

17/04/14

To the Premier
Mr Campbell Newman

Dear Sir,

I write to express my very considerable concern with regard to the nature of the current Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) assessment for students in years eleven and twelve, studying either Senior Physics or Senior Mathematics.

The latest introduction by the QSA has been assessment by means of assignments, in addition to class tests. The assignments now constitute a significant part of the assessment.

I believe the impact of introducing assignment based assessment is causing very serious problems. Below details my experience. I have outlined the impact on the student and then the impact on the teacher, separating the two related matters:

Students (from a teacher's point of view):

1. Their workload has greatly increased. They often have several assignments from different subjects running concurrently. As some assignments for several subjects occur at similar times students often report staying up to 2, 3 or 4 am to complete them. Whilst in some cases there may be less than perfect organisation on the part of students, much of this is out of their control.
2. I cannot speak for other subjects that I do not teach, but students do not appear to learn much from the assignment style work in subjects such as Physics or Maths. One of the reasons for this is good teaching includes revisiting material, but when students do not all do the same assignment in one subject, there is no opportunity for revisiting.
3. They are not receiving a good base knowledge of the subject, as there is less time available to cover important topics.
4. Getting students to do follow up reinforcement exercises, which is also part of good teaching, is now very difficult, as they are nearly always trying to meet deadlines for assignments, either in that subject or other subjects.
5. They are very aware of the problems of standardising and authenticity and don't like the situation. A good student may achieve an A in an exam and an A in an assignment, whilst a student finding the work difficult may achieve a D in an exam but an A or B in an assignment. Not only is the assignment likely to be invalid (because of external influence) but the impact of using this mode of assessment is also to compress the results for the student cohort for that subject. Overall this produces less discriminating and inaccurate outcomes.

As a teacher:

1. The workload has gone from being busy to almost impossible on a full timetable. The marking alone has increased so much that there is the equivalent to a week to two weeks of extra work, each school term.
2. The marking is much more difficult, with no marks and far less discriminating, particularly for a large cohort.
3. In addition to the marking there is also organising, designing of the material, ordering of equipment and unfortunately having parents come in when they wish to question the grades awarded, because they are unhappy.
4. Validity and authenticity are clearly very questionable whatever a school may do.
5. Each school or institution has in place an EB agreement which has involved extensive hours of work for both the employer and the employees before it is finalised. The conditions and workload are negotiated and carefully specified. The weeks of extra work the QSA have introduced have not been considered in the process and would not be accepted or considered fair if it was submitted for consideration within our EBs. A near impossible workload has been imposed and it makes it very difficult to carry out the duties we have agreed to with our respective employer.
6. From my experience meeting and speaking to parents I feel our reputation is deteriorating badly and parents express their dissatisfaction with assessment that uses assignments.

I have written to you as I believe the developments detailed above need addressing urgently.

I strongly believe we need the introduction of external exams as the major part of assessment in Senior Physics and Senior Mathematics.

Thank you for your time in this matter.

Yours sincerely

(Name withheld)

Teacher of Physics and Mathematics