

Runs on the Board: Meeting the future challenges of post- compulsory school education in Queensland

Paper presented at the Australian College of Education Forum:
'Queensland Statutory Bodies at the Crossroads'

Brisbane City Hall, 3 December 1999

John A. Pitman

Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies

© Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1999

Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies

Floor 7, 295 Ann St Brisbane Queensland

PO Box 307 Spring Hill Qld 4004

Telephone: (07) 3864 0299

Facsimile: (07) 3221 2553

Email: office@qbssss.edu.au

Website: www.qbssss.edu.au

National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication data

Pitman, John

Runs on the Board : Meeting the future challenges of post-compulsory school education in Queensland

Bibliography

ISBN 1 74038 014 2.

1. Queensland. Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. 2. Education and state – Queensland. I. Queensland. Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. II. Title.

379.943

Job DR1164

Ambiguity in the title of the Forum

The title of this forum ‘Queensland Statutory Bodies at the Crossroads’ is a bit obscure and the timing interesting (right now we are working around the clock to finalise Student Education Profiles for over 36000 students). Who is at the crossroads? Boards *per se*? Or particular Boards? In fact, the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (QBSSSS) has always been ‘at the crossroads’.

I’ll interpret the forum as being about whether we need statutory bodies and whether the present structure of having a small efficient Board for senior secondary schooling is working. The answer is ‘yes’ to both questions.

The designation of most Boards as ‘statutory bodies’ emphasises the individuality of each. An Act of Parliament for each such body mandates its functions and prescribes its accountabilities. Such Boards are essential to modern democratic decision making. They foster cooperation, look after the interests of students, and work to balance many different community interests. QBSSSS offers a highly developed model of quality decision making in education.

QBSSSS is small and focused. The present structure, which ‘carves up’ different areas of education, helps ensure that members representing different community interests can ‘get a handle’ on the issues. This is why we have such bodies as the Board of Teacher Registration, the Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC), and QBSSSS.

I am not in favour of having one monolithic P–12 board: this would cover too wide a range and have too many responsibilities to be workable. Other states may well have such a body, but we should be cautious about assuming that this fact means they work well, or would work well in Queensland.

The fact is that Queensland does not have two curriculum Boards. QSCCC is a curriculum authority for the compulsory years of schooling. QBSSSS is a credentialling authority that also develops curriculum. Credentialling must be linked to curriculum. Curriculum, assessment, and credentialling are interlinked. The present structure of QBSSSS acknowledges this.

Quality credentialling

The outcome of QBSSSS decisions in the past is a highly developed system of moderated school-based assessment leading to quality credentialling for our students. Figure 1 represents the extent and nature of the system of quality credentialling that has been developed in Queensland. The Queensland system is recognised internationally as an outstanding model of quality credentialling.

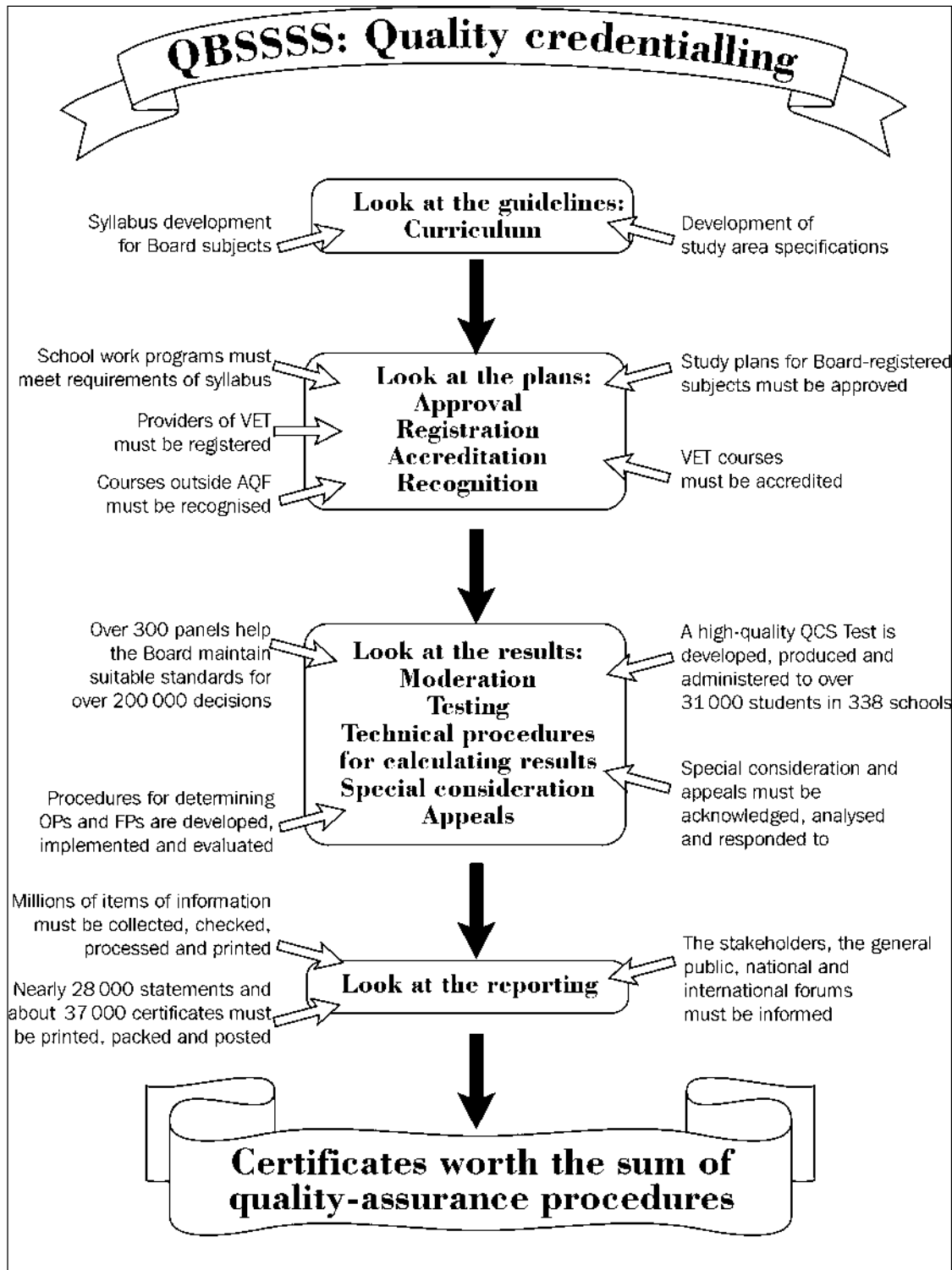


Figure 1: Quality credentialling developed in Queensland

Past accomplishments

Much of the recent public discussion does not seem to have acknowledged what has been achieved in Queensland and why this is a basis for optimism about the future. Before I talk about some of the mantras like ‘flexibility’ ‘diversity’ and ‘falling retention rates’ that do such a disservice to quality public discussion of education, I’d like to talk a little about some of the ‘dunnits’: not ‘could do its’ or ‘should do its’ but ‘dunnits’.

Here is my list of ‘dunnits’. They are about putting students first: that’s our ethos. They give us a sound basis for optimism in the future because they demonstrate that the challenges for the future—which are about quality—can be met. They show that QBSSSS has a history of innovation and development that is evolutionary. Evolutionary change is better than revolutionary change because it can be inclusive and bring everyone forward together. Of course, the ‘Dunnits’ are accompanied by the statutory acronyms so necessary for good communication these days.

‘Dunnits’
School-Based Assessment <i>SBA</i>
Criteria-Based Assessment <i>CBA</i>
Common Curriculum Elements <i>CCEs</i>
Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test
Student Education Profile <i>SEP</i>
VET (Vocational Education & Training) in Schools
Study Area Specifications <i>SASs</i>
Student Data Capture System <i>SDCS</i>
Data Scrutiny Systems (Anomaly Detection) <i>DSS</i>
A Short Course In The Australian Constitution <i>OZCON</i>
External Examinations <i>EE</i>

Figure 2: ‘Dunnits’—putting students first

Let me take each of these in turn briefly.

School-Based Assessment *SBA*

Public examinations were abolished almost 30 years ago in Queensland. Teachers in schools, not a central authority developing external examinations, make decisions about students’ achievements. In Queensland we have the quality assurance (thousands of teachers working on panels in a highly participative system) that allows us to say that a level of achievement in any one Board subject is awarded for substantially the same student work across the State. Other systems don’t have this. Teachers in Queensland have more expertise in assessment than many of their counterparts, and this benefits their students. Our system of school-based assessment has been developed and refined for over 30 years and has international recognition.

Criteria-Based Assessment *CBA*

Student work is assessed against explicit criteria that provide the detail of the knowledge and skills to be demonstrated. Our standards in Queensland are not only comparable, they are meaningful and explicable. This means better quality certificates for our students.

Common Curriculum Elements *CCEs*

The Board has identified common curriculum elements across the senior curriculum: these are the basis for the QCS Test which is used to compare the strength of the competition in different subject-groups and school-groups across the State. Achievement on the QCS Test has a strong relationship to achievement at school. Our CCEs are viewed with considerable interest by many systems that do not have them. They are fundamental to good teaching and learning. They are generic skills that have much to offer the innovative thinking being done by Professor Allan Luke and his team on the New Basics.

The Queensland Core Skills (*QCS*) Test

This test is developed, administered and marked by QBSSSS, in *Queensland*. It has many design features that make it a high-quality test that is also accountable to the community. Teachers are involved before and after the test, particularly in the marking process. It incorporates quality control loops, documentation of decisions made in implementing the design criteria, and evaluation of both the test process and product. It has been independently evaluated as an outstanding international model of testing.

The Student Education Profile *SEP*

First issued to students in 1992, the SEP provides a profile of student achievement: it provides, for each student, information about achievement that is different in kind—some absolute, some relative.

Vocational Education and Training (*VET*) in Schools

It is sometimes forgotten that VET is not new to the Senior Certificate, and that we have had lots of curriculum diversity for a long time. In 1987 there were 43 Board subjects, over 1000 Board-registered subjects, and over 200 TAFE subjects. The Senior Certificate was and continues to be open to VET in the sense that students can select any combination of these and receive a Senior Certificate. In the few short years from 1995 to 1998 we have gone from a situation where 7.7 per cent of students had at least one VET result on their Senior Certificates to a situation where this is true of 38 per cent of students. You need only glance at the details on the diagram showing QBSSSS quality credentialling (fig. 1) to get a sense of the work in VET registration, accreditation and recognition that this has involved. The partnership between schools and the Board has achieved this tremendous development of VET.

Study Area Specifications *SASs*

As at 1999, there are 31 new subjects developed as part of SASs, and 2000 will see three new study area specifications—in Social and Community Studies, Early Childhood Practices, and Physical Recreation. All this curriculum development has involved hundreds of teachers and other community members acting on syllabus advisory committees, and literally thousand of teachers participating in the Board's evaluations.

Student Data Capture System *SDCS*

A cursory glance at senior certificates from other states will tell you how far ahead Queensland is in terms of the range and amount of information about student achievement that is reported. Our system for collecting and checking the information that is reported on our credentials is one of the most developed in the world, and has received awards for innovation.

Data Scrutiny Systems *DSS*

In Queensland, our systems of anomaly detection involve a range of highly sophisticated checks of the input data for calculation of tertiary entrance rankings. For example, checks on subject achievement indicators, on the relationship of overall school achievement and scaling test achievement, school-group checks, subject-group checks, and individual student checks. These checks help make our system of tertiary entrance fair and accurate for all students.

***A Short Course in the Australian Constitution* (Ozcon)**

This initiative is a response to the need for greater awareness of the Australian Constitution. Over 100 schools have students studying this Board-developed course which can be offered as either a Board semester unit or a Board-registered semester unit.

External Examinations *EE*

Queensland has a comprehensive alternative means of accessing Board subjects reported on the Senior Certificate. External examinations mainly cater for mature-age students but are also available to full-time secondary students for whom the subject is unavailable at the school they attend. In 1998, 907 students sat for 28 subjects externally. QBSSSS receives and deals with enquiries from overseas bodies seeking services and advice in this area.

Need for change?

The innovations mentioned represent fundamental developments of teaching and learning in Queensland. Such innovations should give us all a basis for confidence about the future. Instead, there has been a lot of talk about the need for change based on ‘globalisation’ and ‘falling retention rates’. There has been a sense of urgency created about changing the curriculum as if this is ‘the problem’. Of course, the term ‘globalisation’ has been used to justify much change, not all of which has been in the interests of the majority. Globalisation has been occurring for a long time, and so too has our curriculum been changing through open and participative structures involving hundreds of teachers and others developing curriculum on Board committees.

Mantras

Let’s look at the ‘falling retention rates’ issue, which has sometimes been presented almost as if the cause is our curriculum. Mantras like ‘diversity’, ‘flexibility’, ‘alternative pathways’ and ‘the seamless curriculum’ (seams are fine—even necessary—but they must be in the right places) have been repeated at times in a data-free zone or a zone of data misunderstood. Let’s look at what the data are saying.

First, overall, retention rates are rising, not falling. Figure 3 shows that from 1981 to 1999 the rates of certification of student achievement rose.

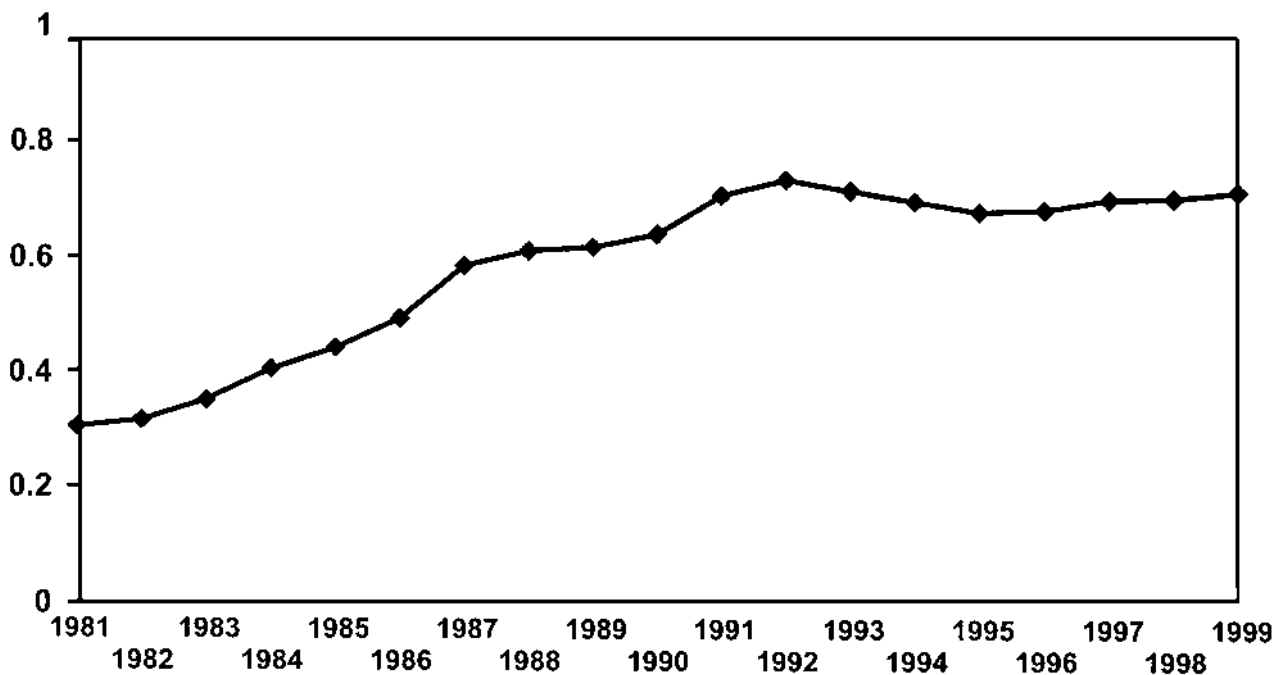


Figure 3: Certification rate 1981–1999

Figure 4 shows the detail of the increase in rates of certification from 1995 to 1999.

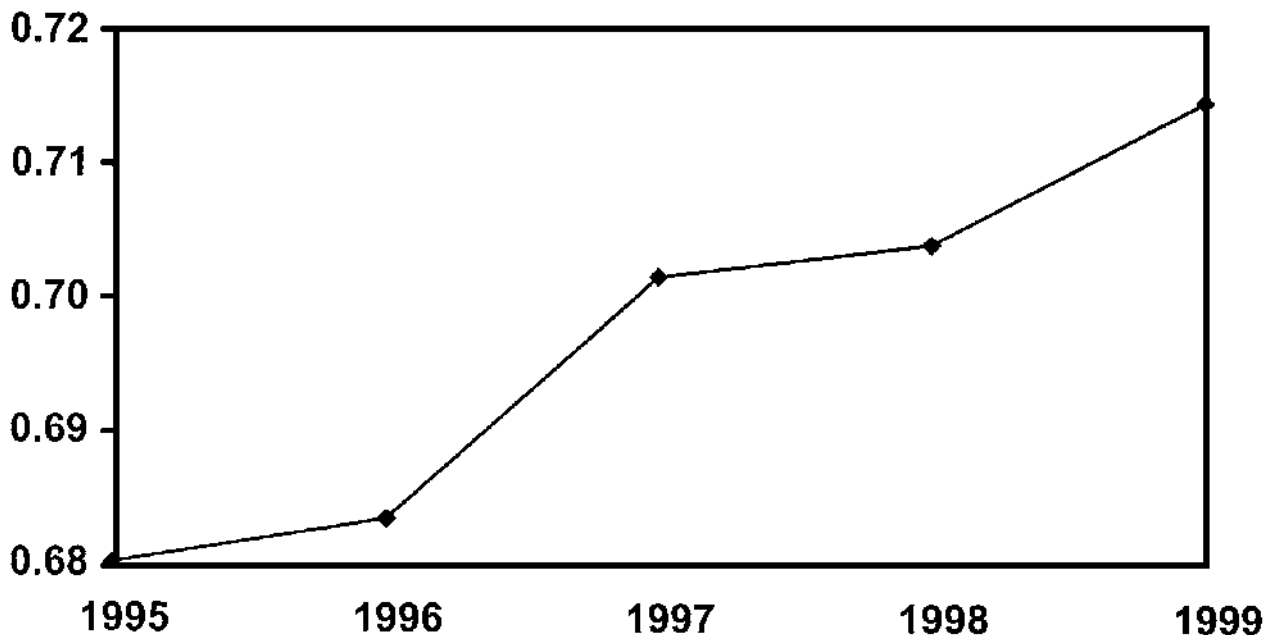


Figure 4: Certification rate 1995–1999

This is not to say that retention rates or completion rates are where we would like them to be. It is to say that they are rising, and to understand how to make them rise faster we need to look more carefully at what the data are saying. It is true that some students are leaving school. For these students, it seems logical to say that they do not complete their schooling partly because of their experiences of compulsory schooling.

Market share

Let's look at the related question of the declining 'market share' of state schools. It's true that more students (particularly the academic higher achievers) are choosing to attend non-state schools. Why?

The answer is a complex one involving many factors. Figure 5 shows that non-state schools offer a significantly smaller range of Board subjects. We know also that non-state schools offer less VET and a much smaller range of VET. In other words, the declining market share of state schools, and the fact that state schools are losing their academic high achievers, is not about lack of curriculum diversity in state schools. Students and their parents seem to be choosing schools with a smaller range of curriculum offerings.

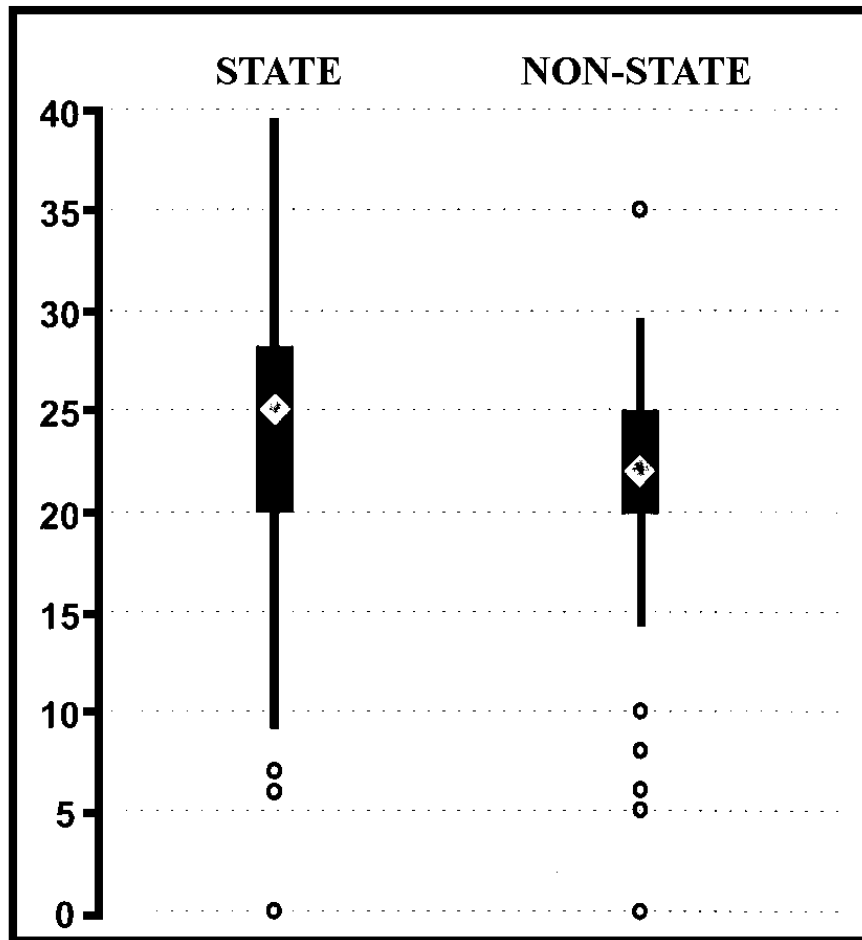


Figure 5: Board subjects by state-school and non-state school, 1999

Diversity

At one stage of the '2010' discussions it seemed that the perception was that there is too little curriculum diversity. Now it seems that the message is that there is too much for some students and not enough for others. However these perceptions may shift, it is certain that:

- *we have enormous diversity*: in 1998 the Senior Certificate could report 59 Board subjects, 28 SAS subjects, 10 993 TAFE Recorded subjects, 836 other kinds of Recorded subjects, and 636 'old style' Board-registered subjects
- *we have considerable flexibility*: a student can complete one TAFE module of a few hours and still receive a Senior Certificate, there are no core curriculum requirements for the Senior Certificate or tertiary entrance rankings, a student can 'chop and change' subjects through senior, and a student can take three years to complete senior.

The argument that some students have 'too much' diversity is a nebulous one. If it means that students are taking fragmented studies, the fact is that most students study Board or Board-registered subjects, each of which represents a coherent program of study of between 40 and 55 timetabled hours per semester. Only *ten* students in the 1999 data did no Board or Board-registered subjects. Some of them completed a string of competencies. The tremendous diversity of the senior curriculum, including VET, has been managed in ways that, by and large, do not result in students taking fragmented, incoherent studies.

There are, of course, students who take highly individualised programs of study. Our research into these issues suggests that some students cannot meet the requirements for VET certificates, or levels of achievement in Board or Board-registered subjects; that is, State or national standards reported on the Senior Certificate. The substantial amount of research involving community members we have conducted into these

issues¹ suggests that a ‘Certificate of Achievement in Post-compulsory School Education’ would help meet the needs of these students to have their outcomes reported on a quality certificate.

In short, we need to move away from arguments, not substantiated by the data, that falling retention rates or low retention rates are about the senior curriculum. We need to move away from the old mantras of ‘diversity’ and ‘flexibility’ (too much or too little) and ‘alternative pathways’. ‘Pathways’ can be like tracks or ruts, and, in fact, students in Queensland have so much flexibility it would not be accurate to describe them as locked into particular pathways.

Challenges, new structures and resources

So what are the challenges and what kind of structure would help us meet them? My preferred model is for QBSSSS to take responsibility for Year 10. This would allow students to access the senior curriculum earlier. Most students would probably continue to complete senior in two years (currently they can complete senior in three if they wish under our variable progression rates). The new model could provide for all sorts of possibilities; for example, students could access senior studies in Year 10. Some students could take four years to complete senior. This would go a long way towards encouraging students to complete senior.

This model would also allow us to build on past achievements for students in Queensland and meet other future challenges such as:

- curriculum that keeps pace with rapid global changes
- developing government schools as schools of excellence
- providing our students with high-quality vocational preparation²
- quality remedial literacy and numeracy teaching, learning and assessment
- achieving high quality in meeting the special needs of students
- giving students the attitudes and values needed to build their sound social futures.

Meeting these challenges is about having properly resourced schools and statutory authorities. The best ‘on the shelf’ curriculum can’t meet the needs of students if schools do not have the resources. Our curriculum evaluations continue to identify a need for more resources. We’ve focused in recent ‘2010’ debates on retention rates and how we compare with other states and countries. Yet there are other figures that should make us sit up.

A recent discussion paper from the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (1999), ‘Why Australia Needs a National Youth Commitment’ (which needs to be considered in the light of another Dusseldorp Skills Forum paper ‘The Cost to Australia of Early School Leaving’) points out that ‘Among the states, education spending as a proportion of all state government expenditure has declined markedly in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, and the Northern Territory in the 1990s’ (p. 20). The same paper also argues that ‘The waste of public funds flowing from start-stop initiatives needs to be acknowledged and countered’ (p.21).³ Resource and school delivery issues seem to be among the most difficult challenges: resolving them requires a long-term commitment to the system.

¹ Two Board studies on the special needs of students are: QBSSSS 1996b, Certification For All: Options for certificating the achievements of all students, including students with special needs, and students in special schools, and QBSSSS 1996d, Working Party on the Certification of the Achievements of Students with Disabilities.

² Recent research suggests that there is much scope for development of quality assurance in the VET sector (see Schofield, K. and Associates, 1999a, The Purposes of Education, consultation report, Education Queensland, Brisbane and 1999b, Independent Investigation into the Quality of Training in Queensland’s Traineeship System, Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Brisbane).

³ See National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling University of Canberra 1999, ‘Why Australia needs a National Youth Commitment’, a discussion paper in Dusseldorp Skills Forum: The Cost to Australia of Early School Leaving, Dusseldorp Skills Forum.

Conclusion

In conclusion, no one really knows what the future holds. The labour market is changing rapidly, and our predictions for tomorrow, let alone 2010, may not be right. We know that problem-solving skills, which are highly valued in Board syllabuses, will probably be at a premium. We know that if we are to change it must be an evolutionary change that fosters cooperation, takes account of many different community interests and maintains the strong partnership between the Board and schools. We know that past achievements are a sound basis for future innovation. Like the future, cricket is an unpredictable game, but QBSSSS has lots of runs on the board and in my view should continue to play for Queensland and be picked for the next Test series.

Bibliography

- Allen, J.R. 1999, *Principles for the Integrity, Quality and Long-term Credibility of Certificates of Achievement*. A report by QBSSSS on behalf of the Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA), QBSSSS.
- Allen, J.R & Bell, E. 1995, *OPs and Levels of Achievement: An examination of 1992–93 data*. QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Allen, J.R. 1990, *The Viviani Report: Simulation of OPs and FPs*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Allen, J.R. 1991, *The Subject Weights Project*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Allen, J.R. 1995, *Technical Features of the OP/FP System*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Allen, J.R. 1999, *New School Form, Forms and Benches: The move to benchmarks and outcomes*. QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Allen, J.R., Matters, G.N., Dudley, R.P., Gordon, P.K. 1993, *A Report of the Scan of the Queensland Senior Curriculum to Identify the Common Elements*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Bell, E. Williams J. and Paties B. 1999, *Interim Report, Literacy and Numeracy Study Area Specification*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Bell, E.J. 1998, *Civitas: Participative research in the formation of Queensland school-based assessment 1970-1998*, paper presented to the December 1998 Adelaide conference to the Australian Association for Research in Education, Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- Bell, E.J. 1999, 'What Learners Need For The Future': *A report of one of the largest single studies of the implementation of VET in senior secondary schooling in Australia*, keynote address presented to 'The Learning Network' (the fourth Queensland State Conference of the National Association of Post-Compulsory Education (Qld) Inc., Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- Bell, E.J. and Allen, J.R. 1998, *The Student Education Profile: Questions students ask about OPs and FPs: A Resource for teachers*. QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Clarke, E. 1987a, *Assessment in Queensland Secondary Schools: 1983–1990*, Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- Clarke, E. 1987b, *Assessment in Queensland Secondary Schools: Two decades of change 1964–1983*, Department of Education, Queensland.
- Dudley, B. 1998, *Bridging Troubled Waters*. QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Matters, G.N. 1991, *A Design Process for Constructing the Queensland Core Skills Test*, Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra 1999, 'Why Australia needs a National Youth Commitment', a discussion paper in Dusseldorp Skills Forum: The Cost to Australia of Early School Leaving, Dusseldorp Skills Forum.
- O'Brien, J.E., Pitman, J.A., Matters, G.N. 1998, *Internal Consistency Measures for the Queensland Core Skills Test*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Pitman, J.A. and Dudley, R.P. 1998, *Criteria-Based Assessment: The Queensland experience*, a paper presented by John Pitman at the 11th International Conference of the International Association for Educational Assessment, Oxford, England, 1985, and at the Australasian Conference of Assessment and Certification Authorities, 1985, Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- Pitman, J.A. and Matters, G.N. 1998, *The Secondary-Tertiary Interface: The need for a new perspective*, transcript of a speech delivered by John Pitman to the 15th international conference of the International Association for Educational Assessment, Sydney, 1989, Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- Pitman, J.A. and Matters, G.N. 1999, *The Queensland Core Skills Test: In profile and in profiles*, paper presented by John Pitman at the 19th Annual Conference of the International Association of Educational Assessment, Mauritius, Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- Pitman, J.A., O'Brien J.E. and McCollow J.E. 1999, *High-Quality Assessment: We are what we believe and do*, paper presented at the IAEA Conference, Bled, Slovenia, Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- Purnell, K. 1997, *Vocational Education in Queensland Schools: A preliminary evaluation of the effects of QBSSSS initiatives under delegation from VETEC*, Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.

- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1987, *Tertiary Entrance in Queensland: A review*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1991, *Ideologies, Principles and Philosophies Underpinning Moderation in Australia*, QBSSSS, Brisbane, 1991.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1992, *Providing For Gifted Students in the Senior Secondary School: A report by the Chairman's working party on gifted students*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1996a, *A Framework for Education and Training*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1996b, *Certification For All: Options for certificating the achievements of all students, including students with special needs, and students in special schools*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1996c, *Schools' Experiences of Registration for Vocational Education*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1996d, *Working Party on the Certification of the Achievements of Students with Disabilities*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1998a, *Making Subject Choices*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1998b, *Vocational Education and Training Not Reported on the Senior Certificate*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1999a, *Random Sampling Project 1998*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1999b, *The Issue of Student Education Profiles: 1998 report*, QBSSSS, Brisbane.
- Radford, W.C. 1970, *Public Examinations for Queensland Secondary School Students* ('The Radford report'), Department of Education, Brisbane.
- Schofield, K. and Associates, 1999a, *The Purposes of Education*, consultation report, Education Queensland, Brisbane.
- Schofield, K. and Associates, 1999b, *Independent Investigation into the Quality of Training in Queensland's Traineeship System*, Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Brisbane.
- Scott, E. 1978, *A Review of School-Based Assessment in Queensland Schools* ('The ROSBA report'), Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- Trost, G. 1992, *The Queensland Core Skills Test: Evaluation of design criteria and process*, Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- Trost, G. 1996, *The Queensland Core Skills Test: A follow-up evaluation of the design criteria and process*, Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane.
- Viviani, N. 1990, *The Review of Tertiary Entrance Procedures in Queensland*, Department of Education, Brisbane.
- Wiltshire, K., McMeniman, M. and Tolhurst, T. 1994, *Shaping the Future: Report of the review of the Queensland school curriculum* ('The Wiltshire report'), vols 1, 2 & 3, Queensland Government, Brisbane.