SENIOR ASSESSMENT AND TERTIARY ENTRANCE CHANGES

From the Executive Director

Next month Queensland's Year 12 students will undertake external assessment for the first time since the early 1970s as part of the reform of Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance (SATE).

The significant SATE reforms have been a long time in planning and implementation with the revised system decided in 2015 by the then Newman Government.

Whilst external assessment, along with a change from Overall Position (OP) to the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) will have the highest public profile in terms of the changes, the SATE reforms consist of an extensive package of changes to Year 11 and 12 in Queensland including new syllabuses, new subjects, changes to the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) and more rigorous quality control of internal assessment.

The implementation of significant change in schooling always has its challenges, controversy and contested ideas. In this regard, SATE has been no different. Adding to the challenges for the SATE reforms and their implementation has been a year of COVID-19 disruptions and uncertainty. This has resulted in the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) dropping one of the three Internal Assessments for each subject for Year 12's in 2020.

This might have never been the case if the original timetable for the implementation of SATE was followed. In 2017, then Minister for Education, Kate Jones, approved the deferral of the SATE reforms from 2019 to 2020 to allow an additional twelve months for their preparation and implementation.

Whilst the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) report *Redesigning the secondary – tertiary interface: Queensland Review of Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance*[1] (Gabrielle Matters and Geoff Masters, October 2014) is the key foundation of the SATE reforms, a Parliamentary Inquiry into *The assessment methods used in senior mathematics, chemistry and physics in Queensland schools*[2] (Report No. 25. Education and Innovation Committee, October 2013) set the scene for change. The Inquiry was in response to a decline in the number of students in mathematics, chemistry and physics and a decline in performance by Queensland students in these subjects.

The ACER report included 23 recommendations in the context that "although the current processes have served Queensland reasonably well, we believe they will be less adequate in meeting future needs and that the time has come for a redesign".

Although not all recommendations of the ACER review have been adopted, Queensland's new SATE system has a number of key features as proposed by the review including a model that

The ACER report (October 2014) *Redesigning the secondary-tertiary interface* which laid the foundations for the Queensland Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance reforms.

1   Available at https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=qld_review
2   See https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-committees/former-committees/EIC/inquiries/past-inquiries/QldAssessment for further details

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combines school-based assessment with common external assessment, new processes that strengthen the quality and comparability of school-based assessment and a move from the OP rank to ATAR.

QCAA has been responsible for the design and implementation of the new SATE system (excepting for ATAR matters which become the responsibility of the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre under the reforms). Several governance groups have assisted in oversight of the reforms including a Ministerial Taskforce.

Some of the challenging issues during the development and implementation of the new system have included deciding what percentage external assessment should contribute to a student's results, the design and detail of individual subject syllabuses, the place of Vocational Education and Training subjects in the senior secondary system, dropping a number of previous subjects and introducing new subjects and whether or not there should be statistical moderation in the redesigned system (there is not).

One of the unresolved issues is how Year 12 outcomes should be publicly reported. This will need to be determined by early 2021 when the annual outcomes report (which first commenced in 2006) is scheduled for release.

The transition to the new SATE system over the five-year period has involved extensive input and resourcing by schools and teachers. Whether it has been the redevelopment of syllabuses, trials of external assessment, assessor accreditation, endorsement and calibration trials or the marking of external assessments, Queensland schools and teachers have been committed to ensuring that senior assessment is best practice and in the interests of all students.

All Year 11 and 12 teachers in Queensland have had access to comprehensive professional development in relation to the new system over the past two years.

Everybody will be wishing our Year 12 students the best as they complete their Year 12 with external assessments commencing on 26 October (just one week before the Queensland State election).

There will be keen interest in the outcomes and no doubt much analysis of the new system in terms of its ability to meet the future needs of students.

Ongoing monitoring of the reforms, particularly over the next couple of years, will be important to ensure its validity, reliability and comparability. An official formal review of the new system will no doubt be undertaken within the next couple of years (Minister Jones anticipated such a review in 2022).

One aspect of the new system that might be the attention of further development is external assessment. The ACER report noted that external assessments could be chosen from an "array of assessment techniques and styles". ACER also believed that external assessment could have a formative function – "in the future when calibrated item banks are developed, students will be able to take the assessments on-line at any time, and their results can be selectively updated by the school".

Just as NAPLAN is transitioning to online, senior external assessment might be an area for online consideration in the future, as well as further development of assessment tasks that best fit the nature of individual subjects.

Most importantly continued development will be essential if the vision of "a high-quality, highly-regarded credential that is internationally recognized as providing an excellent preparation for life and study beyond school" (ACER, p. 75) is to be maintained.

Senior secondary qualifications will need to keep pace with a rapidly changing world where greater emphasis is being placed on 21st century skills.

Similarly, tertiary institutions will need to closely monitor the change from OP to ATAR. Whilst this change brings Queensland into line with other states and territories in relation to tertiary entrance rankings, the construct of ATAR is not uniform across Australia. Ideally, tertiary rankings should be easily understood and transparent.

Yet there has already been some movement towards the tertiary sector adopting entrance procedures that are institution specific (some of which more recently have been as result of COVID-19). ATAR as a tertiary entrance

Students, parents and the community more generally expect that senior assessment should be valid, reliable and fair. The Queensland SATE reforms will be tested against these criteria over the coming months.

ranking has been contentious in some other States and Territories in recent years, so expect a great deal of public commentary from 2021 about the nature and role of ATARs.

Students, parents and the community more generally expect that senior assessment should be valid, reliable and fair. The Queensland SATE reforms will be tested against these criteria over the coming months.

The preparation and planning involved in the reforms means there will be confidence in the system from the start, however, we should continue to explore improvements to ensure that the Queensland system is best-practice and meets the needs of students who will be graduating into a rapidly changing global environment.

Good luck to all of our graduating Year 12 students in 2020 – not only have you coped with the challenges and disruptions of a global pandemic but you have created history as the first students to complete the revised Queensland senior assessment and tertiary entrance system.

DAVID ROBERTSON
Executive Director

Further detailed information on the Queensland senior secondary system can be found on the QCAA website at https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/senior

For details about ATAR, go to the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre website at www.qtac.edu.au

STRATEGIC PLANNING – A HERO'S JOURNEY

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Current leadership theory tends to dismiss the notion of the Hero Leader: all-knowing, all-wise and all-powerful (Croft, 2016). Nevertheless, the role the school leader takes in strategic planning could be seen in the context of a Hero's Journey (Shadraconis, 2013).

Throughout this article reference is made to the Strategic Planning tool of SOARR. SOARR is the acronym for Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results, Relationships and is a tool regularly used when Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) facilitates strategic planning with schools (refer Figure 1).

The journey metaphor is synonymous with the work of Joseph John Campbell who is best known for his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, first published in 1949. Campbell presented the concept of monomyth, where he suggested basic components utilised in myths and legends from around the world were simply variations of the same storyline.

This storyline was the Hero's Journey, whereby the hero embarked on a journey and, as a result of experienced adversity, attained insight and returned with gifts powerful enough to change the world for the better. Indeed, the monomyth concept of the Hero's Journey has been utilised extensively in modern storylines of film, television, literature, computer games and music – Star Wars and Lord of The Rings being such examples (Zadie, 2018). The Hero's Journey has been illustrated in numerous diagrams (refer Figure 2).

As illustrated, Campbell identified the stages in the Hero's Journey. This article likens the Hero's Journey to a strategic planning process regularly utilised by ISQ staff as they assist schools with their endeavour.

Campbell's journey is split between travelling between the known and the unknown landscape. The unknown landscape represents the greatest part of the journey. It is also the unknown landscape that provides the challenges, the revelation and transformation. These are parts of the journey before the hero returns to the known landscape with the "gift" i.e. the strategic plan. Importantly, behind the journey of each hero is a group of committed, influential people who support, encourage direct and re-direct the hero along the way.

Strategic planning

The school's governing body is one such influential group and indeed it has the responsibility to set the future direction of the school. This is a challenging task, as it relies on the interplay of discernment of many key indicators and often only with hindsight can the level of success of the governing body's due diligence be determined.

It is fundamental to provide an appropriate narrative and vision of the future direction to the school community. There are a variety of ways of approaching this process and is context specific to each community. Adding to this complexity of setting the vision is that we live in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world which increasingly requires organisations and their leaders to be agile and adaptive.

There is no question people seek and appreciate knowing the preferred direction and future of the school, and leaders are encouraged to provide a narrative that includes a destination and a pathway to that destination.

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Figure 1: Explaining ISQ's Strategic Planning Tool, SOARR

What is **SOARR**?

Strengths

WHAT DO WE DO WELL AND HOW CAN WE BUILD ON THESE?

What are we doing really well?

What are our greatest assets?

What are we most proud of accomplishing?

What do our strengths tell us about our skills?

Opportunities

HOW DO WE MAKE SENSE OF OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL FORCES AND TRENDS?

How do we collectively understand outside threats?

How can we re-frame to see the opportunity?

What is the enterprise asking us to do?

How can we best partner with others?

Aspirations

WHAT DO WE CARE DEEPLY ABOUT?

Considering strengths and opportunities, who should we become?

How do we allow our values to drive our vision?

How can we make a difference for our school and our customers?

Results

HOW DO WE KNOW WE ARE SUCCEEDING?

What are our measurable results?

What do we want to be known for?

Relationships

WHAT RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT AND HOW DO WE BUILD THESE?

Have you included all the relationships that will be important?

What do these relationships look like?

Are you able to describe what behaviours should be evident in all relationships?

Why use **SOARR**?

SOARR identifies and expands existing strengths and opportunities – moving beyond a focus on weaknesses. It engages school community members at all levels to encourage innovation and energy for change.

The completed process should enable school community members to:

- summarise for anyone what our school does and why;
- understand what is the future direction for our school;
- know how they will get there;
- know what needs to be done; and
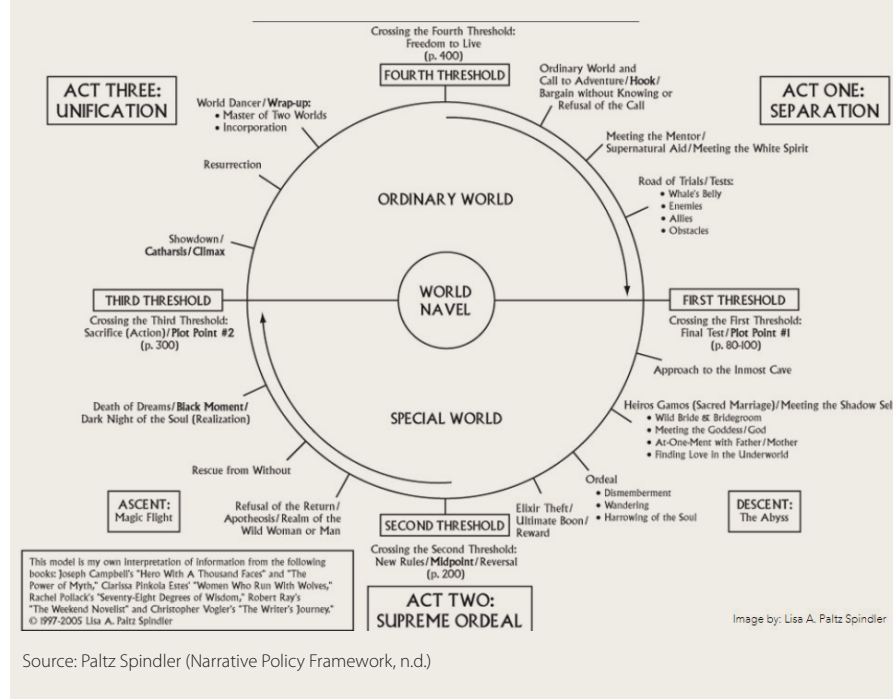- understand what their particular contribution means to the overall success.

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

Appreciative Inquiry is a form of action research that involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential, as shown in the illustration below.
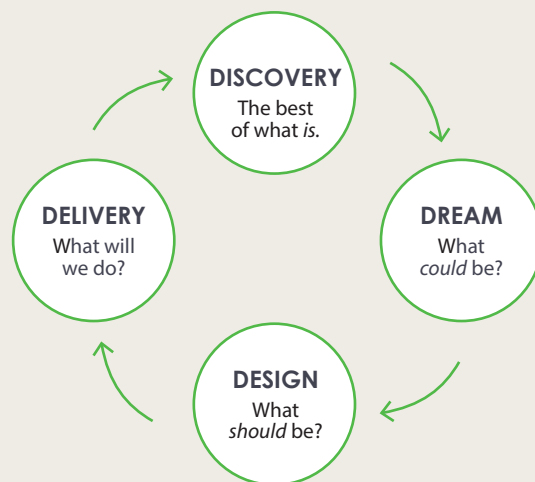
Figure 2: Interpretations of Campbell's Hero's Journey

Source: Paltz Spindler (Narrative Policy Framework, n.d.)

Source: unknown

of time each week putting out "spot fires" to ensure they do not develop into bush fires that can consume significant resources of time, energy and emotion. The strategic planning process may be viewed by some as a potential bushfire with the principal battling to control the direction it goes. However, ISQ strongly suggests the strategic planning process is an effective method of hazard reduction, or indeed backburning, and has the potential to clear new tracks and initiate regeneration in the forest for the journey.

With strategic planning, ISQ supports schools through a process of reflection on past performance, agreement on future directions and establishment of measurable goals. This process has six steps, mapped against the Hero's Journey:

1. **PROCESS BRIEFING**
   Act 1 Ordinary World

2. **REVIEW CURRENT STRATEGIC PLAN**
   Act 1 Ordinary World

3. **STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP (UTILISING SOARR)**
   Act 1 Ordinary World

4. **REFINING OF WORKSHOP OUTCOMES**
   Act 2 Special World

5. **ACTION PLAN FORMATION AND METRICS IDENTIFICATION**
   Act 3 Ordinary World

6. **COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**
   Act 3 Ordinary World

The Hero's Journey

Act 1 – Ordinary World

The *Call to Adventure* (Campbell, 1949) can be either at a set time period, the end of one strategic plan, or an event that prompts a focus on the strategic plan. This event could be the arrival of a new principal, a change of leadership within the board or an external event,

The absence of this narrative shaped by the governing body and school leaders may lead to a vacuum that others will fill, often with a significant negative impact on the desired culture of the organisation.

Governance, including the important component of developing strategy, is about providing this direction and path (Benscome, 2017). Indeed, the word 'governance' derives from the Greek verb meaning 'to steer'. To steer effectively requires strategy

and in many schools, this focus on strategy manifests itself in the strategic planning process. A great strategy is a great story and as with all great stories, as articulated by the Hero's Journey, there are common elements that provide a satisfying result when executed well (Andrews, et al., 2019).

As with all CEOs, the principal navigates a challenging path when involved in strategic planning. To use an analogy within an analogy, the principal spends a reasonable amount

such as COVID-19 or floods. Often the call comes from factors beyond the principal's control, yet the expectation is for the principal to quickly adopt the role of the Hero and head off on the journey. The principal needs to be aware of the expectations and adopt an enthusiastic and agile approach to the strategic planning process.

At the *Threshold*, there is a need for clarity of the role of the board and the principal for this journey. Strategy development is usually shared between the board and the school executive with the board using its knowledge of the school and community issues to influence the development of the strategic objectives. The planning and implementation of the strategic objectives is usually the responsibility of the executive. The board then monitors the implementation and success of the plan.

Considering this, what is the principal's role in the planning of, preparation for and actual undertaking of this journey?

The more responsibility the principal assumes for the role of Hero, or at least co-leading with the board chair, the greater the input the principal has in the process. Consequently, the principal will develop a more meaningful and deeper understanding of the community they are expected to lead.

The ISQ staff member facilitates various stages of the journey (*Mentor* and *Helper*). It is expected that this support will ensure the suffering part of the Hero's Journey is minimised or even eradicated!

The Process Briefing stage involves a discussion with ISQ, board chair and principal around desired outcomes. This includes a methodology briefing by ISQ, including explanation of possible tools (SOARR, surveys, workshops). It also involves workshop participant identification where consideration is given to board members, principal, school executives, staff, students, parents, alumni and the broader community. This conversation is critical in defining the scope and level of engagement various stakeholders will have in the process.

The next step is to Review the Current Strategic Plan. This review identifies items that have been achieved, what is yet to be achieved and what is no longer relevant. This provides clarity on items that need to be considered during the formation of the new strategic plan.

The challenges and temptations are significant in relation to those who will be involved in any Stakeholder Workshop and/or survey. The temptation is to either limit numbers and stakeholder representation to almost predict and pre-determine feedback, or alternatively, to hear as many voices as possible and run the risk of making the process unwieldy. An interesting aspect of the Hero's Journey is that the Hero often undergoes a trial where they lose control of events and it is only through letting go of control that they gain an insight that was previously unknown to them.

By utilising the SOARR tool, it specifically maintains the focus on strengths and the positives of what could be and absorbs both weaknesses and threats into the

realm of opportunities. The ability of the facilitator is crucial but is highly likely to succeed they are not directly connected to the community and can leverage this removed position to focus on where the future may lie. The actual Stakeholder Workshop varies, according to the composition of participants, and is tailored to suit the needs of the school. Normally the process is focused on gathering data based on SOARR.

The presence of board and principal at the ISQ facilitated workshop provides them with an opportunity to hear rich and open discussions, which can in turn assist them in their analysis.

Act 2 – Special World

In Campbell's (1949) Hero's Journey, the *Revelation* stage is akin to the Refining of Workshop Outcomes. This involves the ISQ facilitator having conversations with the board and principal around the workshop outcomes. The challenge is to collate the extensive data into major themes and then summarise these themes into descriptors that capture the essence from the school's perspective. The time taken to achieve this varies but should include adequate reflection and revisiting. With this stage complete, the core of the strategic plan has been developed.

The *Revelation* stage itself occurs in three forms:

- Representatives from staff, students, parents, alumni and the broader community have a valuable contribution to make, with a focus on what may be best for the school in the years to come.

- The understanding that parts of the previous strategic plan, that were once considered important by some, are no longer relevant and need to be jettisoned.

- The commitment (buy-in) of the representatives to support the success of the school.

> *The more responsibility the principal assumes for the role of Hero, or at least co-leading with the board chair, the greater the input the principal has in the process... [and] will develop a more meaningful and deeper understanding of the community they are expected to lead.*

STRATEGIC PLANNING – A HERO'S JOURNEY CONTINUED

The *Transformation* stage commences with the focus area of relationships. Identification and understanding of what relationships are important to the school and what behaviours underpin successful relationships is a vital component of the journey. The *Transformation* continues with the discernment by the board and the principal of the workshop's view of the strengths of the school. Often the views expressed affirm the current focus of energy, effort and other resources by the school into specific areas.

Act 3 – Ordinary World

The last stage of the Hero's Journey begins with Action Plan Formation And Metrics Identification. Lack of relevance and responsiveness are often cited as reasons strategic and operational plans are treated as static documents that have limited use for most employees of a school (Struebing, 1996). Unfortunately, this scenario is unlikely to result in the successful implementation of the strategic plan. Action plans are dynamic translations that make the strategic plan relevant at all levels of an organisation. They combine to form an operational system for management to implement the strategic plan. There can be an intermediary phase of developing a strategy map. Whilst not integral to the process, it significantly improves the translation from strategic plan into various action plans. Information of the ISQ Strategic Map process, SMaRT, is in the August 2019 issue of ISQ *Briefings* (Volume 23 Issue 7) in the form of a research article "How well is your school performing and how do you know".

The actions planned by the principal should directly link to the achievement of the strategic plan, as should the allocation of resources through budget allocation, timetable priorities and school diary (activity) priorities. An ISQ staff member can assist the principal to develop action plans that include the identification of appropriate metrics that adequately provide the board an agreed method of monitoring the strategic plan, including a tangible timeframe and progress checks.

The final process is the development of the COMMUNICATION STRATEGY that ensures the strategic planning journey and the ultimate *Gift* of the strategic plan for the school and associated action plans is a convincing narrative from the board chair and the principal to the school's immediate community and broader community. The ways in which the process and resulting artefacts are communicated to the community are central in creating a shared vision of the desired direction of the school.

The *Hero's Return* is about the final strategic plan combined with the action plans and a great story to tell of the Hero's Journey. The principal and the board may discover that the journey enlisted many supporters on the way and these supporters will willingly champion the *Gift* of the strategy in ensuing years.

Assuming the Hero's role in the journey of strategic planning, and doing so enthusiastically with agility and adaptability, will prove beneficial to the principal and to the school as a whole.

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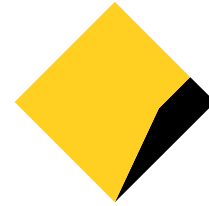
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