To: The Education and Innovation Committee eic@parliament.qld.gov.au
From: Philippa Harvey, [redacted]

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for responding to our requests for a parliamentary inquiry.
I request that all personal contact details, other than my name, be removed from my submission. To make this task easier, I have underlined this in red as I don't have a colour printer.

I have been teaching Mathematics for 35 years; my first 3 years were in the Northern Territory and the rest in Queensland. Born and educated in Queensland myself, I was always so proud of our educational standing in the world. Not any more! I feel very frustrated with the QSA: with their preoccupation with their own agendas and lack of genuine concern for the plight of students and teachers working under their edicts.

In the recent past, QSA's phobia with using marks (we were told on many occasions at panel meetings and panel workshops that the use of marks is not encouraged in any way) has made our system very inefficient. We are required to use criteria marking and are made to feel unprofessional, old-fashioned and incompetent if we insist on using marks. I have marked English essays using criteria marking and it works well. However, criteria marking for Mathematics is a nightmare. It takes me easily 4 to 5 times as long to set, mark and grade using criteria marking (time which I am not paid for). It is incredibly stressful, difficult, inefficient, and draining. I don't actually understand what each criterion really means, even though I am an intelligent person, and neither does anyone else I have met, as evidenced by the fact that no one can explain them quickly or accurately to other teachers, parents or students when actually applied to particular contexts. One has to be a mind reader to know whether some mistakes are errors in recall, application, understanding, etc. and thus I am firmly of the opinion that criteria marking for Mathematics has a much higher margin of error than using marks. To use an analogy: the stopwatch is a wonderful tool to use in determining the performance of an athlete in a running race, but is a very poor tool for measuring the height gained in the high jump. It can be done, like the old method for measuring the heights of horses eg. a jump of 25 stopwatches , but why would one want to measure that way when one has a far superior (but ancient) yardstick? My point? That criteria marking seems to work satisfactorily for the humanities subjects but not for the ones based on mathematics and science.

Once, I used to put time and effort into trying to find alternative ways to develop better understanding of tricky concepts; for example, by using Professor Charles Lovett's ideas etc. I don't any more. I don't have time. The assessment side of my job takes up most of my time. I strongly believe that you don't fatten a cow by weighing it more often. In fact, the cow gets thinner because you have less time to feed it. I don't believe much teaching actually happens now. It is all lecturing, researching and examining.

I am also seriously concerned by another strange edit of QSA that all assessment items must be weighted equally? Why? We have the mathematics to be able to cope with differently weighted test items. The result in Mathematics is that assignments must be huge to cover as many different concepts as an exam, but one cannot be sure of their authorship. So little learning and consolidation is happening while students are researching quite complex situations without the basics! I much prefer the old ways of using an assignment as a learning tool, then using an exam to evaluate the amount of learning that has happened. One can't use the assignment itself. Who wrote it? I also think it is like judging a cook on the first cake they make. Students should be able to experiment with ideas before we start judging their competency so soon after introducing the concepts.

I believe that the Commonwealth Teaching Service had a far superior system when it came to the assessment of students exiting secondary school. Our NT students sat for the SA external examinations and we were asked to send our predictions for our students' performances. These were used to cross check anomalies. Students who were expected to do well but performed poorly could be offered a supplementary examination if there were reasonable grounds. We were told if our own predictions were too high or too low. I found it very useful as a beginning teacher in an isolated region as one learnt very quickly what the standards were. The system in Queensland has relied heavily on experienced teachers who know the standards from previous systems. I think it is much harder for beginning teachers, especially those in isolated schools, which is where they are more likely to be, to get these standards right. I also believe we are at serious risk of losing talented young Mathematics and Science teachers from the profession. Young teachers in other disciplines are gaining promotion etc. much more rapidly as the burden on them isn't nearly as severe.

I thank you for your time in reading my submission.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Harvey