How does scaling work?
by Paul Livingstone

VTAC adjusts the Study Scores for each study to take account of how strong the students were in the study and how difficult it was to achieve the middle ranking. The strength of competition in each study is measured by how well the students performed in all their other studies.

In each study, the Study Scores are adjusted so that the overall level of scores in that study matches the scores obtained by the same group of students in all of their other studies.

For example, in Chemistry in 2012 the average Study Score was 30, but the students who took Chemistry averaged 34 for all their studies (including Chemistry). This shows that the students who did Chemistry in 2012 were of above average strength in their other studies. Therefore, the scaling process adjusted the Study Scores upwards so that the average VTAC Scaled Study Score for Chemistry was set at 34.

The 2012 Geography students averaged 29 in all their studies (including Geography). So, the scaling process adjusted the Study Scores downwards so that the average VTAC Scaled Study Score for Geography was 29.

In some studies the scaling process produces VTAC Scaled Study Scores that are greater than 50. They can go as high as 55. However, the minimum VTAC Scaled Study Score cannot go below zero.

VCE studies are always scaled in the year in which they were undertaken. This may not necessarily be in the year in which a student receives their ATAR.

This scaling process is carried out each year for each VCE study and VCE VET program for which there is a Study Score. There are no predetermined outcomes—the adjustments are based on the performance of students each year. Nevertheless, the process is very stable and there is little difference in the scaled VTAC Scaled Study Scores from year to year.

Mathematics and Languages
Mathematics

VCE mathematics studies are designed to cater for students of differing abilities and interests. Specialist Mathematics is the most difficult, followed by Mathematical Methods (CAS) and then by Further Mathematics.

To ensure that students undertaking the more difficult mathematics studies are not disadvantaged, all three mathematics studies are scaled against each other as well as being scaled against all other studies. The higher of the two resulting scales is used.

Languages

As a result of government policy to encourage the study of languages each Language is adjusted up by adding five to the initial VTAC Scaled Study Score average. All students of a Language receive an adjustment, but it is not a uniform adjustment.

For example a student achieving a perfect Study Score of 50 is guaranteed a VTAC Scaled Study Score of at least 50. The maximum VTAC Scaled Study Score only goes above 50 when
the average score is very high (the scaled mean plus twice the scaled standard deviation exceeds 50). Published means for each Language include this adjustment.

Other variables

Previous VCE studies

VVCE studies are always scaled in the year in which they were undertaken (this may not necessarily be in the year in which a student receives their ATAR).

Further VCE study

Students who have previously obtained an ATAR, but have undertaken further study resulting in an additional Study Score or Increment, are eligible to have their ATAR recalculated. The higher of the two will be recorded and reported as an ATAR. Ranking for courses will be based on the highest ATAR achieved. VTAC will, however, inform course selection authorities of all of an applicant’s VCE results—including those not contributing to their ATAR.

Notional ATAR

A ‘Notional ATAR’ is used to rank students who have a previous Year 12 (other than VCE) or some other qualification (e.g. the International Baccalaureate, also known as the IB).

A Notional ATAR is created for:

- all applicants who successfully completed a full Victorian Year 12 attempt prior to 1992,
- all applicants who (without having successfully completed a full Victorian Year 12 attempt prior to 1992) have for the first time, at least four Study Scores and VCE (HSC) ‘Group 1’ subjects, or their predecessors in combination including any one of the English group (i.e. at least four scorable subjects), and
- all International Baccalaureate students who qualify for the IB Diploma in the current year.

Note: Only Victorian IB students who sit the GAT will be issued with a Notional ATAR statement.

Interstate use of the ATAR

If a student has applied to institutions in other Australian states they will be considered on the basis of their ATAR.

Interrupted study status

Applicants granted official interrupted study status by the VCAA should seek advice from VTAC about the applicability of rules and provisions in this publication. In general, the rules that require completion of Units 3 and 4 in the one year do not apply to applicants granted interrupted study status in the studies concerned.