

**Education and Innovation Committee**

**From:** Edmond O'Donovan [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, 13 May 2013 6:51 AM  
**To:** Education and Innovation Committee  
**Subject:** Parliamentary Inquiry into Assessment Methods for Senior Maths, Chemistry & Physics

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Dear Committee Members,

I would like you to consider my comments when making decisions on the proposed assessment methods for Senior Maths, Physics and Chemistry.

1. My background in this area is principally as a parent. I have had four children complete Yr12 under the Queensland system. My two youngest children are not participating in this as it has proven to be second rate at best, even on an Australian level. My elder children who have completed tertiary education in NSW have noted that the students who have completed the NSW HSC simply "know a lot more". Our younger children are completing the International Baccalaureate. This program is of a high standard and of international repute. It is ably delivered by teachers already within Qld Education Department and a major expansion of it should be considered.
2. As well as being a parent I am a professional engineer and have a great interest in students performing well in these areas. As a professional working in an area that requires a high level of skill in these areas is quite distressing to see what is being put forward in the Maths/Science fields as part of the Qld education system.
3. My first objection to your whole enquiry is that the committee is required to "Ensure that the assessment processes are supported by teachers." There is no mention of support by Parents or higher education providers who have to deal with the consequences of these processes. It should be kept in mind that the education budget is spent to educate tomorrow citizens, not to provide happy employment for teachers. If you are to enquire about support from teachers, please let it be on an individual basis. No submissions should be accepted from teachers unions.
4. As a general comment, the use of continuous assessment overall is incredibly problematic. Apart from assignments grinding any joy out of students, they are open to severe abuse. The issue of cheating is generally ignored though it is very common. I am aware of instances where parents have completed assignments with no input whatsoever from the student. The wider issue of parental or "tutor" assistance is much more complicated but it corrupts the system very badly. Any parent who does not assist their child with an assignment may well be consigning them to the bottom of the class. Assignments also bring on another major dilemma. To assist a child with their learning process is a parents duty. But how does one help a child when that help goes directly into a piece of assessment? The choice is to either assist the child and therefore unfairly impact their performance, or to provide no assistance and have them miss out on learning the material all together. No parent should be required to make this choice. The teaching process should be such that parents can help their children as much as possible without corrupting the assessment process.

5. The sorts of Maths, Physics and Chemistry topics that can be assessed in this manner is limited. This approach was beginning to appear when our fourth child was in Senior year. I saw the syllabus corrupted, with important topics not covered at all as they are difficult to assess in this manner. If someone suggested that History be assessed on the basis of a test with marks to be awarded for "Working and Answers," they would be dismissed as lunatics. However to apply History type assessment processes to Mathematics is assumed completely reasonable!

6. It astonishes me that while everyone is supposed to be scientific in everything these days, the educational establishment is not subject to any standards at all. The tragedy of "whole language learning" over phonetics was imposed on an entire generation with no blind testing to see how well the different approaches worked. Any change to the assessment process for Maths, Physics and Chemistry should be subject to blind testing with a control group. Adoption of any process based on a less rigorous assessment is irresponsible.

7. My personal feeling is that a return to an external exam would be a major improvement. It would enable parents to assist as much as possible without corrupting the assessment process. It would enable the performance of individual teachers and schools to be ranked easily and transparently, and it would mean that higher education providers had a basis on which to begin their courses as all students would have a basic competency in the designated curriculum.

I am happy to have my name associated with my submission.

Regards,

Edmond O'Donovan

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