture and Building (both 83%). The highest enrolment rate was in Natural and Physical Sciences (80%) and then Education and Engineering (both 77%). Table 30 has an analysis of applications for Queensland Year 12 students by Field of Education including acceptance and enrolment rates.
- *Mid-Year 2003:* The number of courses being offered for mid-year admissions increased with 598 courses offered in mid-year 2003 compared with 558 in mid-year 2002, an increase of 7.2%. Mid-year applications numbered 5,441. Of these, 3,996 applicants (73.4%) received an offer of a place, and 2,855 were enrolled at 31 August 2003, representing an enrolment rate of 71.4%.

Summary of Business Changes at QTAC

QTAC operates through closely linked functional divisions that combine to support, service and deliver the activities of the Company for institutions and applicants. Each division cooperates to deliver timely, efficient and cost effective services.

During 2003-2004 there were a number of changes within QTAC that contributed to enhancement of service offerings or the background functioning of QTAC. The divisions of QTAC each undertook investigations and projects to enhance services and meet emerging needs. The divisions are:

- Public Relations and Information Services;
- Production and Assessment Services;
- Information Technology;
- Commercial Services;
- Office of the CEO.

The main activities and initiatives covered by QTAC divisions during the 2003-2004 admissions period are outlined in each of the functional reports. It is however important to stress that the functions of each division interlink and support each other to produce the consolidated outcomes of the business.

Public Relations and Information Services

- ***Market Sector Changes:*** This year there were a great number of changes triggered by the Higher Education Reforms. One of the key features of the Higher Education Support Act 2003 was the deregulation of student contributions. This, in conjunction with far more tertiary courses being provided on a full-fee basis, resulted in a major push to try to provide comprehensive cost information to prospective students. Unfortunately the timelines for the *QTAC Guide* publication were such that not all institutions were able to provide the extent of information that they perhaps would have ideally wished to provide. The provision of meaningful course cost information to the prospective applicant pool will continue to be a focus for the near future.
- ***Tertiary Advice and Counselling Services (TACS):*** Services are generally delivered through workshop and one-on-one sessions. This year saw an expansion in the number of applicants accessing the Personal Competencies and STAT Preparation workshops. The Tertiary Entry workshops for school and institution personnel were heavily subscribed with additional sessions offered to cope with demand. TACS counsellors conducted 1,073 individual counselling appointments. Positive reports of the counselling services were reported in the media, reinforcing the important public relations role the service provides.
- ***Enquiry Rates:*** Staff responded to 81,824 enquiries over the year. Most enquiries are still received by phone, however email enquiries continue to grow in number.
- ***Service Enhancements:*** This year the mid-year admissions period saw the introduction of web-only applications and the availability of a pre-payment voucher system as an alternative to payment by credit card. Various promotional activities, including the development of a comprehensive brochure outlining all application procedures, dates and services, were used to inform prospective applicants of the changed application processes.
- ***Web Enhancements:*** In August 2003 QTAC launched its new website. QTAC's website aims to:
 - Improve customer service – by having pertinent information easily accessible via the web medium,

- Increase business - through new clients choosing to use QTAC services,
- Promote the services QTAC provides, including application and Online Services for current applicants, and
- Promote QTAC member and participating institutions.

Currently there are approximately 1,500 pages of information on the QTAC website (including about 900 pages dedicated to institution course details). In order to maintain this information and to monitor and improve the functionality of the QTAC website, a Web Maintenance Group was formed. This Group is responsible for evaluating website enhancement suggestions, reviewing web maintenance processes and analysing web access statistics. Feedback from users suggests that this enhanced web information and a FAQs section on the website has provided timely assistance to prospective applicants.

The new website has been well received by the public and based on quarterly calculations, the number of unique visitors to the QTAC website in the 2003-2004 financial year was over 30% higher than in the previous year.

- *Promotion:* QTAC worked closely with the media ensuring that the organisation was regularly profiled through editorial, pictorial and educational features.

Production and Assessment Services

- *Enhancements to Assessment Procedures:* In order to ensure consistent and efficient application of QTAC's qualification assessment rules and procedures, which incorporate institutions' admissions rules and policies, QTAC's Admissions System software contains a number of assessment modules which are automatically invoked as part of the assessment process.

During 2003 and 2004 some of these modules were modified at the request of institutions to add new functionality or to effect changed institution policy. Significant efforts had been undertaken by QTAC staff to assist, and in many cases, draft the specifications leading to successful implementation of these changes.

Other procedural enhancements included QTAC notifying applicants of undisclosed studies revealed by assessment processes. A project commenced to establish a set of standard test applicants to confirm the validity of assessments and system functioning over the course of an admissions period.

- *Working Party on Common Assessment:* As part of its regular review of assessment schedules and to keep abreast of the latest developments internationally, amendments were made to QTAC's schedules to incorporate changes relating to Year 12 systems in a number of countries.

Other significant activities and changes included:

- Implementation of recommendations for assessment of AQF Diplomas and Certificates based on the cohort study recommendations.
- Amendments to a range of schedules from the USA to reflect recent initiatives in Senior Secondary education including changes to the format and reporting of the USA Scholastic Aptitude Tests.

- An ongoing review of the assessment schedules pertaining to GCE 'A' Level schedules with recommendations to be tabled at the 2005 Working Party on Common Assessment.
 - A revision of Schedule V1001: Vocational Experience, consistent with Version 2 of the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO).
- *Expanded Mid-year Admissions:* In response to institutions' needs for more flexible offer timetables outside of the traditional first and second semester commencements, QTAC extended its mid-year processing activities to span a period from April to September with offer rounds in April (for a May intake), June and July (for the traditional second semester July intake) and August (for a September intake). Coupled with this extension was a move to web-only applications to accommodate the dynamic nature of course offerings and availabilities for each of the intakes.
 - *TAFE December Offer Round Trial:* QTAC trialled an extension to the December offer round processing to include a number of selected TAFE Queensland courses not normally offered until January. Following a review of the trial, QTAC has decided to extend this early offering of courses to other institutions subject to compliance with rules and procedures designed to ensure that no applicants are disadvantaged by the process.

Information Technology

During the past year, QTAC's Information Technology staff processed almost 600 specific change requests relating to its information systems and infrastructure. The vast majority of these changes were classified as enhancements to QTAC's admissions software and associated processes in order to accommodate the changing needs of clients and to introduce efficiencies into QTAC's practices. The year's IT highlights included:

- *QTAC's New Public Web Site:* Design and development work of the new web site started in the previous 12 month period and was completed in time for an August 2003 launch. All work for this site, including design and graphics, was completed in-house using existing resources. Content publishing processes were developed to reduce the reliance on the Information Technology Section for maintenance activities.
- *Commissioning of the Java Version of QTAC's Admissions Software:* QTAC's admissions processes were run on the Java version of its software for the first time in 2003-2004. Although not without some problems, the converted software ran satisfactorily during that period and all processes were completed accurately and on schedule.
- *Electronic Delivery of Correspondence:* During 2003-2004, applicants were given an option to receive correspondence from QTAC electronically rather than by traditional postal services. The process was introduced in October 2003 with almost 1/3 of applicants registering for the service. For mid-year admissions approximately 50% of applicants registered for the service. The process has the potential to considerably reduce mail turnaround time for QTAC and applicants alike and to provide cost savings for QTAC.
- *Electronic Production of Section 3 of the QTAC Guide:* The *QTAC Guide* is the handbook of courses offered through QTAC. For the first time, Section 3 of the 2005

QTAC *Guide* (the course descriptions and entry requirements) was produced directly from information stored in XML files using formatting objects technologies. A web-based editor developed by QTAC was used to edit this data prior to publication and will be used by institutions in the coming year to maintain their course information.

- *Pre-paid Payment Options:* To offer flexible payment options to applicants during the 2004 mid-year web-only admissions period, QTAC introduced a pre-paid voucher system for the payment of QTAC's processing and other charges. Implementation of this system required substantial changes to the fees module of the QTAC admissions software.
- *Multiple Databases for Web and Phone Services:* QTAC's need to extend admissions coverage beyond traditional semester starts meant that Web and Interactive Voice Response services had to be enhanced to transparently cover multiple simultaneous admissions databases. This was completed for applicant services in August 2003 and will be extended to the Apply by Web software by late 2004. This enhancement meant that QTAC admissions were open for all except 4 weeks of the year (offer rounds excluded).
- *Standardisation of Address Formats:* In order to assist institutions with their management of address information in their student records systems, QTAC introduced controls designed to enforce standard address formats for applicants regardless of the data source.
- *Multiple Simultaneous Offers:* In 2002-2003, QTAC began offering full-fee places for some institutions' courses. Applicants receiving a full-fee offer were, in some cases, also eligible to be offered a HECS place resulting in potentially two simultaneous QTAC offers. Following the successful trial, substantial programming work was undertaken in 2003-2004 to formalise and automate the full-fee offering process.
- *Replacement of Primary Database Server:* QTAC's primary database server was replaced in August 2003 without interruption to on-going services.
- *Performance Enhancements – Web Services:* Admissions seasonality results in information technology infrastructure being subject to short periods of very high peak demand. Performance enhancements to QTAC's Web services software resulted in a capacity to accommodate these peaks with, at the same time, lower utilisation levels of the supporting infrastructure.
- *Support for the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC):* SATAC are licensed users of QTAC's admissions software. QTAC provided continuing support for SATAC's usage of this software.

Commercial Services and the Office of the CEO

A number of additional services and activities are delivered under an administrative banner including governance and strategy. QTAC continues to pursue its three strategic themes with various activities undertaken to achieve stated aims and targets:

- *Secure and Strengthen Business / Revenue Sources:* Although the majority of the business activities were directed to enhancing the existing service levels and service offerings for applicants and institutions, activities were also directed at service extensions and new service offerings. In terms of service extensions, QTAC explored and continues to explore a postgraduate service option, a public qualification assessment service and an alternative service model for institutions. In terms of new

service offerings QTAC focused its efforts on service extensions based around its existing technology with preliminary feasibilities for WebARTS (now *QualSearch*) being completed.

- *Secure and Strengthen IT Model and Facilities:* Significant effort was directed at enhanced security, control and monitoring activities for systems and user activity. Additional work was undertaken within the system licensing area to assist in the expansion and protection of system usage.
- *Secure and Strengthen its Governance Model:* Under this topic the activities of the organisation were split into financial, Board related and organisational development.
 - Financial: Enhancements to the integrated reporting pack were made including statutory reporting activities. Tracking of functional activities is now possible through changes to the chart of accounts.
 - Change of Directors: During the year Professor Peter Swannell, Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Southern Queensland and Professor Glenice Hancock, Vice-Chancellor and President of Central Queensland University, retired from the Board of QTAC. Professors Swannell and Hancock had been active Directors, participants and supporters of QTAC for a number of years. Their services have been much appreciated. Following their retirement, QTAC welcomed Professor William Lovegrove and Professor John Rickard to the Board.
 - The Board of QTAC moved from an annual rotation of the Chair to an optional 2-year term at the discretion of the existing Chair. Professor Paul Thomas chose to undertake a second term.
 - Organisational Development: The organisation made significant efforts at improved internal communication especially between layers of management and across divisions. Joint discussion group meetings were held, social functions arranged, division meetings regularly conducted and a weekly briefing to staff prepared. Staff participation has also been improved through the use of project groups and a team approach to implementing change.

In Summary

In a rapidly changing business environment and with an educational sector that is addressing substantial competitive pressure and legislative change, the challenges for QTAC will continue into the future. The Board recognises that the past challenges have been addressed with operational efficiency and in an innovative manner. This spirit is commended in the staff and management of QTAC. As a result, the Board looks forward to the future knowing that QTAC will positively address the challenges for institutions and applicants alike.

This report has been prepared by staff of the Planning, Statistics and Research Section, namely Ms Dianne Keene and Ms Ingrid Andrews. Should you wish to provide feedback or seek assistance on matters related to this *Statistical Report*, please contact:

Ms D Keene
QTAC, PO Box 1331, Milton, Queensland 4064 or
Email dianne.keene@qtac.edu.au

Thanks is also given to the many participants of institutions, stakeholders and interested parties who contribute to the operations of QTAC on an annual basis. The Board looks forward to the future support of these entities.

It is with pleasure that I present the twenty-eighth report of the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd, entitled *Statistical Report 2003-2004*.

Professor Paul Thomas
Chair, Board of Directors
Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd.