

Scrap the schools authority,

Peter Ridd

MATHS and science in Queensland schools is very weak. International Trends in Maths and Science Studies shows Australian students are far weaker at maths and science than our Asian competitors.

NAPLAN results show Queensland's students are among the weakest in maths and English.

In particular, our brightest and best are shockingly weak compared with other jurisdictions.

School education in Queensland has been dominated by the Queensland Studies Authority, which is charged with determining what happens in every subject, in every school (government and non-government) and in every school year.

Parliament trusted the QSA. I believe the authority has betrayed that trust.

The previous government employed the Australian Council

for Educational Research to review Queensland's education.

That showed that we have gone backwards by two years of learning and that whereas we were the best in the '60s and '70s, we are now the worst.

The QSA should not be blamed for all of the disaster, but it must certainly accept a lot of the blame.

It was responsible for instituting some of the most radical syllabus and assessment procedures in the world.

The QSA forbids the adding of marks. Percentages are banned. Instead, teachers magically work out the final grade and rank order from a matrix of letters. That is called a "holistic" judgment.

QSA assessments are mainly based on "assignments".

In the sciences, these are called Extended Experimental Investigations or Extended Response Tasks.

Both may last for up to eight or

nine weeks continuously and are very verbose. Often nothing else is taught during that time.

Physics and chemistry assessments now are de facto English tests rather than providing information about student knowledge, skills and achievement in the subject.

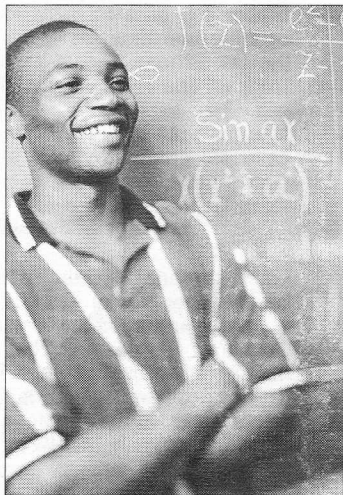
It is common for students to have multiple EELs and ERTs due just before exams and this puts crippling pressure on our students for little benefit.

Government rightly has limited direct authority over the QSA.

However, the legislated QSA governing board has a narrow stakeholder base dominated by teachers, education administrators, education union members and academics from university education faculties.

Where is the representative from the Australian Medical Association, Engineers Australia or the Business Council? Where are the academics from university disciplines such as

for the sake of our students



MATHS SHOCK: In this subject, our brightest and best are weak.

mathematics, history or pharmacy? Education is for everybody and a much broader group is necessary to oversee this organisation.

Only Parliament can rectify the degradation of school education and the current illogical, non-numerate and socially divisive assessment system.

What is needed is for the relevant parliamentary committee to hold an inquiry into schooling in Queensland.

So far, Education Minister John-Paul Langbroek has announced a review of the QSA.

It is to be hoped that this review will finally subject the QSA to the scrutiny it has avoided for so long.

The outcome of any review cannot be foretold, but it may recommend the QSA be abolished.

Certainly Parliament has the power to disband it and form a new organisation with a new board.

The new authority would likely be much smaller than at present because the new national curriculum has replaced many of its functions.

Should the Government disband the QSA, it must take care about

who is appointed to a new board. Lowest on the list, I believe, must be university educationist academics who are responsible for many of the experiments the QSA has conducted upon our children.

They are too preoccupied with trendy social issues and current educational fads to be trusted for this job.

The QSA has flown under the radar as education debates have concentrated on class sizes and private versus public schooling.

Many societal issues and problems are costly to fix.

But by reforming or replacing the QSA, we can have an enormous positive influence on our education system and save a great deal of money.

This is an opportunity that the new Queensland Government must not miss.

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