

**To: The Innovation and Education Committee – Queensland Parliament**  
**Submission: Assessment of Senior Maths, Chemistry and Physics in Queensland Schools**  
**By: Dr Kevin Donnelly – Director Education Standards Institute**

**Terms of reference**

1. 1. That the Education and Innovation Committee inquire into and report on the assessment methods used in Senior Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics in Queensland schools.
2. 2. That, in undertaking this inquiry, the committee should consider the following issues: • Ensuring assessment processes are supported by teachers • Student participation levels • The ability of assessment processes to support valid and reliable judgments of student outcomes.
3. 3. Further, that the committee take public submissions and consult with key stakeholders and relevant subject matter experts.
4. 4. The committee is to report to the Legislative Assembly by 16 August 2013.

**About the Author**

Dr Kevin Donnelly is one of Australia's leading education authors and commentators. Publications include: of *Why Our Schools are Failing* (2004), *Dumbing Down: outcomes-based and politically correct* (2007), *Australia's Education Revolution* (2009), *Educating your child: it's not rocket science* (2012) and over 500 articles in professional journals and Australia's print media.

Kevin taught English for 18 years in Victorian government and non-government secondary schools and has been a member of state and national curriculum bodies, including the Year 12 English Panel of Examiners, the Victorian Board of Studies and the federally funded Discovering Democracy Programme. Research areas of interest include benchmarking curriculum, school choice and identifying the characteristics of stronger performing education systems.

**Submission**

One of the terms of reference (see 2.2 above) includes the following issue for consideration: *The ability of assessment processes to support valid and reliable judgements of student outcomes*. I would like to restrict my submission to this aspect of the review.

As noted above, my experience includes:

- membership of the Victorian Board of Studies, responsible for curriculum and assessment in schools, including Year 12 assessment,
- membership of the Year 12 English Panel of Examiners, responsible for setting and overseeing the compulsory English examination,
- acting as a Marker of Scripts for Year 12 English and English Literature examinations,

- carrying out a number of curriculum benchmarking projects for state and national governments, plus the New Zealand Business Roundtable, identifying the characteristics of stronger performing education systems, and
- acting as a member of the Commonwealth government's inquiry into *The Australian Certificate of Education*.

Based on the above experience I would argue that the current assessment processes employed by the Queensland Studies Authority are substandard and flawed. The model adopted represents an invalid and unreliable method of judging student outcomes.

Briefly put, evidence in support of this argument is as follows:

- Victoria, after implementing a very similar method of school based assessment and moderation, abandoned it due to fears about unreliability, lack of validity, cost and the fact that it exacerbated educational disadvantage,
- Stronger performing overseas education systems, measured by international test results, generally employ high risk, externally set and marked exit examinations and do not rely on school based assessment and moderation,
- Queensland's method of Year 12 assessment, while similar to that in the ACT, is atypical in that the other states rely more on external, end of year, formal examinations when judging a student's result,
- The increasing groundswell of disquiet and lack of trust in the current system of assessment among teachers and some academics suggests that the existing system of assessment lacks credibility and trust, and
- School based assessment and moderation is closely identified with the much discredited outcomes-based education (OBE) model of curriculum development and implementation; a model proven to lower standards, dumb down the curriculum and exhaust teachers and students with bureaucratic overload.

A short comment piece arguing the above can be found on the On Line Opinion website:

<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=14921>

Best wishes,

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