

To whom it may concern

I have been teaching mathematics in Queensland schools since 1994 and have been a member of a district panel for many years. The introduction of alternative assessment and criteria based marking has been a nightmare since it was first introduced. When questions are directed at QSA representatives the responses often vary, are ambiguous and always demonstrate the "ideal" sample. It is of little wonder that schools experience difficulty in implementing syllabus requirements and panels spend hours interpreting submissions.

Mathematics is a subject that should be marks based; the very nature of the subject dictates this. It is very frustrating with our current syllabus to implement the criteria set out by QSA. In most cases the descriptors are vague and subjective, in particular, the Communication & Justification (CAJ) criterion. It is equally weighted with both Knowledge & Procedure (KAP) and Modelling & Problem Solving (MAP). Depending on the teacher, this sometimes inflates the results of a student who may not be as mathematical as his/her peers, but is neat and organised. In other cases a student is penalised twice – once in MAP for not being able to do the question and then again in CAJ.

After applying criteria to all assessment pieces, we are then expected to rank students on a scale and assign SAI's so that an OP can then be assigned (numbers). I fully support the use of standards to set assessment and believe in offering questions that range in complexity. However, only marks based assessment can be easily validated and justified. It is fair in comparing students across classes and the allocation of marks is clear. For example, a question worth 5 marks will require more time and thought than a 1 mark question. The expectation is obvious. When returning assessment pieces, students are often interested as they understand and can follow the process. Criteria based marking is so vague it offers no real feedback and it is easy to pass with very little knowledge of the work. Cross-marking between teachers is also easier with marks as there is less discrepancy between judgements of student work.

My second area of concern is with alternative assessment. Students who undertake straight maths/science courses are overloaded with EEI's, ERT's, mathematics assignments and tests. Each year we face a year 12 group whereby students are overworked, stressed and often ill in the last weeks of the term. The burden of alternative assessment often means that homework and study are sacrificed. Due to all these contributing factors, some students resort to hiring tutors or using social media to do assessment for them. This then questions the authenticity of the assignment, which is unfair to the student who genuinely produces work of a high standard. In most cases, the learning experiences gained from investigations are minimal but very time consuming. When speaking with many students, the ones who enjoy mathematics and are successful acknowledged that they prefer tests; this was particularly the case with males. Perhaps one of the reasons that boys are disengaged in maths and science is because the style of assessment has changed and discriminates against them.

Like many teachers in Queensland, a great deal of my time and energy goes toward setting assessment and marking it. This often takes place on weekends and does interfere with the time I have to prepare teaching lessons and create resources. A fair system is what Queensland requires to move ahead in education. To create this, I believe that external exams are the only way to equitably provide opportunities for all students - one board creates and marks the assessment. This will ensure that neither the school nor the teacher is bias towards a student and that each individual is unaffected by the cohort of that year. As we move towards implementing the Australian curriculum, now would be a prime time to standardise assessment across the nation.

Yours faithfully

