

Education and Innovation Committee
Parliament House
Brisbane QLD 4000

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Assessment Methods for Senior Maths, Chemistry and Physics

To the Education and Innovation Committee

Assessment Methods for Senior Maths in Queensland

Dear Members of the Inquiry,

I have been a teacher in the Queensland state education system for 28 continuous years. My current position is Head of Mathematics, at Alexandra Hills SHS. I have taught Mathematics to all year levels in secondary schools.

Historically the 2001 Syllabus documents for Mathematics A, B and C started the debate, discussion and arguments regarding assessment task creation, marking student's work and grading student's work via criteria. The 2001 Syllabus used terms such as, "consistently", "generally", "appropriately", "sometimes" and "rarely". The interpretation and understanding of these terms (and others) differed from teacher to teacher, from school to school and more importantly from school to panellist. The later of these relationships impacted students' futures.

In 2008 Mathematics teachers hoped that the current Syllabus document would provide more clarity. Sadly this did not happen. The 2008 Syllabus substituted one set of undefined terms by another. The staffroom discussions now concentrated around the terms, "routine", "non-routine", "simple", "complex", "life-related" and "abstract". The problems that occurred between the school and the panellist were magnified. A panellists understanding of these terms (and others) differed from the school leading to an increase in the number of "discussions" regarding movements on the R6 documents. Again students' futures were impacted.

Teachers' main concerns are:

- Consistency in understanding the terms used in the criteria of the Syllabus documents. The terms mentioned above have different meaning to different people throughout the assessment process.
- Creating assessment tasks reflecting the terms used in the criteria of the Syllabus documents. The time to create an assessment task that adequately addresses the criteria of the Syllabus has increased dramatically. Teachers are now a slave to minute detail.

- Marking assessment tasks according to the terms used in the criteria of the Syllabus documents. Teachers are “second guessing” their judgements because of the openness of the criteria used in the Syllabus.
- Extended Modelling & Problem Solving tasks having equal weighting as examinations. Students’ grades are inflated due to assistance from their teacher, parent or tutor.
- Inconsistent “judgements” made by panellists. An assessment package will be accepted one year, but rejected the following year. Individual panellists have differing opinions regarding the criteria statements.
- Inconsistent standards of assessment tasks verified by panellists. Some schools provide packages of “A” standard questions that are of a lesser level of complexity than other schools. If the standard of the package is not questioned by the panellist students are disadvantaged.
- Panellists are told to find evidence to support school decisions, however schools have been allowed to change interpretation of the Syllabus i.e. no marks allowed, but schools are still using marks.

The outcome reached by this committee is extremely important to the future year 12 students of Queensland, their parents, teachers and school. Students’ lives and career aspirations will be impacted if the status quo remains. It is vitally important that the results achieved by year 12 students are accurate and valid. Change must occur, or we will continue to lose experienced mathematics teachers through stress and frustration. Teachers must be allowed the time to focus on their students, student learning, building relationships with parents and the enjoyment of teaching.

Sincerely

Paul Young

HOD Mathematics

