

ACER's Proposed Senior Assessment System

Should be Discarded

by
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The 'independent' review of Queensland's OP system conducted by ACER, proposes a nightmare of enhanced bureaucratic control, and should be discarded. Instead, Queensland should adopt a proper exit exam system, as used in all other states of Australia.

A proper exit exam system means:

1. Graduating students sit comprehensive, pen-and-paper, state-wide exams in each of their chosen subjects. This exam is worth a fixed percentage of their final grade (typically 50%).
2. The remaining 50% of students' final grade is independently assessed by each school (without micro-management by a central bureaucracy).
3. As no two schools are the same, these 'in-school' results are scaled to match the common standard of the state exam. This simple procedure maintains fairness across the state.

Background

Queensland used a proper state exam system (with 100% exams) for ninety years until, under pressure from 1960-70s radical politics, the state switched to an experimental, socially-moderated, 100% school-based system. This system has continued for forty years until the present. During this time, no other state or country has adopted Queensland's system.

Previously in Queensland, the validity of each subject was guaranteed by tertiary specialists, who wrote the relevant examinations. For the forty experimental years however, Queensland's secondary system has been disconnected from knowledgeable tertiary specialists and left under the direction of a small group of local 'education' theorists.

During this period, Queensland schools have seen a continual decline in standards. For example, by 2012, university lecturers at the state's two largest universities reported school graduates enrolled in science and engineering, would typically fail on year 10 level mathematics questions.

This experimental period has also seen school teachers increasingly frustrated with bureaucratic requirements. For example, mathematics teachers have been forbidden from adding up students' marks, and have instead been forced to follow elaborate, time-consuming and subjective grading procedures.

Education theory has become an oppressive burden on teachers, while students' discipline knowledge has diminished. For example, Queensland senior mathematics and science courses have been re-written by education theorists to require long, take-home essay assignments, while mathematical reasoning has been removed from senior Physics and Chemistry, and mathematical proofs all-but removed from mathematics.

The experimental, social-moderation system, has encouraged and rewarded widespread cheating on school assessment. These aspects were all made public knowledge by the Parliamentary Inquiry in 2013.

ACER was chosen to conduct this follow-up review of the senior assessment system. Thus we see a report written by education theorists, including some of those in the small group advocating the present Queensland system.

Problems with the ACER Recommendations

1. ACER propose that the notorious QSA/QCAA be given even further control over every schools' assessment.

- QCAA is the new name for the discredited and notoriously unpopular organization QSA, which has been making every Queensland teacher's life a misery with time-wasting, unnecessary tasks, and even forbidding maths teachers from adding up marks (as uncovered by the 2013 Parliamentary Inquiry).
- QCAA staff lack sufficient discipline expertise to properly manage a secondary assessment system. The organization is further hampered by its misplaced commitment to constructivist education theory.

Instead of proposing that this organization be closed down, ACER is proposing that these same people have much greater powers over every school, than they currently do. This is neither an election-winner, nor a sensible or practical solution. One can only speculate on ACER's motivation for making these recommendations (Rec 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18 and 23).

2. Failure to propose a proper state exam system

- A proper state exam system (used in every other state) includes a comprehensive final exam. ACER's proposed "external assessment" component is not comprehensive, and may not even be an exam.
- ACER reject the simple, fair, essential and obvious procedure of scaling school assessment results to the state exam results. Scaling is used in every other state.

3. Further expensive bureaucratic bungling and interference proposed

- Instead of using scaling, ACER propose an expensive system of bureaucrat-intensive interference in all schools (both public and private) to attempt to force comparability between schools (Rec 8 and 9).

4. ACER propose we continue to reward widespread cheating

- ACER's proposed moderation does not solve the wide-spread problem of tip-off testing (teachers giving students the test-answers the day before). Only scaling would remove the incentive for teachers to do this.
- ACER proposes continuation of the use of take-home assignments for senior assessment, even though it is common for these to be written by paid tutors or parents (as uncovered in the 2013 Parliamentary Inquiry).

5. Constant stress on students with 24 assessment pieces

- ACER propose each student does 24 different assessments (assignments, tests etc) throughout year 12. This is far too many. It would not only disrupt teaching, but would continue the constant stress of the OP-style continuous assessment.
- Warning: ACER's proposed '10+10+10+30 assessments' are not end of semester exams spread over both years 11 and 12.

6. Cookie-cutter proposal is too rigid

- ACER fail to accommodate those students with exceptional circumstances who require the 100% external exam option (Rec 10). This option has always been in place in Queensland (for example, through Hubbards School). ACER propose to close this option. A proper state exam system, on the other hand, easily accommodates these students.
- ACER's proposal to impose uniform in-school assessment across every school (both public and private) fails to recognise the varying standards between high and low achieving schools.

7. Failure to meet interstate standards of transparency

- In other states, ATAR scores, exit exam scores and in-school marks are all visible on students' exit certificate. ACER wants to keep these scores hidden on QTAC computers.
- Interstate standards of transparency engage the public in education, and keep the responsible organizations accountable to the public.

8. Proposed measurement is too coarse

- ACER propose that a student's work for a whole term or semester be recorded with a number from 1 to 10. This is far too coarse. A percentage (from 1 to 100) is more appropriate.
- One only need consider the process of training for an athletic event to realise that accurate (fine-scaled) measurement plays a helpful role in healthy competition and in improving personal performance. On the other hand, using only coarse measurement discourages students from striving for improvement. Other states announce honour rolls for the top performers on their state exams. ACER's proposal suggests we play-down, hide or ignore academic achievement.
- ATAR scores used in every state for tertiary entrance, also require much finer-scaled reporting of academic results.

9. An unnecessary duplication of bureaucracy

A proper state exam system easily achieves both tasks of certifying school achievement, and providing tertiary entrance rankings. ACER's proposal to separate these tasks into separate organisations unnecessarily duplicates work for the government.

Conclusion

The Newman Government should implement a proper state-wide exit exam system, as used in every other state and discard this 'independent' proposal.
