

Attn: Professor Gabrielle Matters
Australian Council for Educational Research
1/165 Kelvin Grove Rd
KELVIN GROVE QLD 4059

Sent to: gabrielle.matters@acer.edu.au

April 2014

Dear Prof Matters,

Submission:

Qld must fast-track external pen-and-paper exams like the other States

Please accept this letter and attached response to ACER's 'Focus Questions' as my submission to ACER's OP Review*.

(*Qld Review of Senior Assessment and Reporting and Tertiary Entrance)

ACER's one-year review is in its final months concluding in July 2014.

Yet it appears from your advice to date that ACER -

1. is **not** considering external exams;
2. is **not** considering scaling school assessment according to external exam results;
- and
3. **is** considering continuing social moderation.

Why is ACER not seriously considering fast-tracking quality external senior subject exams counting towards senior assessment in Queensland, like every other Australian State and top-performing countries?

ACER's approach is **contrary to Qld's 2013 EIC parliamentary inquiry recommendations** and **contrary to ministerial direction** for maths and sciences.

Queensland's failed schools experiment has put our students behind the national average on all 20 NAPLAN tests in 2013.

This submission urges you to –

- adopt the recommendations below, in response to your Focus Questions;
- put an end to this state's 40-year experiment with unproven assessment and tertiary entrance methods.

This submission including my name may be published but I request that my address and contact details be kept confidential.

Yours sincerely,

David Best (*Science/Maths Teacher*)

P.S. I find it ironic and faintly ridiculous that in order to level the playing field Queensland has replaced true external exams with state wide QCS tests, i.e. External Exams.

ACER's Focus Questions¹

1. School-based assessment - NEEDS AN ANCHOR

- teacher workload with former Queensland Studies Authority-directed, school-based assessment has become unmanageable with every teacher having to 're-invent the wheel' (EIC p31, ToR 2)²
- authenticity and validity problems with school-based tests and especially with assignments (EIC Rec. 4, ToR 3.2, 7.1)³
- supervised, end-of-semester tests are preferred to continuous, time-wasting assignments (EIC Rec. 1, 9, ToR 3.2, 7.1)
- limit assignments to 12 - 25% of school-based assessment (EIC Rec. 9, ToR 7.1)
- school results should be based on up-front, transparent calculations (ToR 5)

2. External Assessment for 50% - YES! YES! YES!

- ALL OTHER STATES use pen-and-paper, subject-specific state exams for all subjects (EIC Rec 2, ToR 7.1, 7.2)
- external audit (anchor in reality) for school-based assessment (EIC Rec 2, ToR 7.1)
- level playing field providing unexaggerated results (EIC Rec 2, ToR 7.1)
- to encourage learning of genuine discipline knowledge (EIC Rec 2, ToR 7.1)
- External exams should be standard pen-and-paper, not online-response, especially for mathematics (EIC Rec 2, ToR 7.1)

State of Australia	Standard, pen-and-paper, state-wide senior exit exams	marks added and reported as a percentage	ATAR score
New South Wales	Yes	Yes	Yes
Victoria	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tasmania	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Western Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Queensland	No	No	No

Table 1. Queensland needs standard senior exit exams, like all other states

3. Moderation - NO MORE

¹ http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/SATE_focus_questions.pdf

² Terms of Reference for *Review of Senior Assessment and Reporting and Tertiary Entrance*
http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/Qld_Review_Terms_of_Reference.pdf

³ Recommendations in *The Education and Innovation Committee Report No. 25*

<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/EIC/2013/QldAssessment/rpt-025-14Oct2013.pdf>

- social moderation is corrupt, unfair, unreliable and must be discontinued (ToR 3.1)
- instead using scaling of school assessment by state exams provides authenticity, and removes the need for central micromanagement of teachers/schools, thus giving teachers flexibility and freedom to achieve goals, with minimum auditing (EIC Rec. 4, 14, ToR 3.1, 7.1)

4. Finer scale for school assessments - MUCH FINER PLEASE

- The finer the better. A 100 point scale is much better than 5 or 15 (ToR 3.3)
- Fine scaled reporting encourages students to exert effort and study (ToR 3.3)

5. Cross-curriculum capabilities testing - NO THANKS

- not genuine knowledge (ToR 4.3, 4.5)
- waste of money and students' and teachers' time (ToR 4.3, 4.5)
- not necessary to produce ATAR rankings (ToR 4.3, 4.5)

6. Separation at the secondary-tertiary interface - NO NEED

- separating ranking from certification is unnecessary, counterproductive and expensive, as external exams can conveniently achieve both (ToR 7.2)
- separation of certification and ranking doubles costs to tax-payers
- using the ATAR ranking encourages learning and study

7. Scaling and the construction of rank orders - YES, ATAR

- the less authentic school-based assessment should be scaled according to the state-wide exam for each subject (EIC Rec. 4, ToR 7.1)
- Qld should use ATAR like all the other states (ToR 4.6, 7.2)
- difficult, academic subjects should be weighted more heavily than easy subjects
- ranking encourages study and can readily be obtained using state exams (ToR 7.2)
- The generation of all scores must be transparent (ToR 5)

8. Governance - DISCIPLINES, NOT QCAA

- QCAA (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, former QSA) staff do not believe in state exams, and QCAA staff are not trusted by teachers (ToR 4.7)
- Setting curriculum and exams should be done by small teams of discipline experts and experienced teachers, NOT education theorists (ToR 4.7)

Other issues

- reports to parents should show percentages (ToR 3.4, 5)
- exit statement must show external exam percentages for each subject (ToR 3.4, 4.3, 5)
- If a student wants results for a second language to be used in their ATAR calculation, the language chosen by the student must be a genuinely foreign language to that student (ToR 4.7)
- choice of quality alternative curricula such as the International Baccalaureate should not be penalised (ToR 4.2)
- Qld should guarantee continuation of the 'Hubbard's-style' option of 100% external exams for those who seek it (ToR 4.2)
- To ensure the independence of this review, that the report identifies ACER's financial and other conflicts of interest and makes no recommendations that are likely to financially or otherwise benefit ACER and the reviewers, such as the use of ACER's online testing systems (ToR 8)