

From: Neil Capps [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 18 March 2013 4:16 PM
To: Education and Innovation Committee
Subject: Assessment Methods for Senior Maths, Chemistry and Physics Submission.

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Submission from Neil Capps for the inquiry.

Dear Members of the Inquiry,

I have been teaching mathematics for 23 years. I was educated in Queensland through the State System at Aspley SHS and teachers college at Kelvin Grove College of Advanced Education.

I have taught in the State System and the private system in Catholic and Christian Colleges.

Early in my teaching career I taught in the Northern Territory and actively took part in the external assessment system which used the external exams to moderate the internal assessment provided by the schools. It was a solid system and did not appear to me to have bias as it was based on sound Mathematics.

I have witnessed a decline in the standards in Queensland over my whole career in teaching. The skill set of students have been reduced in favor of graphical interpretation through graphic calculators. The students no longer need to be able to draw graphs from algebraic calculations or factorize Polynomials, they simply type in the equation and read off values from a graph. This is said to be higher level thinking when any questions are raised to the QSA Authority but in reality we are just reducing the students skill levels and making them reliant on technology rather than the technology being a tool to be used.

I have been a member of the Maths C Panel in Brisbane North, Maths B panel in Toowoomba, Maths C panel in Toowoomba and Maths C panel in the Sunshine Coast Region.

I have seen the large discrepancy that exists in how school submissions are moderated. The school is basically judged by 2 random panel members who after both spend approximately spend 2 hours each looking through the assessment package come together to adjudicate the schools assessment. The panel chair may be asked for his/her opinion but it doesn't happen often. I have often found some very strongly opinionated panel members who are very assertive and thus the judgement becomes very one sided. Another problem with this is many young inexperienced teachers are encouraged to join a panel to learn what they need to do to get through the panel process and they are judging others at the panel process.

The Maths C panel in Toowoomba was chaired by a State School Teacher and had a bias against Private Schools. When I spoke to the QSA Mathematics Person in [REDACTED], [REDACTED] acknowledged that they were aware of this problem.

I have been at many meetings with other schools and it is commonly acknowledged that at the wealthy private schools they know but can not do anything about the fact that tutors and parents are doing the assignments for the students. This is class discrimination and some of the criteria necessary to demonstrate a students A level ability is only able to be demonstrated through assignments.

You may be told that teachers can still use marks but it has been said many times under many different forums that students should be judged by criteria only and not by marks.

It is a very common story that a teacher can have submitted the same assessment package for years and never had a problem but another year it can be ripped to shreds. This just shows the random nature of the QSA panel system. I had a teacher who had his top student dropped 14 rungs which is a terrible thing to happen. The teacher involved spent many hours on the weekend cross matching the assessment to the assessment criteria and physically went and showed the panel chair who agreed that it was incorrectly judged and put them back 13 rungs. The GAME often played is that when the panel members are found to be incorrect the chair will negotiate the placement to 1 rung below which actually goes against QSA guidelines so as to back their panel members up. That 1 rung is often overturned after a final assessment if the students results are consistent.

It is a game of personalities. Many are too scared to challenge the panels decisions and therefore those incorrect judgments negatively affect many students Queensland wide. There are others like myself who do challenge with legitimate arguments and have some success with negotiating. I have found the sunshine coast panel chairs quite approachable but when I was in Toowoomba I had to take my assessment package to State due to a panel chair who was biased against private schools in my opinion.

The success of a student is not dependent on the students ability but dependent on the teacher of the student to create assessment items that can justify the A level required by the panel. This is all up to interpretation of what is required.

I believe external exams mixed with internal tests is the only fair way to make valid student comparisons across Queensland.

Please feel free to contact me for any more information if required.

Thanks

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Neil Capps

