

## CHAPTER 2 - CONDUCTING THE PROJECT

### 2.1 APPROACH

- 2.1.1 The project was undertaken through a grant made by the then Department of Employment, Education, Training, and Youth Affairs under the 1998 Higher Education Innovation Program (HEIP).
- 2.1.2 The project's general purpose was to address the need to assess, for tertiary entrance purposes, the increasingly varied profile of qualifications and experiences of young people by creating and piloting for school-leavers and other young people a comprehensive assessment method based on alternative evidence used in conjunction with or in lieu of the TER.
- 2.1.3 The approach used for the project was to address the actual potential for creating such a method in the real context of Queensland secondary and tertiary education and training. The plan was to start from current practices, expectations, accumulated experiences, assumptions, and acceptable directions for change, as reported on, eg in Chapter 3, and as would emerge from consultations.

### Objectives

- 2.1.4 To do this, some objectives were adopted, to:
- explore the character of the project target group, seen in general terms as being 16-19 year olds who may or may not have followed a conventional senior schooling route;
  - identify the extent and nature of the need to assess the qualifications and experiences of members of the group for tertiary entrance purposes;
  - map the extent and availability of selection evidence;
  - propose a methodology for the use of such evidence;
  - pilot the use of the methodology; and
  - report analytically and descriptively on the findings and outcomes of the project.

## Method of Working

2.1.5 The methods for working on the project were chosen to suit those objectives and in a way that would base the procedural recommendations as far as possible on extensions of existing practice and practitioner values in Queensland, and set it in a Queensland and national strategic context.

2.1.6 The working methods were therefore made up of these sorts of activity (Where appropriate, references are given to the investigative and analytical chapters of this report, where details of the work, and documentary sources, can be found.):

- Use, in general terms, an **iterating, descriptive, action-research methodology** leading to development of a solution well grounded in informed opinion.
- Draw on the **processes and knowledge of QTAC** – as a body owned and directed by higher-education institutions - and of the project team members themselves, through consultation and reflection. (Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6)
- Consult the officers of other **expert bodies** active in this field (such as BSSSS, TEPA<sup>1</sup>, TAFE, Universities, schools, private tertiary providers). Sets of consultations were conducted with 6 tertiary institutions, 12 expert bodies and relevant review teams – including QTAC and 3 interstate admissions centres, and six substantial regional and metropolitan secondary schools selected because of their innovation in this field. (Chapters 4,5,6)
- Conduct extensive **field investigations in tertiary institutions and schools**. Undertake analysis to test assumptions, and to map critical practices in non-conventional admissions practices for school-leavers. Place special emphasis on potentially useable non-conventional evidence, and non-conventional ways used by institutions of making admissions decisions. (Chapters 4, 5)
- Investigate and describe evidence availability and capture, and management and operation, of selection decision making in **two real-time natural experiments** located in higher-education bodies – Queensland University of Technology, and Griffith University, Logan Campus. (Chapters 4, 5)
- Undertake concurrently a **critical consideration of assumptions and concepts** underlying the project. Draw on field consultations, historical data bases - eg in QTAC, TEPA, government departments, and institutional alternative admissions schemes - and on reports of relevant

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<sup>1</sup> (Queensland) Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority.

agencies and public policy reviews related to the school-leaver age range. (Chapters 3, 6)

- Consider **salient features of the environment** from which those assumptions are drawn, and contextual trends, and map the likely range of relevant evidence about individuals in the target group and explore its practical availability. (Chapter 4)
- Use outcomes of field investigations to establish a view of the rationality of the **core assumptions about the project's target population**, and connecting notions of access, opportunity, and selection chronology. (Chapter 6)
- Research and postulate a **method for making admission decisions** for entry to tertiary courses using individually relevant sub-sets of codified and uncoded qualitative and para-quantitative data. (Chapter 5)
- **Trial** the method.

2.1.7 As the outcomes of the two main strands of fieldwork and consideration of core assumptions were drawn together, serious questions arose about the sense of conducting a trial. As has been discussed in detail in Chapter 6, and to some extent in Chapter 3, the project team developed strong doubts about the usefulness and practicability of proceeding with the development and introduction of such a model.

2.1.8 This was especially because of concerns about the apparent decline in durability of conventionally held assumptions about the timing and basis for transition of school-leavers to tertiary education. Further, it recognised the multiplicity of alternative avenues for access that now exist, and more that would be available to school-leavers if the centrality of those conventional assumptions were questioned.

2.1.9 Thus, the project did develop a model for making admissions decisions using alternative evidence (Chapter 5), but it did not proceed to trial, and efforts were directed to the matter of examining core assumptions in a better developed way so as to form a contemporary view on tertiary transition practices and routes. (Chapter 6)

## 2.2 CONDUCTING AND CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROJECT

### QTAC Project Team

2.2.1 The Project Director was Avril McClelland, Managing Director of QTAC Ltd since 1980. She was assisted by John Topley as Associate Project Director. Bryan Kearns, Assistant Manager Production and Assessment Services, QTAC, whose scholarship and comprehensive experience in tertiary selection and admissions in a number of spheres, gave core strength to the project.

- 2.2.2 The project engaged Professor Royce Sadler, Faculty of Education, Griffith University as Professional Adviser to the project. He provided a strong discipline to analytical discussions and participated in synthesising findings and solutions. He periodically reviewed and criticised the work. The project is deeply indebted to his insight and constructive contributions, drawing on his years of experience in dealing with qualitative research and measurement issues, both in his academic research, and in investigation and application in such bodies as BSSSS.
- 2.2.3 Direct support in the professional conduct of the project was given by Rosie Teague and Kylie Poole, whose extensive social research skills were seen in the planning and conduct of field work, the discovery and analysis of data, and development of the project's direction.
- 2.2.4 Jo Connah's patient recall of her assessment of many applications based on personal competencies brought considerable understanding of issues to do with alternative admissions evidence and its handling – and with qualitative and quantitative admissions evidence.
- 2.2.5 Dianne Keene, Assistant Manager, Planning, Statistics and Research, commands QTAC's vast collection of data on its admissions functions and its clientele, and contributed statistical understanding and data to the project.
- 2.2.6 Katya Fairlie and Linda Hanvey, QTAC Managing Director's office, used their computing skills and mastery of the refinements of using words to prepare and edit this report.

### **Contributors to the Project**

- 2.2.7 Many people and their institutions generously agreed to be consulted during the project, and some participated in the fieldwork through permitting observation of their admissions activities, or taking part with the project team in taking advantage of their actual admissions work to conduct "natural" experiments or to investigate the detailed judgmental processes used when dealing with varying sets of quantitative and qualitative admissions data.
- 2.2.8 The project team deeply appreciates this multitude of contributions to the project. Here we mention just a few of those agencies and their professional people who especially informed the work:
- The Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, its Director John Pitman, and staff.
  - The Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority, its Executive Director Bernadette Roberts, and the research staff.

- The Australian National Training Authority, and Claire Field, Project Manager.
- The project support staff for the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce 2001.
- The research staff of the Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Statistical, research, and special project staff of Education Queensland.
- Department of Training and Industrial Relations.
- Brisbane Girls' Grammar School, its Principal, Judith Hancock AM, and staff, who illustrated schooling responding to individual needs, and building direct pathways to tertiary study.
- Gympie State High School, its Principal, Jeanette Gentle, and staff, who introduced the project to the range of internal and external evidence available and recorded.
- Caloundra State High School, its Principal, Kerry Emery, and staff, who assisted in a similar way.
- Helensvale State High School, its Principal, Glenn Hopper, and staff, who illustrated the extensive external vocational experience program they conduct, and the character of qualitative evidence supplied or available from employers.
- Everton Park State High School, Year 12 students who provided access to their personal portfolios.
- Redlands College, Head of Vocational Studies, Christine Klee.
- Board of Directors, Queensland Institutes of TAFE.
- Bond University, Deans, and Admissions staff, who provided useful insights into the University's extensive use of quantitative and qualitative admissions evidence.
- Griffith University, staff of the Executive; staff of the Logan Campus; and staff conducting the Logan Regional Special Admissions Scheme, Phil Rowan (Campus Co-ordinator), Kylie Reid, Amanda Clark. Logan Institute of TAFE – Griffith University Tertiary Access Course, Heather Griffin, Convener.

- Queensland University of Technology. Professor Don Field, Director Academic Policy, Faculty of Science, Dean's Scholar Program, Dr Al Grenfell, and staff of the Faculty. Ray Morley, Director, Student Services Department, and the central and faculty staff who conduct the QSTEP admissions route for disadvantaged students.
- The Maroochydore Campus of the Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE, Arthur Hartley, Associate Director, Commerce Unit and staff of the IT Section.