



Independent Schools Queensland Submission to

Parliamentary Inquiry into Assessment Methods used in Senior Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics in Queensland

May 2013

Background

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) is the peak representative body for the independent schooling sector in Queensland. ISQ membership comprises 187 independent schools operating on some 200 campuses throughout the state. These schools are educating over 115,000 students in 2013, or approximately 15% of all Queensland students. Further, independent schools educate nearly 20% of all Queensland secondary students.

The majority of independent schools are Prep to Year 12 schools. A total of 147 independent schools provide Year 11 and 12 programs, with the vast majority offering the QSA curriculum for Years 11 and 12. These schools enrolled 21,118 senior secondary students in 2012.

A small number of independent schools offer the International Baccalaureate in Years 11 and 12; just as a small number of independent schools offer specialist programs at these year levels such as those for disengaged youth.

Independent schools are autonomous schools governed at the local level. Each school's governing body is responsible for the educational programs offered by the school and the delivery of those programs.

Engagement with the Inquiry

Independent Schools Queensland appeared before the Parliamentary Education and Innovation Committee on March 6, 2013 to provide a briefing and to answer questions from the Committee. A transcript of this public briefing is available on the Committee's website.

As ISQ is a representative and support body for independent schools, it is not responsible for the operation of independent schools. This responsibility rests with the governance and management of each independent school.

As a result, in terms of this Inquiry, ISQ has taken the position that its role principally relates to facilitating the involvement of interested independent schools in the Inquiry process. It has undertaken this role through the provision of information to independent schools about the Inquiry and encouraging interested parties in the independent sector to raise any issues or concerns directly with the Committee.

ISQ has also sought views from the independent sector about the matters being considered by the Committee.

In doing so, it is important to recognise that the assessment methods used in senior mathematics, chemistry and physics apply across all schooling sectors under the direction of the Queensland Studies Authority. A perception that independent schools have the autonomy to implement assessment methods according to their own particular needs and circumstances is not correct.

Concerns Raised by Independent Schools

Generally, Principals of independent schools raise concerns about the Queensland Senior Secondary system across a range of areas including Queensland's school-based assessment system, the OP system and its associated Core Skills Test and moderation panels and processes and the provision of professional development associated with these. Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics are all part of this system of assessment and reporting.

Some teachers of these subjects within the sector have expressed specific concerns about the time taken to prepare students to conduct the Extended Experimental Investigations (EEI) and that consequently there is less time for deepening students' knowledge of the required content.

Although the majority of teachers consulted supported the principle of the EEI and Extended Responses, there was some concern that this form of assessment appears to have taken precedence in the syllabus and that a balance needs to be restored.

There are a variety of views about senior secondary assessment within the sector. Many Principals are very passionate in their support of our current system as educational best practice, whilst others are critical of the system, particularly around the moderation processes. There would be some Principals who would advocate a role for external assessment in the system.

Schools are currently in the process of implementing the Australian Curriculum for Prep to Year 10 and discussions have started with schools about the implementation arrangements for the Australian Curriculum in Years 11 and 12.

Concerns are developing in schools about uncertainty around the future arrangements particularly given the context of this Inquiry and the recently announced Review of Senior Assessment and Reporting and Tertiary Entrance which is to be completed by July 2014.

Reviews and inquiries often generate expectations, and even sometimes speculation, about what changes might occur in the future. Whilst it is vital that we get our senior secondary system right, Principals want certainty and stability in the system.

Recommendation

Independent schools recognise the need for continuous review and improvement, but the current arrangements need to be reviewed professionally and with some degree of urgency so that conclusions can be made and, if necessary, changes implemented as soon as practicable.

Senior assessment systems in Queensland must be rigorous, fair and transparent. They must be held in high regard both educationally and by the wider community. Our assessment systems must be supported by schools and teachers and be valid and reliable in their outcomes in terms of assessing student outcomes.

Independent Schools Queensland will be pleased to continue working with the Education and Innovation Committee in this important Inquiry in order that the objective that senior assessment systems are rigorous, fair and transparent is achieved in the best interests of all Queensland students.

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