

Maths don't add up

Opinion

**PROFESSOR PETER RIDD,
Head of Department Physics
James Cook University.**

THE Menkens Inquiry report released on Monday has finally revealed that Queensland has big problems with its assessment and teaching of senior science and mathematics.

It is probable that similar problems occur right through the school system at all years, in all subjects, and in private and public schools.

The root cause is the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) and its trendy education theories. Its experiments on Queensland children have been shown to be an abject failure.

It is now evident that the QSA methods of assessment are radical and almost unique in the world. This would not be a problem if there were evidence that the system performs at least as well as good education systems in other jurisdictions.

During the inquiry, the onus of proof was upon the QSA to demonstrate this, but the QSA failed the inquiry in this regard.

Instead considerable evidence was presented by parents, teachers and university discipline academics that indicated that the QSA's assessment system, which among other attributes bans the use of marks, are: unreliable, over-complicated, and difficult or impossible to understand; open to cheating;

excessively inefficient and time consuming for both students and teachers; discriminatory against boys; and disadvantageous to rural/remote schools, schools in lower socio-economic areas and schools with a high proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The QSA has redefined and impoverished maths, physics and chemistry by over-assessing capabilities which are marginally related to these subjects, e.g. the overuse of writing tasks instead of calculations. The inquiry has recommended that these tasks be greatly reduced.

One particularly strange aspect of the Queensland system is that marks are effectively banned in Queensland schools and that teachers must make an "holistic" judgment to come up with the final grade, rather than just adding up the marks.

The Menkens Inquiry has recommended that marks can be used. Many teachers will be very grateful that we are finally returning to a system that is used by the rest of the world. Students and parents will finally be able to understand how the teachers arrive at the final grade.

The inquiry has also recommended that an external subject-based exam be implemented. This is a huge kick in the guts to the QSA which argued tirelessly against an external exam system the likes of which are used in most other parts of the world and

Australia.

The QSA attitude has been to keep its head in the sand and dispute that there is anything amiss.

During the inquiry, the closest that the QSA and its supporters have come to accepting that real problems exist is to claim that a little more professional development to train the teachers would have been useful.

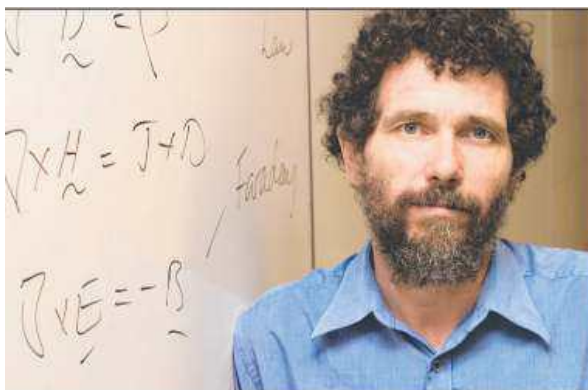
This is not correct as no amount of training can make this system work.

The only group where the QSA found any significant support was from the education hierarchy – teacher's organisations, teachers in positions of authority, and education academics at universities.

This group of like-minded and self-selecting educationalists have controlled Queensland education for too long without being subject to any scrutiny.

A first step to restoring Queensland schools to international standards must be to abolish the QSA and form a new organisation which is properly responsible to parliament and the education minister.

Finally the Minister of Education, Mr John-Paul Langbroek, must not wait for the outcome of the OP system inquiry in mid-next year to take some action. There has been enough review, now let's have some "can-do".



ACTION NEEDED: JCU's Professor Peter Ridd