

The Parliamentary Enquiry

As a Head of Mathematics in a large State Secondary School I am dismayed at the poor numbers of students that are attracted to higher Mathematics.

I have worked in both Queensland, where there is no externally set assessment and in the United Kingdom, where there is externally set assessment. The culture in schools in the United Kingdom is one of learning, with a focus on the rigorous assessment. As the assessment is also externally marked by a relatively small number of people employed by examination boards, the external assessment is a true indication of student ability.

We need to have external examinations in Queensland for at least Mathematics for the following reasons:

- Teachers are freed to teach, rather than set assessment.
- State examinations are equitable for all students.
- Student achievement can only be compared between schools with externally set and marked assessment.
- Teacher quality can only be compared when all of their students are performing the same assessment.

We should not be using written assignments in Mathematics to assess for the following reasons:

- The time consumed by implementing these assessments outweighs their learning benefit. This is largely because an inordinate amount of time is used to complete these tasks, rather than practising the basic skills which they purport to teach.
- They discriminate against students with literacy issues.
- In a lower socio-economic school there is not the financial capacity to “buy” help in the form of tutors to assist students with these assignments, which are allowed to be taken home. In higher socio-economic schools there is this capacity.

We should be grading work that is done in schools using marks and percentages for the following reasons:

- Students do not in the vast majority of cases have the emotional maturity to dissect a table of criteria to decipher a means to improve their work.
- Parents do not understand the system of grading used at present (I have many friends who are parents of teenagers who ask me to explain to them exactly what grade their child achieved).
- Numerical marking and grading frees teacher time to plan valuable learning experiences.

Yours Truly,
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