

Jan Finch



8.05.2013

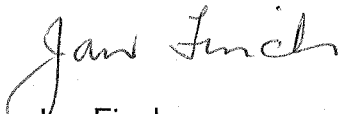
Education and Innovation Committee,  
Parliament House,  
Brisbane. Queensland 4000

Dear Committee Members,

Attached is my submission to your inquiry. I am currently teaching Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics. I experience at first hand the many problems of the current system of assessment in Queensland. As standards are falling and stress and workloads of students and teachers are increasing it is obvious that we need change to improve our educational outcomes in Queensland.

Please accept the attached submission. I do not want my personal details (email, phone number nor address) publically printed and could you also withhold from publication the schools' named in the submission. I have highlighted and underlined in red those schools I do not want named.

Yours sincerely,

  
Jan Finch.

Phone 

## **Submission to Education and Innovation Committee**

I have taught Senior Biology, Chemistry, Physics & Mathematics A during my more than 30 years of teaching. I spent 7 years as a Chemistry panellist. At various times I have also been Head of Science in schools I have taught in. I have also taught in New South Wales and in two overseas countries. Both countries had public examinations. I myself sat the Queensland Public Examinations in my senior year. I began teaching as Radford was implemented in Queensland. The current Queensland assessment system is the worst system I have experienced.

### **Ensuring assessment processes are supported by teachers**

I was part of the Chemistry Trial Pilot. Teachers at the meetings I attended did not support the implementation of the current syllabuses; in fact we were told at QSA syllabus implementation days that we just had to accept the new system even though we could see it was flawed. QSA does not take kindly to constructive criticism. There were many discussions concerning what the words in the criteria meant. The meaning of the criteria is interpreted differently by different teachers and this is consistently reflected in panel advice to schools. A piece of assessment can be praised one year and the same piece can be heavily criticised another year.

At one meeting last year we were told by a QSA SAO that we can use marks but can't use them to make judgements. We are supposed to make qualitative judgements to come up with an OP which is used as a quantitative result. How can we (maths and science teachers) support that when we know that it is fundamentally flawed and goes against the principles of the disciplines of Maths and Science?

### **Student participation levels**

Last year in Term 3 my year 12 Chemistry students had 11 major pieces of assessment spread across the subjects they were studying due over a period of less than 2 weeks. It included exams and major assignments. Students became so tired some days they missed school because they had been up all night getting assignments done. Some students were close to breakdown and several were on medication for stress. This is relatively common during Term 3. I do not believe we need to push our youth to breaking point for them to gain entrance to University. This turns them off Maths and Science and does not encourage them to pursue these career areas.

Students with a gift for problem solving don't want to be burdened with long winded assignments. It is not what challenges them. Year 12 and past students tell younger students of the excessive workloads and then less students choose Maths A,B,C and Science subjects. The dropout rate in Term 1 Year 11 is relatively high once students realise the work load in Science subjects.

### **The ability of assessment processes to support valid and reliable judgments of student outcomes.**

last year had girls do practicals together in Chemistry and they wrote exactly the same report. Consequently some students got higher marks than they deserved while others were disadvantaged because of their less gifted

partners. I consider submitting the same report cheating. In Mathematics students calculated the area of an island. In a written assignment they were supposed to explain why their result was different from the actual area. The better students had negligible error so they had very little to write about. Wouldn't it be better to give them credit for being so accurate rather than be disadvantaged because their error was so small? Calculations not assignments identify the student with the greater Maths ability.

At the same school and other schools across the state tutors write the assignments. As a teacher I cannot prove if a parent or tutor wrote an assignment for one of my students unless I can prove it is plagiarised. Students who work hard and don't have support of parents and tutors are disadvantaged.

I also know of separate cases at two different non-Brisbane schools where their best students were each allowed 6 hours to complete an exam paper.

QSA states that there is agreement of standards across the state. I have been involved in two panel areas. My experience is there is not agreement. Certainly if you read the Chemistry Discussion Groups emails it is evident that there are many people struggling with the standards and they are not comparable across the state. QSA itself ran workshops last year to try to ensure standards were consistent across the state. Although workshops had been run before the focus had never been specifically to ensure state wide consistency of standards. Why was that needed? In all the years since implementation this had not occurred before.

I try very hard to follow the syllabus guidelines to be fair to my students and other students across the state. Writing new exam questions, EEs and ERTs take up a lot of time and we are never sure how the panel will criticise them. The marking of rough drafts and final reports takes up a huge amount of time. Time which would be better used preparing lessons to better engage students and ensure the subjects retain rigor. Teaching is much more stressful than it was 10 to 20 years ago. By the end of term many teachers become ill because the excessive workload and lack of sleep results in them getting run down and unable to fight off infections. This also happens with students who are overworked.

Unfortunately if you want to cheat it is easy to do so. A previous teacher at my current school was caught telling the students the answers in Chinese when they put their hands up for help in the examination room. At another school I have encountered the teachers giving revision sheets which include questions the students subsequently got on their exam paper.

When I taught at [REDACTED] and the Chemistry teachers cross marked I was told by the HOD of Science that if one teacher awarded a B and another a B- for a student's work that was close enough. We would never accept that if one person gave 78% (B) and the other gave 67% (B-) it was close enough. The more the result gets manipulated the greater the error becomes magnified. This would result in incorrectly ranked students for their SAI and could result in incorrect OPs.

I also teach Biology and 1/3 of assessment in this syllabus is the assessment of Biological Issues. Surely issues are something that should be discussed in Biology

but should not be 1/3 of the total assessment. Biology is a discipline of Science and should be treated as such not as a humanities subject like it is in the current syllabus. There should be consistency across all the science subjects. I am not alone in believing this. I frequently hear other Biology teachers say the same.

### **The Solution**

No system is perfect, however because of the reasons I have stated above I believe a public examination set by experienced teachers and trialled prior to state-wide use is the fairest system of assessment for our students. It would also eliminate the need for the QCS test.

Each discipline has a basic knowledge base that should be tested. I am also in favour of including reasoning and problem solving questions. Knowledge should be worth 60% of the paper and problem solving and higher order thinking 40% of the paper. Together let us improve our educational standards for all students in Queensland.

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