

A Review of School-based Assessment in Queensland Secondary Schools

Queensland. Board of Secondary School Studies, 1978 (Chair: E. Scott)

Overview of the document

196 page final report of a review of two recent reports, 'Schools under Radford' (Fairbairn et al., 1976) and 'Some Consequences of the Radford Scheme for Schools, Teachers and Students in Queensland' (Campbell et al., 1975). The report makes 36 major policy recommendations, as well as 60 supplementary recommendations.

Keywords

Curriculum; Radford; school-based assessment; competency-based assessment; reference-based; assessment; moderation; accreditation; certification; teacher education.

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Summary of Contents

INTRODUCTION

- Notes that the Report reflects analysis of two independent research reports, 'Schools under Radford' (SUR Report) and 'Some Consequences of the Radford Scheme for Schools, Teachers and Students in Queensland' (Campbell Report), both tabled in December 1975, relating to the effects of policy changes implemented in Queensland secondary schools in 1971 following the Radford report into the system of public examinations.
- Provides a summary of the Radford recommendations and a summary of the implementation of the school-based assessment subsequently adopted, noting:
 - that the external or public examinations has been replaced by a system of moderated school ratings on a 7 to 1 scale; and
 - the moderation process now involves (i) teacher peer concurrence and (ii) BSSS acceptance through its system of district and chief subject moderators.

- Argues that three assumptions were implicit in the adoption of the Radford recommendations, which in the event were only partly valid:
 - That teachers were ready for the changes – in fact while there was majority support, there was an overall lack of confidence and competence.
 - That the community was ready for them – in fact, in the face of failure to launch an adequate community education program, “public ignorance became public distrust”. (p. 2)
 - That they would be supported by tertiary institutions – in fact they exercised two major constraints on the reforms by (i) summarising student ratings and (ii) maintaining a dominant influence on the curriculum through the system of prerequisites and entry requirements.
- Argues that “It is our belief, however, that the Radford Report was, and remains, visionary and worthy of pursuit...We believe that the major reviews we were commissioned to evaluate were timely...We believe that, while maintaining the spirit of the Radford Report, some major changes in the implementation of that spirit are essential.” (p. 3)
- Summarises the findings of the Campbell Report (the 13 expectations of the Radford Committee as opposed to the actual occurrences) and argues that the SUR Report shows a high degree of similarity. Notes that together the reports both argue that:
 1. The liberalizing elements in the Radford proposals have been withstood and frustrated.
 2. Schools have become more difficult to administer.
 3. There has been no improvement in the openness of school climates.
 4. There has been a significant increase in workloads which, in turn, has had unintended effects.
 5. Curriculum change has essentially remained system-boxed with very little influence from community bodies and other groups.
 6. The operational syllabus in schools seems largely determined by the expectations of moderators and by the sanctions of moderators meetings.
 7. Evaluation is seen as a control over curriculum evaluation.
 8. Many teachers feel incompetent to exercise the freedom of syllabus development and believe they do not receive sufficient consultative support. They also believe that such support is missing when new courses are introduced.
 9. Individual difference in students is not really accommodated.
 10. Schools offer a limited range of Board subjects thus limit student choice.
 11. Board subjects currently available are academically oriented.
 12. The frequency of developing Board subjects has been disappointing.
 13. Tests and examinations remain the imperative of school life.
 14. Assessment is almost exclusively concerned with the recall of academic knowledge.
 15. Low priority has been given as feedback to amend teaching strategies and to diagnose student weaknesses.
 16. Testing and ranking of students have increased in frequency and are having a detrimental effect on students, teachers and school administrators.
 17. There has been an erosion of student-teacher relationships.
 18. Continuous assessment together with relativistic ratings have generated anxiety and hostility in students.
 19. The demands of school assessment programs have decreased student

involvement in extra-curricular activities.

20. The promise of freedom in evaluation practices remains largely unfulfilled.
 21. Students believe the distribution of ratings to their school are predetermined and this has led to a decline in teacher-student relationships.
 22. The time constraints of moderation meetings lead to moderators making superficial, subjective judgments, teachers being overwhelmed by administrivia, a reduction in time available for teaching, emphasis being placed only on assessable aspects of the curriculum and a decline in teacher-student relationships over assessment.
 23. Atypically bright students in small groups are disadvantaged.
 24. The Radford Scheme has generated stress and frustration.
 25. Science students are less prepared in the development of their cognitive abilities.
 26. Students report senior school life to be dull.
 27. A marks 'fetish' has developed leading to unhealthy competition.
 28. There is a lack of trust and a build-up of animosity between students.
- It is conceded that some of the above observations are no longer valid due to change in Board policy, but for the purpose of the Review they are considered as valid at the time of data collection.
 - Notes that the report provides 36 major policy recommendations to the BSSS (prefaced by the letter P), along with a further 60 supplementary recommendations (prefaced by M), which are summarized in the next section.

2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Summarizes the reports major policy recommendations under subheadings as follows:

The Aims of Secondary Education

- P1: "Bearing in mind that young people are being educated in, and for, life in a pluralistic society, a system of secondary education should provide a wide range of experience for all the youth of society, regard being had to the requirements of a sound general education and to the specific needs of students related to their age, cultural heritage, aptitude, ability and special interests. Thus through the curriculum and instructional processes, secondary school should provide opportunity for, and assistance in, the further development of:
 - the student's physical well-being and mental health;
 - the student's fundamental intellectual skills;
 - the student's acquisition of knowledge and the related skills of validating, organizing, interrelating and utilizing such knowledge critically and constructively in order that he/she might be culturally and scientifically informed and aware;
 - the student's highest level of mastery of communications skills;
 - the student's awareness of his/her abilities and his/her effective use of them for the betterment of himself/herself and society;
 - the student's consciousness of his/her own values and value commitments and his/her understanding of the values of others and of the values and moral traditions of Australian society;
 - the student's ability to relate his/her knowledge and values to the contemporary scene for the betterment of his/her own welfare and for the betterment of society;

- the student's ability to relate effectively to others and to find self-realization and self expression through such relationships; and
- the student's readiness to assume a mature adult role in society." (p. 8)

Courses of Study – The Secondary School Curriculum

The Nature of the Curriculum

- P2: "The Board of Secondary School Studies advise the Minister that in the Board's opinion the secondary school curriculum should be organised as core plus elective studies with the emphasis on elective studies increasing from the junior to the secondary school." (pp. 8-9)
- P3: "Mindful of the proposed general aims of secondary schooling (see Recommendation P1) and in view of the rapidly changing composition of the secondary school population (i.e. an increasing proportion of potential school leavers remaining on at school in Years 11 and 12 in the absence of job opportunities and the multi-cultural mix of the student body), the growing awareness of sexism in secondary school opportunities, the growing pressures for broadening the curriculum, and increasing community concern over the alleged growing magnitude of basic skill defects in secondary students, the Board should establish, as a matter of urgency, a Curriculum Task Force charged with the responsibility to examine these problems and allegations through public enquiry and to advise the Board (where considered necessary) on appropriate curricula extensions and modifications and on the nature of a core plus elective studies organization of the curriculum." (p. 9)
- P4: The three categories of subjects (Board subjects, Board-Approved subjects and School Subjects) should be retained, with more use to be made of the latter two.
- P5: The range of Board Subjects should be broadened.
- P6: Encouragement should be given to the broadening of the range of Board-Approved and School Subjects through (i) the formation of regional curriculum groups and (ii) the use of appropriate members of the community as specialist community consultants an/or teachers on a part-time basis.
- P7: Regional School Subject Assessment panels should be established to review proposed School Subjects against the criteria on the Board's guidelines. (p. 9)

Curriculum Organization

- P8: The system of semesterization should be retained.
- P9: The principle of school autonomy in course design should be preserved.
- P10: The school year should be reorganized into two discrete semesters. (p. 10)

Curriculum Development

- P11: The strategies for syllabus construction and the spirit of school autonomy proposed in the Radford Report should be retained, with each syllabus stated in accordance with the following guidelines:
 - The syllabus should be a broad framework statement of aims and objectives for a subject from which the school can develop its own program.
 - The syllabus should contain a statement of its global aims and of its general objectives. The general competencies should be "the performance criteria against which student competency should be assessed", falling under the headings: process objectives, content objectives, skill objectives, affective objectives.
 - The syllabus should contain a statement of the competency criteria to be applied in each of the first three areas of general objectives to determine the

- student's level of competency.
 - The syllabus should contain examples to illustrate to teachers alternative approaches to fulfilling the syllabus objectives. (p. 10)
- P12: Representatives of interested groups (tertiary institutions, parents, employers, professional bodies) should be consulted in developing a new syllabus.
- P13: Membership of the Board's Subject Advisory Committees should include a primary school curriculum specialist.

Assessment of Student Achievement

- P14: The Board should support the following statement of the purposes of assessment, stating that the purposes of assessment are:
 - to enable the student to assess learning and provide information which can be used to correct deficiencies.
 - to enable teachers and student to modify teaching/learning programs.
 - to provide parents and students with information concerning the student's achievement and potential.
 - to assist students and parents in determining future pathways.
 - to provide an indication of the student's suitability and readiness for other educational institutions and employers. (p. 11)
- P15: "The present norm-based assessment procedures in Years 10, 11 and 12 should be replaced by competency-based procedures." (p. 11)
- P16: Assessment in each year of secondary school studies for all subjects (Board, Board-Approved and School) should be made for the relevant dimensions of achievement in each subject in terms of the following competency categories: Highest level of competence; Highly competent; Competent; Limited competence; and Very limited competence.
- P17: Reported levels of competence should relate to the extent to which the syllabus specified performance objectives for the relevant achievement dimensions of each subject have been achieved...
- P18: "The levels of achievement reported in Year 10 should be expressed as levels of competency on the appropriate achievement dimensions of the subject studied, together with a statement of the student's overall level of competency in the subject." (p. 12)
- P19: In the Senior Secondary School, the Board should issue only one assessment in each subject – an exit assessment indicating a student's global level of performance in that subject at the cessation of his/her study of that subject.

Accreditation and Certification

- P20: "The Board's present moderation practices should be replaced by a system of Subject Accreditation of proposed work programs and competency criteria, and Certification of reported standards of achievement." (p. 12)
- P21 concerns the panels and committees through which the procedures of accreditation and certification should operate.
- P22: Subject Review Panels should be established at district and State levels.
- P23 regards the proposed establishment of The Board Accreditation and Certification Committee.
- P24 concerns District Teachers' Meetings in each subject to be held twice a year.
- P25 concerns proposed School Consortia to assist establishment of work programs in Year 10.

Maintenance of Schools

- P26: “To assist in the maintenance of state-wide achievement standards and the maintenance of such standards across time, the spirit of para. 6.15 of the Radford Report should be endorsed. A policy should be adopted by using Competency Reference Tests in Board subjects. The sole objective of these tests should be to assist schools in determining standards of performance relative to each level of competency in a subject. Such tests will be an invaluable aid to teachers in determining competency standards in smaller schools. Under no circumstances should the results of Competency Reference Tests appear on Board or School Certificates or reports. Initially Competency Reference Tests might be restricted to the Senior Secondary School with extension downwards to Year 10 depending upon the subsequent advice of the Accreditation and Certification Committee.” (p. 13)

Tertiary Entrance Score

- P27: The Tertiary Entrance Score should be maintained.
- P28: In calculating the TE Score use should be made of ASAT or of a comparable test.
- P29 concerns possible inclusion of two semester units of certified School Subjects among the exit assessments to be used in calculating the TE Score.

Certificates

- P30: Formal reporting to students and parents and formal certification should be the responsibility of both the school and BSSS.
- P31: Schools should be left free to determine the form and content of School Progress Reports.

Research

- P32: “The Board should use its Research Committee to keep the efficacy and implications of its policies and practices under constant review.” (p. 14)

Public Relations

- P33-34 relate to broadening membership of the BSSS to include spokespeople for parent groups industry and the professions, and the necessity for preparation in terms of publicity and training before changes to Board policy.

Implementation of Recommendations

- P35-P36 provide suggestions as to the timing and logistics of implementation.

3. THE AIMS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

- Provides a general discussion leading to Recommendation P1.

4. COURSES OF STUDY – THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The Nature of the Curriculum

- Provides a very general statement on the purposes of the secondary curriculum.
- Notes that a cause of serious concern for the Committee is that models of conduct, standards and values presented to young people by society “present alternative behaviour and value patterns” without offering “guiding criteria against which youth may evaluate the efficacy of those alternatives.” (p. 18)
- Notes that the Committee believes much of the concern directed towards the

secondary school curriculum because of the allegedly declining standards and values of students is misdirected: “The alleged problems do not reside in the curriculum per se but in the manner in which the curriculum is implemented...in the contemporary scene, there appear to be concerted attempts from sections of our society to deny the school, and the secondary school in particular, its role and traditional responsibilities in these areas.” (p. 18)

- States that “The Committee believes that the situation whereby the Senior Secondary School curriculum has continued to be dominated by the requirements of tertiary entrance despite the fact that only half of Year 12 students are applicants to tertiary institutions militates against the spirit of the Radford Committee’s recommendations, viz. that secondary education should be seen as a stage that has its own objectives, and its organization and curriculum should consider the needs of the whole secondary school population.” (p. 19)
- Notes that “To these problems must be added the implications for our schools of the significant change in the cultural mix of the student body, the growing awareness of sexism in secondary school opportunities and the pressures exerted from time to time to include specific studies...as obliged studies within the curriculum.” (p. 19)
- Notes that in view of these issues, “plus the already stated view that we believe that the secondary school should provide both a general education or set of core experiences for all post-primary students and elective tracks or programs for students with differing post-school aspirations”, the Committee makes recommendation P2. (p. 19)
- Defines the core curriculum, with the assertion that it be provided “within a framework of the traditional values and democratic ideals upon which our heritage has been built”, and that “core experiences advocated are essential to the maintenance of a healthy society and lead to individual student achievement.” (p. 19-20)
- Due to the precise nature of the core studies is a community concern and prerogative, outlines recommendation P3, concerning the establishment of a Curriculum Task Force.
- Argues that the Radford recommendations that (i) schools be encouraged to develop new subjects outside the Board’s syllabuses and that (ii) schools should have the freedom to choose the detailed content of Board Subjects within the framework of clearly stated syllabus objectives, should continue to be supported. Proposes recommendation P4 and argues that “Accountability should not be at the cost of individuality. Accountability is best met through the core elements of the curriculum and through pre-determined guidelines to regulate the choice of the elective components of the curriculum.” (p. 21)
- Notes that the potential for a wide range of school curricula provided by the Radford recommendations according all evidence “is being but minimally realised”. (p. 22)
- Notes that “The two research reports also found that the extent of development of school subjects has been disappointing” (p. 24), and provides five reasons for this: the first four pertain to lack of technical competence and resourcing and staffing problems and the fifth is the lack of student interest because the majority have an orientation to tertiary education and there are rigid constraints of course pre-requisites.
- Makes recommendations P5-7 in respect of the limited range of subjects offered in schools and to the constraints influencing the range of subjects available. Also provides five supplementary recommendations on technical aspects.

Curriculum Organization

- Notes that the Radford Committee recommended that the Secondary School curriculum be organized on a semester basis of courses consisting of one to four units which may be either discrete or sequential in nature, a recommendation which was adopted by the Board.
- Notes that because semesterization has been criticised both on administrative and educational grounds, the Committee commissioned a systematic enquiry into it. Summarizes the results which deal with issues of semesterization, availability of School Subjects in Years 11 and 12, and frequency of assessment.
- Concludes that “Though the evidence suggested that the intentions of the Radford Committee are not necessarily being totally fulfilled, the Review Committee believes strongly that those intentions are still worthy of pursuit.” (p. 28)
- Makes recommendations P8-P10 and supplementary recommendation M9.

Curriculum Development

- Notes that the Radford Report intended that “schools should be permitted a degree of autonomy in constructing those courses of study which form part of the school’s curriculum” (p. 29). Outlines recommendation P11 which supports this principle and pertains to the explicit statement of the global aims and general objectives of each syllabus.
- Counters criticisms of this approach with the statement, “We do not view our recommended required statements of objectives as restrictive but rather as the minimum requirements and as the bases for assessing student performances”. (p. 29)
- Argues that “Curriculum change essentially remains system-based. The influence of community bodies and other groups is minimal.” (p. 31). Advances recommendations P12 to overcome such deficiencies.
- Notes the discontinuity between the primary and secondary schools in syllabus development and makes recommendation P13.
- Reiterates the Committee’s support for schools developing syllabuses for School Subjects and, when appropriate, their conversion to Board-Approved Subjects.

5. ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

- Notes that the Campbell and SUR Reports have commented adversely on teacher and student reaction to both the assessment and moderation system that came in after Radford to replace the external examination system, citing five major lines of criticism:
 - Criticism 1 is that tests and examinations have remained the imperatives of school life, that assessment is almost exclusively concerned with the recall of academic knowledge, and that low priority has been given to assessment as feedback to amend teaching strategies and to diagnose student weaknesses. After suggesting reasons for these perceptions, centred mainly on teacher misunderstanding, the Committee recommends “that the Board examine its communication strategies with regard to schools and the need for sharing ideas on assessment strategies”. (p. 33)
 - Criticism 2 is that testing and ranking of students have increased in frequency, having a detrimental effect on students, teachers and school administrators, damaging in particular student-teacher relationships and generating anxiety and hostility in students. Notes that the Committee believes that pertinent here is “either teachers’ misperceptions of Board policy, or a lack of

professionalism in teachers threatened with the accountability of their professional judgments, or both...the real cure may well be a change in the nature of assessment and in moderation practices.” (p. 33)

- Criticism 3 is that the demands of the school assessment programs have decreased student involvement in extra-curricular activities. Notes that the Committee believes the real cause of this may be other social factors.
- Criticism 4 is that the promise of freedom in evaluation practices remains largely unfulfilled, due to the need to adhere to the policy of a normal distribution curve and to the limitations imposed by the moderation system on the choice of assessment techniques. The Committee considers that this finding “may indicate either unrealistic teacher expectations for their assessment autonomy and/or that in some instances moderation practices are not in conformity with Board policy”, and indicates the need for Board in-service education programs of information and training relating to Board policies. (p. 33)
- Criticism 5 is that students believe that the distribution of ratings available to their school is pre-determined and also make allegations of favouritism in assessment, leading to a decline in teacher-student relationships.” The Committee suggests “there is obviously still some misunderstanding among teachers and students concerning Board policies on assessment” and that such accusations may be avoided “through using panel assessment in larger schools and between larger schools and smaller schools and between smaller schools.” (p. 34)
- Discusses the current norm-referenced system of assessment, whereby scores are distributed across seven bands according to percentages set by the Board and argues that this ranking of students one against the other “is a very limited piece of information”, when assessment “should serve a number of educational purposes”. (p. 35)
- Proposes that the Board change to a system of competency-based assessment under recommendation P15.
- Outlines the features and benefits of competency-based assessment. Notes that there would be a scale of five levels of competency identified by verbal descriptions (‘highest levels of competence’ to ‘very limited competence’), as opposed to the seven bands of the current norm-based system.
- Argues that “Competency-based assessment should be concerned only with those learning outcomes which can be observed and measured against pre-determined criteria”, which “would be restricted to determination (as appropriate) of a student’s competency in response to expectations for” the following general objectives: specified cognitive skills (process competency); specified content (content competency); specified practical skills (practical skill competency) and affective responses. (p. 38)
- Argues that each syllabus should “be re-organized specifying (a) general objectives under the categories mentioned above and (b) core, or essential, content (as appropriate) and optional content.” (p. 38)
- Discusses the issuing of assessments of performance and recommendations 18-19.
- Stresses that “one of the most significant differences between norm-based assessment and competency-based assessment is that no attempt is made to have the results of competency-based assessment conform to a normal curve distribution.” (p. 40)
- Sets out recommendations P14-P19 and supplementary recommendations M12-M14.

6. ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION

- Notes that “no other aspect of the Radford Scheme aroused more adverse criticism among students and parents than moderation” and that most criticism has been directed at moderation meetings. (p. 41)
- Notes the problematic aspects of moderation meetings identified by the Campbell and SUR Reports and that these reported research findings were confirmed by much anecdotal information.
- Recommends the discontinuation of the entire present moderation system under recommendation P20. States that “The Board’s present moderation practices should be replaced by a system of Subject Accreditation of proposed work programs and competency criteria, and Certification of reported standards of achievement.” (p. 42)
- Argues that the proposed system “accredits work programs, not schools, the implication being that different subjects within the same school may well have different accreditation status.” (p. 43)
- Sets out recommendations for detailed procedures for the accreditation and certification process under recommendations M20-M32.

7. MAINTENANCE OF STANDARDS

- Argues that in terms of “public accountability”, the BSSS “must be constantly concerned with the maintenance of state-wide standards per se and of standards across time.” (p. 49)
- Proposes that this be achieved through Competency Reference Tests, the sole purpose of which should be “to assist schools to establish standards comparable with those of other schools”. (p. 49)

8. TERTIARY ENTRANCE SCORE

- Notes that the TE Score was developed by the BSSS to rank Year 12 school leavers state-wide for the purposes of tertiary enrolment and that since this score has almost universal credibility among tertiary institutions, the Committee is loath to recommend its abandonment. However, notes that there are two causes for concern: it has come to assume an importance beyond that intended (i.e. as a ranking device) and is subject to misuse by employers; and it is alleged to be vulnerable to unethical practices. (p. 51)
- Notes that these allegations do not appear to be well founded, according to a study commissioned by the Committee and reported in detail as Appendix E.
- Recommends that the TE Score is accompanied on Board certificates by the appropriate competency assessments awarded to the student, and a public awareness campaign on the purpose of the TE Score and its limitations be conducted. (p. 52)
- Notes that the Committee supports the retention of the Tertiary Entrance Score, in the terms set out in recommendations P27-P29.

9. CERTIFICATES

- Notes that at present the BSSS is required to issue Junior Certificates and Senior Certificates. A Senior Certificate, together with a Tertiary Entrance Statement, is issued to each student who completes 4th semester, Year 12, with at least one Board Subject. It records all subjects, classified as Board Subjects and School Subjects, studied in Years 11 and 12, the semester units studied and the grade of achievement for each semester unit. Argues that formal reporting on a student’s progress should be the responsibility of both the school and the BSSS and the present Senior Certificate and the Tertiary Entrance Statement should be replaced with a single Senior

Secondary School Certificate.

- Discusses a Committee enquiry into current school reporting policy and practices which confirmed the Committee's belief that many students who leave school without a Board Certificate may be seriously disadvantaged in the absence of a formal statement of their school achievements. Recommends the issuing of School Leaving Certificates which provide a detailed and comprehensive record of secondary schooling.
- Makes recommendations P3-P31 on the issue of certificates of attainment, along with supplementary recommendations M38-M40.

10. TEACHER EDUCATION

- Notes that the problem of teacher competence in the implementation of a school-based assessment scheme appears to be an enduring one.
- Notes that although the Board is not responsible for teacher preparation or development, its policies cannot be implemented effectively without action in these areas and makes recommendations concerning seeking co-operation with teacher education institutions in making obligatory the study of: theory and practice of curriculum development and evaluation; theory and practice of the design and evaluation; and theory and practice of the Board of Secondary School Studies.
- Makes a number of other recommendations regarding provision of in-service education and training (M41-M44).

11. RESEARCH

- Makes recommendations P32 and M45 in the interests of ongoing monitoring and reappraisal of the efficacy of Board policy and practices.

12. PUBLIC RELATIONS

- Notes that it is obvious from the findings of the Campbell Report and Schools Under Radford that many students, teachers and parents have misunderstandings concerning Board policy and practices and makes recommendations P33-34 and M46-M48.

13. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provides recommendations on the implementation of the proposals and their timing (P35-P36 and M49-60).

14. FINAL COMMENT

- Notes that only Board policies and practices that require modification are addressed in this report.
- States that "We believe, as did the authors of the 'Campbell Report' that the strengths of school-based assessment outweigh its weaknesses. We believe that adoption of the recommendations we have made will lead to enhanced public accountability by schools, information which is of more meaning to students, parents and employers, and to what was seen as an aspiration in the 'Campbell Report' – 'a gentler scheme of monitoring' the large degree of autonomy with which our secondary schools have been endowed in the matter of student assessment." (p. 64)

15. SUMMARY OF SUPPLEMENTARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Outlines the supplementary recommendations.