

## **SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS OF SCHOOL EDUCATION**

Additional information prepared by the Department of Education, Training and the Arts to complement the Queensland Government submission.

Hearings were held by the Senate Inquiry in Brisbane on the 5 and 6 June 2007 to further inform the Senate about current standards and achievement levels in schools. A range of issues in relation to education in Queensland were raised during the sessions. The department was invited to provide additional information to the Inquiry in relation to these issues. This additional information is provided by the department to address issues raised which are relevant to the scope of the inquiry and where additional information may be helpful to complement the Queensland Government submission.

### **Queensland Government investment in education**

The Queensland Government's submission provides an overview of the Government's investment in education. Queensland's overall funding for education and training in 2007–08 has increased 7.2 per cent from 2006–07 to 2007–08. State funding to education has continued to increase year on year by an average of over 7 per cent from 2001–02 to 2006–07.

Figures taken from the latest annual Report on Government Services (ROGS), show that 2004–05 State Government recurrent expenditure per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) student for Queensland Government schools was \$9497 compared to a national average of \$9778 per student. This level of funding is above that of a number of other states.

There are a number of reasons for the relatively low per capita expenditure in Queensland. The methodology used to calculate the ROGS figures is a simple calculation of expenditure divided by the number of students, which does not take into account the following considerations.

Queensland has the highest percentage of large public schools (that is, with 600+ students in primary and 1000+ students in secondary schools), a situation which provides for economies of scale. Queensland's high rates of enrolment growth in state schools (due to student retention and population growth) also impact heavily on average student expenditure. Where some enrolment growth is able to be absorbed into the current infrastructure, this creates even greater economies of scale.

Furthermore, the latest data in the 2007 ROGS is from 2004–05, which does not yet fully reflect the increased levels of services provided, such as the implementation of the full-time preparatory year. ROGS also does not include Queensland's expenditure on the training component of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, incurred by the former Department of Employment and Training. Queensland has the highest level of school-based apprenticeship and traineeship participation in Australia.

### **Targeted approaches for Indigenous students**

Over the years there have been gains and improvements in the educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Despite the gains, the Queensland Government acknowledges there is still a long way to go in terms of closing the gap in performance and outcomes for Indigenous students when compared to non-Indigenous students. This is an issue for all states and territories and resulted in the endorsement of *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

The Queensland Government is working to address a broad and complex range of issues that impact on Indigenous communities in an effort to achieve equitable outcomes for Indigenous Queenslanders. It will take tailored responses to close the educational gaps for Indigenous students, particularly those in rural and remote Indigenous communities.

The Queensland Government has therefore introduced comprehensive targeted strategies to improve standards of academic achievement for students in Far North Queensland. The *Bound for Success: Education Strategies* include actions to facilitate community engagement, improve the quality of education services and implement complementary programs to improve education outcomes in the region. The strategies include the implementation of new, consistent Years 1–10 curriculum and culturally relevant, rigorous assessment tasks for Bound for Success schools within Cape York and the Torres Strait. In addition, an online tool has been developed to assist teachers to monitor student progress in literacy, numeracy and health awareness, and to develop Individual Learning Plans for every student in Prep–Year 10. Further information about these strategies is included in the Queensland Government submission (p. 16–18).

Further support for Indigenous students was recently announced in the State Budget with \$10m over four years being provided to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of Indigenous students. The funding will target state and non-state schools to help teachers better understand the challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The aim is to keep Indigenous students engaged in their learning while giving teachers skills to improve their teaching practices and curriculum delivery.

Indigenous students in urban areas also face a range of challenges. To improve educational outcomes for these students, the department is currently developing an urban Indigenous strategy, with a discussion paper scheduled for release later this year.

While the gap in performance and outcomes for Indigenous students in comparison to non-Indigenous students remains an issue, there is evidence that Queensland compares favourably on a national basis in terms of Indigenous student benchmark results. In March 2007, MCEETYA released the 2005 National Benchmark Results for Reading, Writing and Numeracy, which includes a breakdown by jurisdiction for Indigenous students in Years 3, 5 and 7. When comparing the performance of Queensland against the other jurisdictions which have a high level of Indigenous students, the evidence indicates that Queensland had a higher percentage of Indigenous student achievement across all years and benchmarks, with only one exception.

### **School-based assessment**

As outlined in the Queensland Government submission, Queensland students are assessed by schools as an integral part of their learning. This results in the collection of richer information contributing to the senior secondary certificate than can be provided from pen and paper, point-in-time external exams.

The school-based assessment system takes place within a rigorous state-wide quality assurance framework that addresses issues of validity, reliability and rigour. The following features contributing to the rigour and reliability of the system should be noted:

- under this system, Queensland students are assessed against clear standards and criteria outlined in senior syllabuses. Standards are consistently applied through internal and external moderation. This fosters teacher professionalism and results in high consistency of teacher judgment
- the assessment regime includes extensive external moderation of school-based assessment and a common state-wide test of common elements of the Queensland senior curriculum — the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) test. This test is used to scale internal assessment to allow comparison of achievement of students in different subjects and in different schools.

- checks and balances are in place to ensure that students are able to address any concerns about their grades. Students can raise issues with other teachers, heads of departments or the principal of their school. They also have the chance to seek verification of their results through the Queensland Studies Authority providing more avenues for redress than are available for external exams.

Further details of the senior assessment system are available at Appendix A.

## **Conclusion**

As is demonstrated by Queensland's submission, the provision of a high quality education for Queensland students is a priority. The Queensland Government is also committed to working with other jurisdictions in a cooperative federalist approach to improve school education for all children across the country.

## **Queensland's System of Externally-Moderated School-Based Assessment**

### **Outline of the system**

Queensland's system of assessment for senior students involves the use of externally-moderated school-based assessment and a method for deriving tertiary entrance ranks using the results of a standardised test, the Queensland Core Skills Test (QCS), to scale the results from school-based assessment. The system is managed by the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA), an independent statutory body and involves a number of levels of quality assurance. The elements of the system are:

### ***Syllabuses developed and approved by the QSA***

Syllabuses prescribe:

- objectives to be achieved by students and core content to be taught to students
- standards for the award of the five levels of achievement by the end of Year 12
- the contents of folios of assessed student work by the end of Year 12.

### ***Approved work programs***

Work programs developed by schools are approved by the QSA and include:

- the core content of the syllabus
- additional content, consistent with the syllabus and suited to the needs of students in a school
- learning experiences selected by a school suited to the needs of students
- assessment program to be administered by the school including examples of assessment.

### ***Monitoring of standards at the end of Year 11***

At the end of Year 11 schools send sample folios of assessed student work for each subject to the QSA. This work is assessed and schools advised whether the:

- approved work program has been followed
- assessment instruments are effective
- correct judgements about the standards being achieved by the students are being made.

### ***Verification of standards at the end of Year 12***

- QSA reviews a prescribed sample of student folios against the standards outlined in the syllabus.
- QSA advises principals of the final distribution of Levels of Achievement based on the written advice of the panels, and, if necessary, additional folios of student work selected by the QSA.

### **Queensland Core Skills Test**

- The Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test tests the Common Curriculum Elements experienced by students when they study combinations of subjects over Years 11 and 12.
- The QCS Test comprises two multiple-choice papers, a short-response paper and a writing task and is sat over two consecutive days by all eligible students in August of Year 12.
- Students receive an A-E grade on the QCS Test.

### **Tertiary Entrance Ranks**

- Queensland uses a profile of tertiary entrance ranks — a main rank on a 1–25 point scale called an Overall Position (OP) and five subsidiary ranks on 1–10 point scales called Field Positions.
- The ranks are constructed by using group results on the QCS Test to scale the externally-moderated school-based assessments.

### **Comparison of moderated standards with standards on the Queensland Core Skills Test**

- The QSA compares students' distribution of results on the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test with the distribution of results from externally-moderated school-based assessment.
- This is a quality assurance process and provides an opportunity to identify any anomalies that may be related to a school's assessment program. If this is the case additional training is provided by the QSA to the relevant school.

### **Random sampling<sup>1</sup>**

- An additional quality assurance process is conducted each year with the QSA taking a stratified random sample of Year 12 folios from schools across the state for review by different panels.
- This provides a further opportunity to provide input to schools if any issues are identified with school based assessment.

### **Outcomes of the system**

- A student is awarded one of five Levels of Achievement in a subject at the end of Year 12. This level of achievement represents the same standard regardless of the school attended by the student.
- Eligible students receive an Overall Position and up to five Field Positions. These ranks are used by universities and colleges of technical and further education to select students for tertiary courses.

### **Quality Assurance**

The Queensland system is based on a rigorous framework of quality assurance of educational standards. The results of students individually and overall are reviewed at a number of stages in the process. This quality assurance process ensures that teachers

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<sup>1</sup> *Random sampling* is a quality assurance procedure designed as a way of providing information about the comparability of final level of achievement decisions. Random sampling occurs after a course is completed (around February the next year), is carried out by selected teachers from district panels (a district other than the reviewing district), involves the work of students selected at random and nominated by the QSA after level of achievement decisions have been finalised, and is based on the complete and final sets of student work.

and students receive useful and effective feedback on their performance. For teachers this provides essential professional development in the area of assessment and consequently flows on to students. Elements of this quality assurance framework include:

- the inputs, syllabuses and work programs, are quality assured by an external body, the QSA
- the products, students' work, are sampled routinely by the QSA twice before the end of Year 12 with provision for additional sampling and rectification if this is warranted
- different measures of students' achievements are compared and adjustments made where necessary
- after-the-event training of teachers in schools occurs where this is warranted
- the system has built-in continuous improvement of curriculum, assessment practices, teachers, and standards of student achievement in each school
- cheating and plagiarism are more readily identified by teachers who have daily contact with their students than can happen when students are assessed by external examiners
- any complaints of cheating or plagiarism identified by the QSA or reported to the QSA are investigated immediately and appropriate action taken by the QSA.

### **Benefits of the system**

The benefits and effectiveness of Queensland's school-based assessment system have been highlighted by prominent researchers including Professor Geoffrey Masters and Professor Royce Sadler. Given that students are assessed by schools as an integral part of student learning, rather than through a point-in-time external examination, the benefits to students and educators are that it:

- ensures comprehensive assessment, through a range of methods over a significant period of time, of the full range of knowledge and skills developed by students
- ensures more rigorous and fairer assessment of students as it requires them to demonstrate their abilities over a significant period of time rather than on a single 'point-in-time' external test
- enables teachers to track student progress and provide feedback to students on their performance through a continuous assessment process
- enables continual improvement in curricula, teaching, learning and assessment
- provides professional development opportunities for teachers:
  - in quality assessment methods and in making judgments of students' achievements
  - through the moderation process, where their assessment and teacher judgment is subject to intensive peer review.

Queensland's assessment regime involves a long tradition of mechanisms at both schools and state level which support high standards. Queensland's school curriculum is integral to this system and is focused on equipping all students with the knowledge, skills and attributes that they need to succeed in their chosen pathways.