

Making good decisions on tertiary entrance

This brochure provides guidelines to help when you are trying to decide which university courses and full-time TAFE diploma and advanced diploma courses to apply for (up to six) through the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) Ltd. You can make good decisions about study options after Year 12 if you follow a decision-making model which takes into account the course selection timelines, the optional pathways, and the resources available to you.

The course selection process

The stages

The procedures of making your initial preferences, reviewing them, and making a final decision can be looked at as a process with definite stages, as follows:

Stage 1

Select initial preferences

Timeline: September

Stage 2

Review initial preferences

Timeline: October to early January

Stage 3

Decide on a response to the course offer

Timeline: Mid–end January

Stage 4

Prepare for a tertiary course or other option

Timeline: early February

Decision-making model

Decisions have to be made at each stage, even if they are only tentative or temporary. Following a structured model, such as the following one, can help you make a good decision.

Step 1: Clarify the question. You may have to answer a number of questions, e.g. 'What career(s) do I want to follow?'; 'What course or level of study is most appropriate?'

Step 2: Collect information. You must be able to answer accurately the question 'What information do I need to help me make the decision?'

Step 3: Weigh up the facts. To do this, you will need to take account of factors such as information about:

- yourself (e.g. interests, skills, abilities, health)
- the influence of others, such as parents, friends and the media, on your decision making
- the effect of other relevant factors (e.g. necessity to leave home, availability of financial support)
- future considerations (e.g. your values, what lifestyle you want)
- likelihood of obtaining a place in a desired course.

Step 4: Make a decision.

Step 5: Review your decision. This is particularly important when you receive new information, e.g. your Overall Position (OP), or results of the QTAC major offer round.

No one can guarantee that you will make a 'perfect' decision. Following the model can help reduce the stress sometimes associated with course process and help you make and carry out positive action plans.

Course selection stages

Stage 1

Select initial preferences

You should:

- **read** publications, especially the QTAC Guide; university/TAFE course information booklets or handbooks (also available on the internet)
- **talk** to a guidance officer or careers counsellor at school, representatives of universities, TAFE institutes or private training providers, employers, family, and friends
- **visit** careers markets or tertiary information events, open days, careers nights and course information talks, and a Career Information Centre if there is one near your home
- **consider** aspects associated with the courses, such as upfront costs, transport details, accommodation details, and the possibility of obtaining the required academic results
- **make** an application over the phone, or through the Twelve to Tertiary (TTT) web-based application, before the advertised closing date
- **comply** with any early closing dates
- **prepare** folios or practise for auditions where necessary.

Stage 2

Review initial preferences

You will have the opportunity to change your preferences until early January, which will allow you to review your initial choices in view of new information you obtain, e.g. your OP and subject results in mid-December, information regarding new courses, or courses which won't be offered next year, and details obtained by speaking with staff from universities or TAFE institutes. The following tips should help you through this stage:

- keep all your information together
- write down information when you think of it
- write a personal action plan
- know the deadlines and procedures for changing preferences
- consider back-up plans.

When you receive your Student Education Profile (SEP), which will tell you your subject levels of achievement,

OP and FPs (if you're eligible), take a 'cooling-off' period to think about this new information if it affects what courses you are now eligible for — don't rush in and make a snap decision. Remember, there is always a pathway to where you want to go. Seek help and advice if you are unsure of what it is.

Many people decide to stick with their original preference list, but if you do wish to change, make sure you are aware of the deadline and make it easier on yourself by not leaving the change until the last moment.

Stage 3

Decide on your response to the course offer

Details of offers in the major offer round will be available by the middle of January. Applicants will be notified of the course offered in the major round. To accept an offer you must respond to QTAC before the published deadline.

Using QTAC's TTT On-line Application Service you can:

- **accept** your offer and enrol in the course
- **accept** your offer conditionally and ask to be considered for your higher preferences in the next round of offers; or add new preferences; or rearrange your existing preferences for the next round (be aware that sometimes the cut-offs for courses in the second or subsequent rounds can rise dramatically as universities and TAFE institutes make limited offers in these rounds — always have a 'fall back' position)
- **apply** for deferment in the course if the tertiary institution accepts deferment and you are not ready to study
- **reject** your offer if you are no longer interested in undertaking tertiary study.

If you are applying for a place in the next round of offers, you will need to consider the 'cut-offs' for courses in the first round of offers, whether you are likely to be considered for some or all of your preferred courses, information on possible remaining vacancies, and where you can go to get help with these details.

If you don't receive an offer, you might consider back-up options which could give you either alternative pathways to reach your desired goal, or the chance to

follow other acceptable career directions.

These options could include:

- bridging courses
- tertiary courses at private colleges
- part-time diploma/advanced diploma courses at TAFE institutes
- certificate or advanced certificate courses (full time or part time) at TAFE institutes or other training organisations
- tertiary study through Open Learning Australia or full-fee courses
- full-time or part-time employment
- short or extended employment-oriented courses offered by government-sponsored agencies or private providers (guidance officers, school counsellors and trained careers advisers can help you weigh up the pros and cons of each option)
- Year 12 studies at centres for continuing secondary education, schools of distance education, private academies or secondary schools.

Stage 4

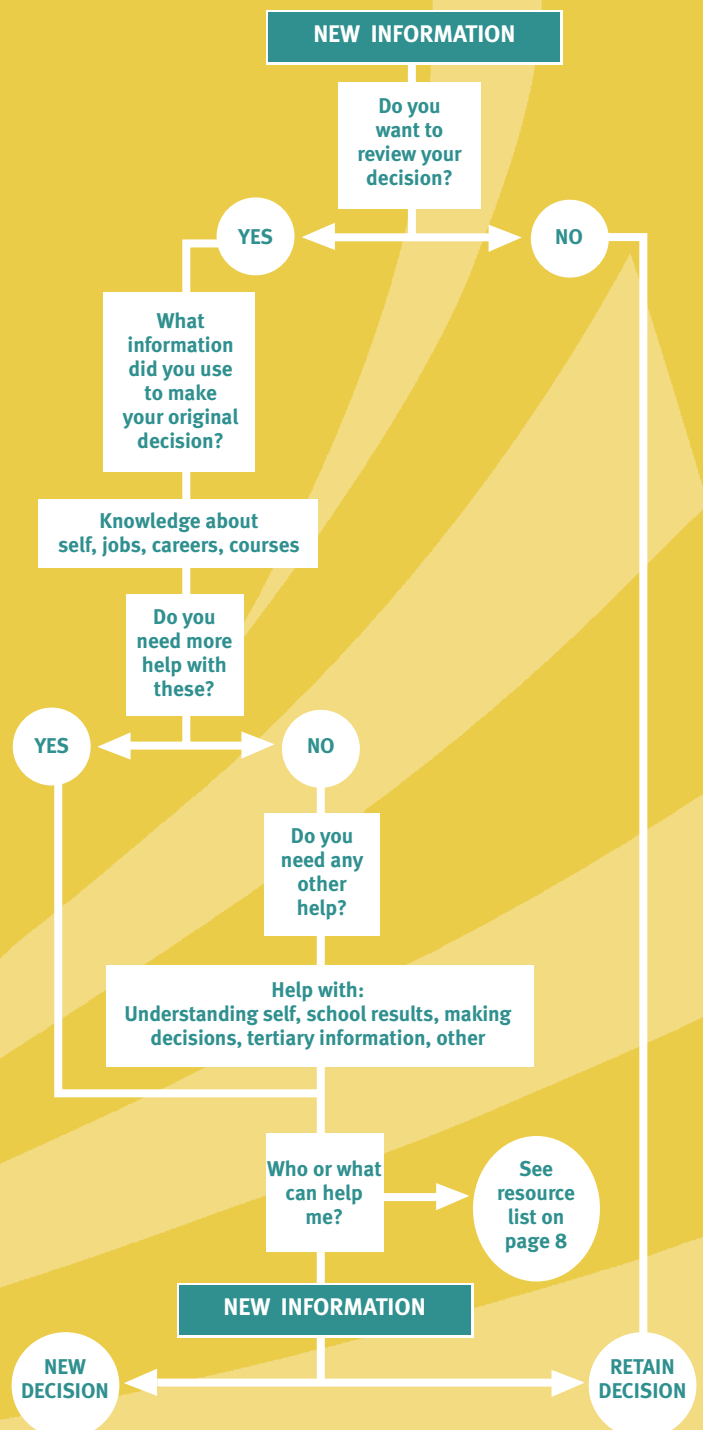
Prepare for a tertiary course or other option

Things to do at this stage include:

- identify all deadlines associated with the action you want to take (e.g. when you must enrol, when you can withdraw from a course without penalty)
- identify what actions you are required to carry out (e.g. making accommodation arrangements, arranging a subject/course selection interview)
- make sure you understand how your new results will be viewed by the university or TAFE institute if you are undertaking an alternative course in order that you might 'upgrade' your Year 12 results — you need to know that the 'cut-offs' for entry to individual courses are not predetermined but vary according to supply and demand, and can change from one year to the next
- seek help to explore all the options open to you — there may be some relevant alternatives you haven't considered.

Decision-making flowchart

This flowchart could help you decide what to do after you receive new information (e.g. results of an audition, your OP). It would also be useful in considering the information used in making the original decision.



Course selection in action

Case study — Lisa

Stage 1

Select initial preferences

Lisa has always wanted to study engineering. Her father is an engineer and her older brother is in the fourth year of an engineering degree. She had completed a number of work experience placements with engineering firms which provided her with a good understanding of many aspects of the profession. She also loved flying so she decided she would make her first preference Bachelor of Engineering (Aerospace Avionics).

Although she was doing well at school, she wasn't certain that her OP would be high enough to secure her a place in her most preferred course. Lisa's 'back-up' plan was to include a bachelor of technology course and a science course which offered subjects related to those in the desired engineering course. Lisa also included a mechanical engineering degree course in Brisbane and also one in Toowoomba. For her sixth preference, Lisa opted for an advanced diploma in engineering at TAFE as a 'fall-back' option.

Stage 2

Review initial preferences

Lisa's personal action plan was to:

- investigate the costs associated with each of the courses — including accommodation costs if she had to live away from home
- look more closely at the subjects studied in other engineering courses to see if she would enjoy doing them and if they were related to the subjects in the aeronautical engineering degree course
- investigate the structure of the course more closely to see if it is possible to transfer out of, or into, the course, if desired, and whether credit could be granted for subjects completed
- find out about the destinations of graduates from these courses to get an idea of the opportunities available on completion of the course
- identify other possibilities with historically lower cut-offs just in case her OP was lower than hoped.

When Lisa received her Student Education Profile, her OP was below last year's cut-off for her first preference so she felt she had no real chance of gaining a place. She considered changing her other preferences to include a technology course with aviation. She decided, however, to stick with her original preferences as she realised that she couldn't afford the cost of the flying lessons in any of the aviation courses.

Stage 3

Decide on action

Lisa was offered her third preference but her results provided her with some hope of obtaining a place in her second preference course in the next offer round. She accepted her offer conditionally and asked to be considered for her higher preferences.

Stage 4

Prepare for a tertiary course or other option

While Lisa was waiting for the outcome of the final offer round she completed her enrolment forms for the course she had been offered, visited the university campus, and obtained a list of textbooks and subject outlines. She decided not to buy textbooks until she received the results of the next round of offers.

Final stage

Acceptance

Lisa did not receive any further offers and enrolled in her third preference. She will review her position at the end of her first year. She plans to study hard and do as well as she can to improve her chances of getting into a greater range of courses in the future.

Course selection in action

Case study – Tran

Stage 1

Select initial preferences

Tran was an average student who wanted to work in the tourism/hospitality industry. He had a part-time job in a fast-food restaurant and enjoyed the customer contact and nature of the business. His guidance officer at school had told him about a couple of bachelor degrees in the tourism and hospitality area but he wasn't sure he would get the OP required for entry. He also looked at a couple of the full-time diplomas at TAFE in the same area.

Subsequently he put three bachelor degrees and three full-time diplomas in his QTAC application and waited until he received his OP.

Stage 2

Review initial preferences

In the meantime, Tran asked his employer about the kinds of qualifications needed for full-time and long-term employment in the tourism/hospitality industry. He also considered the possibility of working full-time and studying part-time. He looked at other pathways into the industry, such as pre-vocational courses and certificate courses, in case his OP was not high enough to get him into either a bachelor degree or diploma course.

Stage 3

Decide on action

Tran wasn't made an offer for any of his first three bachelor courses because his OP was not high enough, nor for the diploma-level course offered through the College of Tourism and Hospitality at South Brisbane. He was, however, offered his fifth preference, which was a Diploma of Hospitality (Management) at his local TAFE campus. In the meantime, his employer asked him if he would like to work full-time. Tran decided that, seeing he wanted a break from full-time school/study, and because he was unsure of the right course to take, he would work full-time and study part-time. He approached his local TAFE college about undertaking the diploma course part-time. The course was available part time, and he found that he was able to fit the study in around his work. He also received some recognition of prior learning (RPL) in his course for the practical work he had done in the workplace.

Alternative pathways

Sample alternative pathways

Students who complete Year 12 without an OP, or whose OP is not high enough to allow them entry into a desired course, might be able to follow an alternative pathway to obtain their goal. An example of this approach follows.

Students deciding about which course(s) to consider on completion of Year 12 are trying to balance the importance of a number of factors, such as what type of job they eventually want to get, what results they are going to end up with, what courses they think will give them the best prospects for employment, and whether they will have to leave home to enrol in the desired course.

It is sometimes wrongly assumed that the only way to get a good job is to undertake a university course. This can be a mistake for several reasons. Firstly, the majority of school-leavers don't go directly to university and, while the overall employment rate of university graduates is very high, so too is the employment rate of other young people who gain a recognised post-secondary qualification. Current figures show that there are significantly more university graduates enrolling in TAFE to improve their employment prospects than the other way round.

Secondly, many secure and skilled jobs require more focused and practical training than that offered by a university degree, and many young people would improve their employment prospects by achieving well in these courses.

Thirdly, almost all industries and occupations now encourage their workers to upgrade their qualifications and skills continually through further training to ensure competitiveness within the business world.

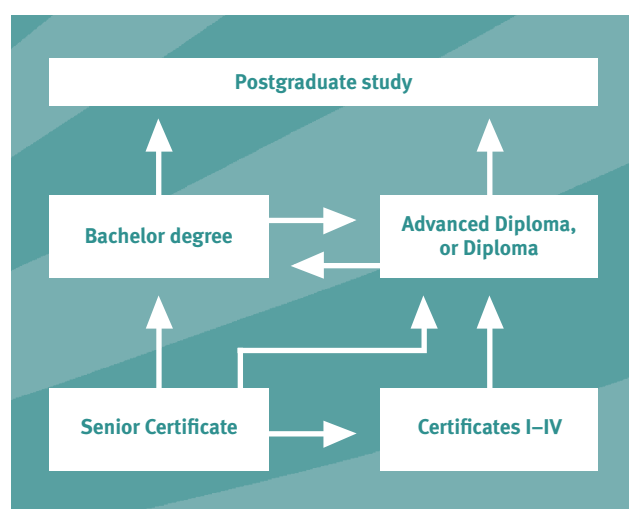
The education and training system caters for the needs of industry by organising a system which not only provides specific development of skills and knowledge for particular industries or occupations, but also provides links between sectors such as universities, TAFE institutes and private providers to allow individuals to continue their education and training with minimal obstacles.

The 'pathways' diagram below illustrates the common pathways available to Year 12 school-leavers. Individuals can progress (articulate) from one qualification to another and obtain credit (advanced standing) for relevant studies in prior courses. It is also possible for applicants without formal further education experiences to be given credit for work and/or life experiences through a process called recognition of prior learning (RPL).

Moving from one qualification to a higher level course is commonly referred to as 'upgrading' and the 'pathways' diagram indicates a number of ways in which this can occur.

Other alternatives for students who do not achieve the required OP, or the prerequisite subjects, for the desired course include repeating Year 12, enrolling in one or more subjects for the External Senior Examination, enrolling in bridging subjects, and enrolling in tertiary preparation courses. Information on each of these alternatives can be obtained from your school's careers adviser or guidance officer and the Pathways Unit, Curriculum Innovation Branch of Education Queensland.

Pathways diagram



Course selection timelines

30 September

QTAC closing date for on-time applications

mid December

OPs available on QSA website, and Student Education Profiles received

early January

Closing date for change of preferences using QTAC's TTT applicant on-line services

mid January

QTAC major offer round — majority of tertiary offers released

late January

Closing date for response to offers and change of preferences using QTAC's TTT applicant on-line services

late January — early February

Final tertiary offers released

February

Courses commence

Stage 1

Select initial preferences and make your application.

Use the decision-making model to process the information available to help you decide on your initial preference list. Gather additional information.

Stage 2

Review initial preferences.

Consider any new information in conjunction with your initial decision and use the decision-making model to help you decide whether to retain or change your preferences.

Make a decision and 'sit tight'.

Stage 3

Decide on action about offer, no offer, or other options.

Preparing in advance for this stage can greatly reduce anxiety. The more times you have followed a logical decision-making process, the more comfortable you should feel about this stage.

Stage 4

Prepare for a tertiary course or other option.

Whatever the result of Stage 3, you will probably still have to make decisions and carry out enrolment activities in a short time. Once again, early identification of possible courses of action and required actions for these options will make it easier for you.

Essential resources

QTAC Guide produced by QTAC
(provided to all Year 12 students)

- describes all university and full-time TAFE higher education courses
- lists course prerequisites
- describes how to lodge applications using QTAC's TTT (for Year 12s only) and online services.

QTAC Applicant Services Guide produced by QTAC
(provided to all Year 12 applicants)

- contains information to help applicants with finding out whether they have been made an offer, changing preferences and responding to an offer

Exit Lines December produced by the QSA
(to be sent with your SEP)

- contains contact details for the QSA information service, guidance and counselling services, and universities and TAFE colleges
- explains alternatives after Year 12.

Career Information Centres

- Phone: 3000 3056 or 1800 627 175 (Brisbane)
- Phone: 5575 6361 or 1800 641 459 (Gold Coast).

Queensland Studies Authority

- Phone: 3864 0299 or 1800 804 991
- Internet: www.qsa.qld.edu.au
- Email: information@qsa.qld.edu.au

Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd

- general enquiries: Phone: 3368 1166
- Internet: www.qtac.edu.au
- Email: qtac@qtac.edu.au

Just remember

- There is information available on all the options available to you.
- There are people you can talk to about these options.
- There are places you can go to get this information and meet these people.

So decide on your action plan now, write it down (with timelines), and put it into practice when the time is right.

Do this and you will be well on the way to achieving the best possible result.