October 2008

P–12 syllabus and assessment framework consultation report

Contents

Introduction

From June to September 2008 the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) undertook statewide consultation about the development of a P–12 approach to teaching, learning and assessment.

The consultation aimed to build greater understanding and seek responses to a range of initiatives that the QSA is developing and plans to implement. The particular initiatives are about syllabus design, assessment, the position of Year 10, and a framework for P–3. Together, these initiatives contribute to a P–12 approach to teaching, learning and assessment.

The QSA also provided participants with information about the possible implications of the national curriculum on the work of the QSA, and the role of the QSA in the context of a national curriculum. The consultation also reinforced the role of the QSA in supporting teachers and working with schools through the ongoing maintenance and development of syllabuses, assessment and certification.

Context for the consultation

The QSA Strategic Plan 2007–10 states that the QSA is establishing an integrated P–12 approach to education in Queensland through its syllabuses, assessment, reporting, testing and professional development services. Strategic Objective 1 of this plan is to demonstrate educational leadership, informed and supported by cross-sector collaboration. The strategies supporting this objective include working in partnership with schools and other stakeholders to develop and implement a P–12 approach to syllabus development. This approach includes P–12 syllabuses, assessment practices and reporting guidelines.

During the first half of 2008, the QSA Governing Body approved significant policy positions for consultation:

- P–12 syllabus design principles (for Prep to Year 12 QSA syllabuses) (March 2008)

- P–12 assessment policy (March 2008)

- *Design brief for Year 10 Guidelines* and the development of specific Year 10 Guidelines (June 2008)

- P–3 Framework (May 2008).

In May 2008, the QSA Governing Body approved the consultation strategy and schedule to be undertaken from June to October 2008.

Consultation process

The consultation was designed primarily to connect with practising teachers. The consultation process included three parts:

- community meetings held outside school time in each QSA district and in Mount Isa, Longreach and Roma. A range of stakeholders were invited including teachers, school administrators, parents, employers and interested community members

- school visits involving discussions with school leaders and groups of teachers

- key education stakeholder meetings.

Consultation focus

The focus of each consultation meeting was a package of materials that included:

- P–12 syllabus design principles
- P–12 assessment policy
- *Design brief for Year 10 Guidelines*
- P–3 Framework information statement
- a set of supporting materials:
    - Aligning P–3 curriculum
    - P–12 assessment overview
    - P–12 syllabuses in Queensland
    - a PowerPoint presentation and a set of questions to facilitate discussion and encourage feedback.

Key consultation question

The four documents in the package were presented as a set of proposals that collectively contribute to the development of a P–12 approach to teaching, learning and assessment.

The key question for consultation was:

How do these initiatives deliver a P–12 syllabus and assessment framework that is useful for schools to implement QSA syllabuses and assessment practices?

Broad focus questions

Participants were asked to respond to broad focus questions that allowed responses to individual documents or to the set of documents. The focus questions were:

- What parts of these proposals are important to maintain?
- What should be deleted?
- What needs to be refined?
- What needs more detail?

Participation rates

Community meetings

More than 600 participants attended the 17 community meetings with an average attendance of 30 participants representing ten school sites.

School visits

Eleven school visits represented a sample across schooling sectors; school types — primary, middle, secondary, P–10 and P–12 schools; and geographic locations.

Key education stakeholder meetings

The QSA held five stakeholder meetings with representatives of schooling sectors, teacher unions, tertiary institutions, parents' associations, principals' and administrators' associations, and teachers' professional associations. Presentations were made to a range of other groups organised through established QSA processes. This included syllabus advisory committees, Authority committees, and as guests to other groups such as school sector networks.

3. Findings

The response to the proposals outlined in the documents for consultation was generally very positive. Participants showed broad support for the purpose of the documents and the ideas underpinning the development of a P–12 syllabus and assessment framework. Notably, the responses from teachers and administrators tended to be more favourable than feedback received from some key stakeholder groups, particularly officers from some school sectors.

The majority of the participants' feedback was about the *Design brief for Year 10 Guidelines* and P–3 Framework. These documents were seen as having a significant and immediate role in school-based curriculum and assessment planning. The responses from participants also focussed on how the consultation documents would operate in conjunction with existing QSA products such as the Years 1–9 Essential Learnings and Standards, senior syllabuses and the externally moderated school-based assessment system of Years 11 and 12.

Participants in community meetings, school visits and stakeholder meetings appreciated the opportunity to be informed about the QSA's current work and to discuss the latest developments in framing a P–12 approach to teaching, learning and assessment. The high level of support for the consultation events outside the south-east Queensland corner by teachers, administrators and region and district school sector representatives shows the value these school communities place on interactions with officers from the QSA.

3.1   P–12 syllabus design principles

The majority of the participants responded well and supported the P–12 syllabus design principles and the ideas associated with developing low-definition syllabuses to support high-quality and high-equity outcomes for Queensland students.

Teachers tended to be positive about the concept of low-definition syllabuses and were comfortable with the need to balance prescription and professionalism. However, some sector representatives raised concerns about these concepts in relation to other state and national policy issues and developments.

Several participants were also confused about the nature of the document and discussions centred on the distinction between a policy position that outlines principles for designing syllabuses and technical or design specifications or templates used by syllabus writers.

Frequently made comments

Participants made the following comments about the P–12 syllabus design principles.

- The document is a clear and useful synthesis of the original report by Luke et al, *Development of a set of principles to guide a P–12 syllabus framework*.

- The document needs some refinement to match the language and terminology of existing Queensland syllabuses and curriculum documents. For example, the P–12 syllabus design principles use the term "content"; this should be replaced with "Knowledge and understanding" and "Ways of working".

- The definitions of each phase of learning need to be refined to state the emphasis of each phase rather then giving the impression that access, engagement and pathways are unique to particular phases.

- The principle of balancing informed prescription and informed professionalism will build on the current culture of flexibility and professional decision-making and will ensure greater clarity about what to teach.

- A low-definition syllabus model increases the required levels of support, resource development and professional development.

- The P–12 syllabus design principles provide a starting point to develop a common nomenclature across P–12.

3.2   P–12 assessment policy

The P–12 assessment policy received limited feedback throughout the consultation. However, participants were encouraged by the reaffirmation of Queensland's system of externally moderated school-based assessment in the senior phase and by the recognition of the range of assessment practices that occur in the early and middle phase. Participants were also supportive of key messages in the consultation presentation.

The state school sector suggested that the policy be labelled a position so it is not confused with the curriculum policy expectations of Education Queensland.

Frequently made comments

Participants made the following comments about the P–12 assessment policy.

- The purposes for assessment are clearly stated and a worthwhile professional checklist for all teachers and school administrators.

- The audience of this document is unclear as it appears to have limited usefulness for classroom practitioners.

- The policy appears to be silent on the assessment for a diverse student population including students with English as a second language and students with disabilities.

- The descriptions of the focus for moderation in each phase seems incomplete and does not represent an accurate picture of what learning is assessed in the middle and senior phases.

- The policy should include the principles of exit assessment for the senior phase Authority and Authority-registered subjects and QSA's role in providing quality assurance processes.

- The document would be better structured by describing the assessment culture of each phase and how QSA supports that culture.

3.3   Design brief for Year 10 Guidelines

In the main, the response to the proposed *Design Brief for Year 10 Guidelines* was very positive. However, many participants expressed a desire to reserve their judgment until the draft Year 10 Guidelines were complete.

It was noted that the positioning of Year 10 as part of the senior phase was not a unanimous agreement across school sectors. In addition, it was also noted that the Year 10 Guidelines should clearly state that they are a resource for schools and do not have any form of mandate over schools to implement the advice.

Summary of positive responses

Participants made the following positive comments about the *Design Brief for Year 10 Guidelines*.

- The operating principles of *continuity*, *transition* and *foundation* clearly position Year 10 as the beginning of the senior phase of learning.

- The proposed structure of the guidelines emphasises flexibility for school-based planning to suit different students and student cohorts and provides options and advice for planning learning, teaching and assessment in Year 10.

- The proposal that a maximum of 4 credits in the preparatory section of the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) could be achieved during Year 10 is worthwhile. However, the additional workload associated with possible quality assurance processes is of some concern.

- The inclusion of advice to schools about Vocational Education and Training (VET) appropriate for Year 10 students is important.

- The development of career and pathways education and the associated development of the Senior Education and Training (SET) plan is positive.

- The development of Learning Statements for the identified 10 learning areas is worthwhile. However, it is important that the Learning Statements are more than a list of content. These should comply with the P–12 syllabus design principles with an emphasis on low definition that balances prescription and teacher professionalism.

- The structure for the learning statements, based on the Essential Learnings, develops conceptual and structural understanding between phases of schooling and will be significantly useful for school planning.

- The role of the 10 learning areas is helpful in assisting the planning for multiple configurations of Year 10.

- The inclusion of a Standards statement for each learning area and advice on assessment instruments are important parts of the preparation for and transition to learning based on the senior syllabuses.

Summary of key issues

Participants identified the following issues in the *Design brief for Year 10 Guidelines* and made recommendations for the development of the Year 10 Guidelines.

- The position of guidelines in comparison with syllabus documents must be made clear. Importantly, this distinction should be made through the use of language and terminology. For example, "Learning Statements" should replace the term "Essential Learnings" in the design brief.

- The purposes of Year 10 need further refinement and the term "remediation" should be substituted with a more positive term.

- Year 10 learning areas must allow schools to structure courses that cater for a range of pathways. For example, Science courses that prepare students for the more challenging Science subjects as well as courses that provide a general introduction to Science in the senior phase should be available.

- The design brief and the guidelines need clarity about how they will accommodate subjects that do not fit naturally into the learning areas, for example Home Economics.

- More detail should be included in the guidelines about the nature of assessment advice and in the information about Standards.

- Some sections will need more detail. These include the sections on Vocational Education and Training, career education and certification. In particular, these sections need to include the QCE and the Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA).

- The design brief and guidelines will require greater clarity about the proposal for the achievement of 4 credits of learning towards the QCE.

- The Year 10 Guidelines should be a useful resource for:

  – a range of school settings (P–10, middle school and secondary school)

  – the range of course organisations in schools (8–10, 9–10, 10 and 10–12)

  – the range of students

- The Year 10 Guidelines should continue to focus on literacy and numeracy development.

3.4   P–3 Framework

The feedback gained through consultation identifies high levels of stakeholder support for the development of a P–3 Framework. Participants provided feedback on the key strategies within the P–3 Framework including Year 1 Learning Statements, Early Years Diagnostic Net and reporting advice for the early years of schooling.

Summary of feedback

Participants provided the following feedback for each key strategy.

Year 1 Learning Statements

Participants showed strong support for the continuation of the Prep Year early learning areas to the end of Year 1 and the development of Year 1 Learning Statements. This was seen to support the continuity of learning and as an important strategy for building a firm foundation for learning in the early years and later schooling.

Early Years Diagnostic Net

Stakeholders supported the development of the Early Years Diagnostic Net, aligned to the Queensland curriculum. This would replace the Year 2 Diagnostic Net as the tool commonly used to map students' progress in literacy and numeracy.

In particular, participants showed support for:

- the inclusion of oral language in the literacy continua and areas other than number in the numeracy continua.

- the alignment of phases to the end of a year level. However, feedback was not clear about how best to rename the phases.

Participants identified the following issues.

- Teachers requested advice about the use of social moderation throughout the early years to support consistency of teacher judgment.

- There was significant discussion and interest in the timing of validation. Different views were presented including repositioning validation to the end of Year 1 or maintaining validation in May of Year 2.

- If validation was moved to Year 1, there was support for the development of additional validation materials for Year 2 and Year 3. This idea was seen to extend the assessment culture already established with the Year 2 Diagnostic Net.

Reporting advice for the early years

Teachers strongly advised that reporting on an A–E scale in the early years was inappropriate.

Participants identified the following issues:

- Teachers requested language specific to the early years to support reporting on a five-point scale. Stakeholders were concerned that the current A–E scale unfairly labels young children and that it does not support ongoing monitoring and assessment and planning for further learning.

- Many stakeholders raised questions and expressed concern about the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Stakeholders were concerned about the inappropriateness of the assessment instrument for young children. They also commented on the length of assessments and lack of alignment with Queensland curriculum.

4. Conclusions

The consultation provided valuable feedback on the initiatives to build a P–12 syllabus and assessment framework. Participants expressed the general view that the work of the QSA should be informed by a P–12 syllabus and assessment framework. In the main, the feedback on all four documents was positive. However, some specific actions have been identified that can inform the further refinement of the documents.

4.1   P–12 syllabus design principles

The P–12 syllabus design principles should be refined to clarify:

- the language and terminology so that it matches existing understandings of terms and builds a common nomenclature
- the descriptions of the emphasis for each of the phases.

Given the positive feedback, the QSA should consider developing a syllabus template for each phase of learning. This template should be based on the design principles and would be used when developing new syllabuses and revising current syllabuses.

4.2   P–12 assessment policy

The assessment policy should be refined to include:

- assessment for a diverse student population
- moderation in each phase
- principles of exit assessment
- quality assurance processes.

Given the positive feedback about the document as a reaffirmation of Queensland's system of externally moderated school-based assessment, consideration should be given to redeveloping the document specifically for classroom practitioners as a strategy to promote the assessment culture in Queensland.

4.3   Design brief for Year 10 Guidelines

Participants gave positive feedback about developing Year 10 Guidelines The QSA should use the feedback gained through consultation to revise the design brief and inform the Year 10 Guidelines.

The QSA should revise the design brief with specific emphasis on:

- language and terminology to clarify the document as a set of "guidelines"
- clear statements of purpose and operating principles to position Year 10 as part of the senior phase of learning
- flexibility for schools to structure courses that cater for a range of pathways
- course advice to display how the learning in each of the learning areas may be packaged

- assessment advice and Standards linked to the Learning Statements
- Vocational Education and Training, career education and certification (QCE and QCIA)
- advice on literacy and numeracy development.

4.4   P–3 Framework

The QSA should use the supportive feedback from the consultation to:

- develop Year 1 Learning Statements to continue the Prep Year early learning areas to the end of Year 1
- develop the Early Years Diagnostic Net to replace the Year 2 Diagnostic Net as a tool to map literacy and numeracy progress in P–3. This includes moving validation to Year 1, and developing additional validation materials for Year 2 and Year 3
- develop reporting advice for the early years with language specific to P–3 to support reporting on a five-point scale.

Appendix 1: Locations and dates of community meetings

Area	Date	Duration	Location
Sunshine Coast North	19 June	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Caloundra State High School
Brisbane Ipswich	23 June	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Ipswich Special School
Brisbane East	15 July	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Coorparoo Secondary College
Cairns	15 July	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Cairns State High School
Sunshine Coast South	22 July	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Caboolture State High School
Mount Isa	29 July	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Spinifex College
Gold Coast South	30 July	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Elanora State High School
Townsville	5 August	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Townsville State High School
Roma	5 August	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Roma State College
Wide Bay	7 August	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Maryborough State High School
Rockhampton	18 August	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	North Street Annex
Toowoomba	18 August	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Toowoomba State High School
Brisbane Central	20 August	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	All Hallows' School
Longreach	27 August	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Longreach Civic Centre
Mackay	26 August	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Pioneer State High School
Brisbane North	2 September	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Aspley State High School
Brisbane South/Gold Coast North	3 September	3:30 pm– 5:30 pm	Springwood State High School

Appendix 2: Locations and dates of school visits

School	Date	School Type	QSA District
St Mary's College, Woree	15 July	Cairns Catholic Education 8–12	Cairns
Spinifex State College, Mount Isa	29 July	Education Queensland P–12	Townsville
St. Michaels College, Merrimac	30 July	Brisbane Catholic Education 8–12	Gold Coast
Surat State School	5 August	Education Queensland P–10	Toowoomba
Heatley Secondary College	5 August	Education Queensland 8–12	Townsville
The Rockhampton Grammar School	18 August	Independent P–12	Rockhampton
Sacred School, Yeppoon	18 August	Rockhampton Catholic Education P–7	Rockhampton
Harristown State School	18 August	Education Queensland P–7	Toowoomba
Pioneer State High School	26 August	Education Queensland 8–12	Mackay
Our Lady's, Longreach	27 August	Rockhampton Catholic Education P–7	Rockhampton
Redeemer Lutheran College, Rochedale	4 September	Lutheran Education Queensland P–12	Brisbane South

Appendix 3: Dates of stakeholder meetings

Stakeholder Group	Date	Venue	Time
Schooling sectors	1 September	Level 14 Authority Meeting Room	3:00 pm–5:00 pm
Tertiary educators	2 September	Level 14 Authority Meeting Room	3:00 pm–5:00 pm
Parents associations	5 September	Level 14 Authority Meeting Room	3:00 pm–5:00 pm
Principals and administrators associations	8 September	Level 14 Authority Meeting Room	3:00 pm–5:00 pm
Teacher professional associations	2 September	Level 14 Authority Meeting Room	3:00 pm–5:00 pm
Teachers unions	16 September	Level 14 Authority Meeting Room	3:00 pm–5:00 pm

Appendix 4: Other meetings

Meeting	Date
Brisbane Catholic Education Deputy Principals and Assistant Principals Network	20 May
Queensland State P–10/12 School Administrators Association Executive Council	4 June
Education Queensland Guidance Officers and Senior Schooling Heads of Department (Sunshine Coast Region)	18 June
Education Queensland Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) Heads of Department	23 June
Combined Principals Reference Group	16 July
Business Educators Association of Queensland (BEAQ) Conference	26 July
Vocational Education and Training Network (VETNET)	30 July
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee	7 August
English Syllabus Advisory Committee	5 August
Science Syllabus Advisory Committee	7 August
The Arts Syllabus Advisory Committee	11 August
P–12 Curriculum Committee	18 August
Equity Committee	20 August 8 October
Health and Physical Education Syllabus Advisory Committee	22 August
Technologies Syllabus Advisory Committee	27 August
Early Years Syllabus Advisory Committee	5 September
Syllabus Advisory Committee Chairs	17 September