

Public Examinations for Queensland Secondary Schools

Queensland. Board of Secondary School Studies, 1970 (Chair: W. C. Radford)

Overview of the document

116 page report of the Committee Appointed to Review the System of Public Examinations for Queensland Secondary School Students and to make Recommendations for the Assessment of Students Achievements. The report makes 47 specific recommendations for the assessment of students' achievements, including the key recommendations that external examinations for both the Junior Certificate and the Senior Certificate be replaced with school-based assessment.

Keywords

Assessment; public examinations; school-based assessment; comparability; moderation; Junior Certificate; Senior Certificate.

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

- Alludes to three matters additional to those made in the Report itself:
 - The Committee rejected a proposal that there should be an external examination at the end of Grade 11.
 - The Committee rejected a proposal that there should be added a Grade 13 for those wishing to proceed to tertiary study.
 - The Committee makes no recommendations about funding the Board of Secondary School Studies they propose.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Lists all recommendations on pages 2-6 which are included in the below summary under relevant Chapters 5-7.

CHAPTER 1 – A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS IN QUEENSLAND

- Notes that there have been three public examinations since 1863 and describes the historical developments of each including:
 - The State Scholarship Examination: Notes that it was instituted in 1873 and abolished in 1962 and that until the early 1950s it had been the accepted standard for school leaving and job seeking.
 - Public Examinations - Secondary School Level: Describes the forerunner examinations between 1876 and 1910, when the first public examinations were conducted by the University of Queensland.
 - The Junior Examinations: Describes historical developments and trends to the present day.
 - The Senior Examinations: Describes historical developments and trends to the present day.

CHAPTER 2 – EXAMINATIONS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL IN OTHER AUSTRALIAN STATES

- Notes that “In order that readers may see the Queensland system within a wider framework, we set out below some facts about the present examination structure at the secondary level in other Australian States, their present situation in examining at the Junior and Matriculation levels, and recent trends in examination practices.”
- Deals with the States in turn under the first of these headings.

CHAPTER 3 – PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

- Reviews the policies other English-speaking countries.
- Notes that the outstanding points emerging from this survey are: each country has a different system; each country has recently made major changes in its system, and have reviews under way; all countries use school assessments at some point except Scotland; and some system of external testing is used in all countries to give an order of merit.

CHAPTER 4 – AN EXAMINATION OF EXAMINATIONS

- Considers the benefits of public examinations for the student, the teacher and the school, as well as one benefit claimed on social grounds.
- Notes the harmful effects examinations have on the student, the teacher and the school and summarizes nine criticisms on other grounds.
- Considers Public Examinations in Queensland in particular and notes that the two official purposes of these examinations are: to assess achievement and to provide a rank order of students. Also notes that exams have particular uses for the student, the teacher, the school, the administrator and the employer.
- Argues that as much as being an ‘end-point’, examinations are also a ‘starting-point’, in that they are predictive. Concludes that the Junior and Senior Examinations are:
 - a test of readiness to progress to the next stage;
 - a predictor of success at higher levels of education; and
 - a selection test for the award of scholarships or for entry to places where there are quotas.
- Lists eight factors that encourage a move to internal School Assessment and delivers and counters four arguments against continuous assessment.

CHAPTER 5: THE JUNIOR EXAMINATION

Assessment of Achievement

- Notes that the Junior Examination is taken at the end of Grade 10 after completion of three years of secondary education and that it is a subject examination which is administered by the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies, with a Junior Special Committee to advise on matters of syllabus, text books and chief examiners.
- Points out that while the great majority of students who enter Grade 8 go on to receive a Junior Certificate, two thirds of these then leave for either immediate or later employment.
- States that “The Junior examination is meeting a need for employers by providing evidence of educational attainment.” (p. 64)
- Argues that for those going on to Grade 11 or post-Junior vocational courses, the Junior Examination “provides information on strengths and weaknesses in different school subjects, useful for further educational and vocational planning”. (p. 64)
- Makes the following recommendation:
 - Recommendation 1: That the present Junior Examination should be replaced, for the purpose of awarding a Junior Certificate, by school assessment, and that the Certificate be awarded on the basis of school assessment. (p. 67)
- Provides four reasons for opposition to this proposal which are anticipated. These arguments are discussed and countered including:
 - The Junior Examination guarantees fairness.
 - The problem of comparability from school to school for a certificate that is based on school assessment.
 - The guarantee of quality of subjects and syllabuses when under the control of a Board.
 - The usefulness to employers of a system of numerical assessment of achievements.
- Sets out and supports objections to the present external examination for the Junior Certificate, including:
 - The Junior Examination “discourages experiment and innovation”. (p. 66)
 - Many activities (craftwork, drama, physical education etc.) and objectives (acceptable social attitudes etc.) remain unexamined. (p. 66)
 - External examination prevents schools from preparing many students for their life in society. (pp. 66-67)
 - External examination creates “excessive emotional strains”. (p. 67)
 - The external examination “reduces significantly the period of the school year available for classroom activity”. (pp. 67-68)
 - The external examination is “limited in the kinds of assessing instruments or techniques it can use”. (p. 68)
 - The external examination “takes little account of the different rates of learning of the individual student”. (p. 68)
 - “... we have concluded that the responsibility should be placed on the schools for the assessment of school achievement.” (p. 69) Nine positive gains are then set out. (pp. 69-70)

PROPOSALS:

Control

- Makes the following recommendation:
 - Recommendation 2: That control over the nature and award of the Certificate be vested in a statutory authority to be called the Board of Secondary School Studies. (p. 70)

Courses of Study

- Makes four recommendations regarding courses of study:
 - Recommendation 3: That the Board approve syllabuses recommended by Subject Advisory Committees on which teachers will be in the majority. Syllabuses approved by the Board will present a broad framework of the subject and not prescribe its detail. (p. 70)
 - Recommendation 4: That new subjects be initiated by schools or subject associations but that results appear on the Certificate as approved Board subjects only after approval of the subject by the Board. (p. 70)
 - Recommendation 5: That schools have freedom to undertake studies, which may appear on the Certificate not as subjects approved by the Board but as subjects offered by the school on its own initiative. (p. 70)
 - Recommendation 6: That schools have freedom to choose the detail to fill out a syllabus, freedom in method of presentation of an approved syllabus, and, within the moderation system, freedom in methods of assessment of student performance. (p. 70)

Nature of the Certificate

- Makes three recommendations regarding the nature of the Certificate:
 - Recommendation 7: That the title Junior Certificate be retained. (p. 70)
 - Recommendation 8: That the Certificate be awarded by the Board on the recommendation of the School. The school will issue the Certificate. (p. 71)
 - Recommendation 9: That the Certificate state all the subjects studied and the grade of achievement for each, etc. (p. 71)

Moderation

- States that “The Committee considers that the Certificate will be acceptable if the standards of assessment upon which it is based are comparable from school to school and from student to student.” (p. 71)
- Makes the following recommendation:
 - Recommendation 10: That the Board be responsible for maintaining comparability of the gradings which appear on the Certificate. (p. 71)
- Advises that the proposed system of moderation will be concerned with:
 - the quality of the assessments made and the examinations used within the school; and
 - the establishment of common standards of assessment between schools.
- Makes six further recommendations regarding the Certificate:
 - Recommendation 11: That the Board exercise this responsibility through a Moderation Committee and Chief Moderators. (pp. 71-72)
 - Recommendation 12: That the Moderation Committee have the assistance of full time staff. (pp. 71-72)

- Recommendation 13: That all schools wishing to issue Board Certificates to their students be required to accept Board moderation of their standards of assessment. (p. 72)
- Recommendation 14: That Inspectors of Schools, selected secondary teachers and staff members of tertiary institutions be used as agents of the Board in moderation procedures. (p. 72)
- Recommendations 15-16: the use of model and reference examinations; arrangements for early stages of moderation scheme and liaising with the public. (pp. 72-74)

CHAPTER 6 – THE SENIOR EXAMINATION

Assessment of Achievement

- Notes that:
 - The Senior Examination is normally taken at the end of Grade 12 after completion of five years of secondary education.
 - The examination is administered by the Board of Secondary School Studies, with a Special Committee to advise on matters of subjects, text books, Chief Examiner etc.
 - A Senior Examination Certificate is issued to each candidate by the University of Queensland by arrangement with the BSSS.
- Argues that the Senior Examination has two main functions:
 - the assessment of standards at the end of secondary school studies; and
 - the identification of students capable of profiting from tertiary education or suitable for particular occupations.
- Makes the following recommendation:
 - Recommendation 17: That the present Senior Examination be replaced, for the purpose of awarding a Senior Certificate, by school assessment, and that the Certificate be awarded on the basis of school assessment. (p. 76)
- States that: “We consider that schools should be able to make assessments at least as reliable as present scores on Senior Examination papers, and more valid because they can take account of more performances than a single written examination.” (p. 76)
- Provides the following reasons for substituting school-based examinations for the present external Senior Examination:
 - “The present Senior Examination does not meet the needs of a large percentage of students... secondary education up to Grade 12 level now has more purposes than that of preparing students for study at university” (p. 76). After presenting data showing the progression rates of students through secondary school over recent years, this section concludes: “There is an urgent need to design courses and subject syllabuses which will meet the needs and abilities of all Grade 12 students.” (p. 80)
 - The stresses and “harmful effects on student activity and on teaching methods” imposed by external examinations. (p. 80)
 - The hindrance to providing an education suited to the student’s total needs, an effect which extends well below Grade 12. (p. 80)
- Makes two further recommendations:
 - Recommendation 18: That for correspondence and part-time students the Board provide an external examination. (p. 84)

- Recommendation 19: That in situations where an order of merit list needs to be prepared, it be based on a combination of scaled school assessments and special examinations not based on prescribed syllabuses. (p. 88)

Control

- Makes the following recommendation under the heading of Control:
 - Recommendation 20: That control over the nature and award of the Certificate be vested in a statutory authority to be called the Board of Secondary School Studies. (pp. 76, 84)

Courses of Study

- Makes five recommendations regarding courses of study:
 - Recommendation 21: That the Board approve syllabuses recommended by Subject Advisory Committees on which teachers will be in the majority. Syllabuses approved by the Board will present a broad framework of the subject and not prescribe its detail. (p. 80)
 - Recommendation 22: That new subjects be initiated by schools or subject associations but that results appear on the Certificate as approved Board subjects only after approval of the subject by the Board. (p. 81)
 - Recommendation 23: That schools have freedom to undertake studies, which may appear on the Certificate, not as subjects approved by the Board but as subjects offered by the school on its own initiative. (p. 81)
 - Recommendation 24: That schools have freedom to choose the detail to fill out a syllabus, freedom in method of presentation of an approved syllabus, and, within the moderation system, freedom in methods of assessment of student performance. (p. 80)
 - Recommendation 25: That syllabuses be prepared in semester units for Grades 11 and 12. (pp. 81-82)

Nature of Certificate

- Makes three recommendations regarding the nature of the Certificate:
 - Recommendation 26: That the title Senior Certificate be retained. (p. 84)
 - Recommendation 27: That the Certificate be awarded by the Board on the recommendation of the School. (p. 84)
 - Recommendation 28: That all subjects appear on the Certificate (provides details). (pp. 82, 84)

Moderation

- Makes six recommendations regarding moderation:
 - Recommendation 29: That the Board be responsible for maintaining comparability of the gradings which appear on the Certificate. (pp. 82-83)
 - Recommendation 30: That the Board exercise this responsibility through a Moderation Committee and Chief Moderators. (pp. 71-72, 82-83)
 - Recommendation 31: That the Moderation Committee have the assistance of full time staff. (pp. 71-72, 82-83)
 - Recommendation 32: That the Board Certificate be available only to students in those schools which accept the Board's moderation of their standards of assessment. (p. 83)

- Recommendation 33: That Inspectors of Schools, selected secondary teachers and staff members of tertiary institutions be used as agents of the Board in moderation procedures. (p. 83)
- Recommendations 34-35: The use of model and reference examinations; arrangements for early stages of moderation scheme and liaising with the public. (p. 83)
- Discusses the use of reference tests to assist the system of moderation.
- Notes that special provision is to be made for students not in full-time education in schools including:
 - correspondence students
 - part-time students
 - students on transfer

Internal Examining and Entrance to Tertiary Institutions

- Argues that internal examining must be:
 - acceptable to teachers and parents by providing evidence that “a sound education has been successfully completed; (p. 86)
 - acceptable to tertiary institutions by providing evidence of adequate preparation for tertiary studies; and
 - acceptable to employing authorities by providing evidence of competence to undertake particular kinds of employment.
- Proposes an outline of alternative selection procedures a tertiary institution might use
- Argues that “It will be commonsense ... for tertiary institutions to use both special tests and school assessments for entry purposes.” (pp. 86-87)
- Expresses confidence that “school assessments, used in conjunction with tests not bound to a specific syllabus, will be effective predictors of success”. (p. 87)
- Proposes that “In the immediate future, we consider that tertiary institutions could...use in their selection procedures”:
 - school assessments, scaled for comparability between schools (if desired) by the Scholastic Aptitude Test or other means;
 - TEEP-type tests...designed to test abilities required in tertiary courses; and
 - Scholastic Aptitude Tests. (p. 87)

Order of Merit Lists

- Makes three recommendations regarding order of merit lists:
 - Recommendation 36: That candidates, for the award of scholarships etc., be ranked on a combination of scaled school assessments and special external examinations not based on prescribed syllabuses (p. 88)
 - Recommendation 37: That the school assessments be based on four subjects for each of which the work covered will be the equivalent to that of 4 semester units in the subject (pp. 88-89)
 - Recommendation 38: That there be special requirements for government scholarship (p. 89)
- Proposes that in drawing up the order of merit, a combination of scaled school assessments on a 100 point scale and results of tests will be used.

CHAPTER 7 – ADMINISTRATION

- Makes the following recommendation:
 - Recommendation 39: That a single statutory authority, the Board of Secondary School Studies, be appointed to approve courses of study and to award the Junior and Senior Certificates. (p. 93)
- Illustrates that this has the advantage that a single Board will view the five years of Secondary education as an integrated whole.
- Makes three recommendations regarding the make up of the Board, staffing and auxiliary committees (Recommendations 40-42). (pp. 93-95)

Education of Teachers

- Makes two recommendations regarding pre-service and in-service education of teachers (Recommendations 43-44). (p. 96)

Implementation of Recommendations

- Makes three recommendations regarding implementation of the new system:
 - Recommendation 45: That the last external Junior examination be held in 1970 and the Certificate based on school assessments be issued as from 1971. (p. 72)
 - Recommendation 46: That the last external Senior examination be held not later than 1972 and the certificates based on school assessments be issued from the following year. (p. 91)
 - Recommendation 47: That experimental use be made of kinds of examinations other than the present Senior Examinations during 1970 and 1971 to establish the most efficient ways of drawing up order of merit lists. (p. 91)

APPENDICES

Provides a number of appendices which:

- 1 Set out the constitution of the present Boards as prescribed by The Education Act of 1964;
- 2 Present results and draws conclusions from studies investigating the relationship between Senior Examination results and university performance; and
- 3 Report briefly on two series of tests that ACER was commissioned to prepare for experimental use in the last year of secondary education.