

Report of the Select Committee on Education in Queensland

Queensland Legislative Assembly, 1980 (Chair: Michael Ahern)

Overview of the document

Comprises the Final Report plus six Interim Reports, which are in themselves definitive reports, despite the term 'interim'. The reports were presented to Parliament between December 1978 and March 1980.

Keywords

Curriculum development; school-based assessment; reference testing; reporting, accreditation; Social Studies; Religious Education; Ethical Education; Health Education; literacy; numeracy; remediation; teacher education; streaming; human relationships sex education; distance education; isolated schools; post-secondary education; early childhood education; primary education; secondary education; accountability; school discipline; special education; gifted students.

Terms of Reference

The Select Committee was appointed to enquire into, report upon and make recommendations in relation to the system of education in Queensland and the extent to which it meets the expectations of students, parents and the community, with particular reference to the following matters:

- a) the efficiency and adequacy of the present system of secondary education;
- b) appropriate emphasis in primary education between basic education and other activities;
- c) adequate technical and further education to meet today's industry needs;
- d) a review of the decision-making process in education and the role of the community in this area;
- e) adequacy of social education courses for primary and secondary students;
- f) the need for new courses, the ability of the education system to provide them and the administrative machinery for implementing them;
- g) the introduction of an independent authority to investigate complaints by parents or community organisations concerning any aspect of education; and
- h) any other matter pertaining to the matters for inquiry, report and recommendation as aforesaid.

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FIRST INTERIM REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND: COMPOSITION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE BOARD OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDIES AND SECONDARY SCHOOL ASSESSMENT (Presented to Parliament on 5 December 1978)

Section 1 – General

- Summarises the Select Committees terms of reference.

Section 2 – The Composition of the Board of Secondary School Studies (BSSS)

- Recommends minor changes to the constitution of the Board, mainly concerning the inclusion of three community representatives.

Section 3 – The Functions of the Board of Secondary School Studies

- Recommends minor changes to the functions and power of the Board.

Section 4 – School-Based Assessment

- Notes that the Select Committee received a very considerable number of representations concerning assessment of students in Queensland secondary schools and that these proposals fell into four well-defined groups of arguments:
 - a return to public examinations
 - examinations set by the tertiary institutions
 - assessment that is part external and part internal
 - the present school-based assessment system be retained.
- Also notes that the recent Scott Report has recommended a change from norm-based to competency-based assessment.
- Notes that the Committee has considered all proposals, as well as reviewed the Radford Report, the Campbell Report, Schools Under Radford and the Scott Report, along with research material and practices from other States and from overseas.
- Presents a summary of the undesirable features of public examinations, with an emphasis on the flexibility enjoyed in secondary schools, important in view of the number of students who do not proceed immediately to tertiary studies, that such examinations would destroy.
- Recommends that the principle of school-based assessment should be supported.
- Supports the move to competency-based assessment as advocated by the Scott Report, although with some reservations concerning some of the Scott recommendations, especially regarding the system of reporting.
- Argues that there are adequate safeguards against perceived unfairness in the system of school-based assessment, although the BSSS should take heed of community concerns.
- Concurs with the view expressed in the Scott Report that the problem of “over-testing” which is seen to be a concomitant of school-based assessment is in fact a result of a lack of effective communication between the BSSS and teachers with regard to assessment procedures.

- The Committee supports the reorganisation of the school year to conform with the semesterisation of the curriculum.
- Briefly addresses the problems faced by small schools.
- Notes that the Committee is considering how worthwhile it would be to introduce testing of computation and communication skills.
- Argues that, while the matter of assessment has loomed large in contemporary debate, it is but one facet of the education system and does not represent the aim or purpose of education.

Section 5 – Curriculum Development

- Notes that a major rationale of the original ‘Radford Scheme’ was to allow a greater degree of flexibility in relation to the curriculum, but that there is considerable community concern about a perceived over-emphasis on the need for flexibility in relation to the problems it causes for students transferring school, and the possible diversity of outcomes in relation to a variable curriculum and its assessment.
- Argues that “There has been an over-action to the need for flexibility”, and “consideration should be given to defining a core curriculum within each subject area” but that flexibility and the need for a core curriculum should not necessarily be seen as incompatible. (p. 5)
- Supports the retention of a significant degree of flexibility in curriculum design but notes that there is nevertheless considerable population mobility and the introduction of a core curriculum would mitigate the problems facing children who move from school to school.
- Argues for “a degree of uniformity in curricular material”, suggesting “the introduction of a core syllabus of approximately 50% in each ‘Board Subject’ and ‘Board-approved Subject’”. (p. 5)
- Argues that “Prescription of a core of approximately 50% in each subject area will still allow ample scope for the personal and professional development of teachers and also preserve their opportunity to develop courses or approaches in a manner appropriate to the needs of the community in which the particular school is situated.” (p. 5)
- Proposes that “a greater uniformity in curricular material is a pre-requisite for an adequate competency-based reference testing program.
- Supports the Scott recommendations that a “‘Curriculum Task Force’ re-write each syllabus specifying objectives in terms of cognitive skills and practical skills, as well as quantitative expression of core content.” (p. 5)
- Recommends that the BSSS “establish procedures to ensure that schools devote appropriate time to the teaching of all sections of each subject curriculum and that assessment is related to a student’s performance over the whole curriculum and not merely the core content”. (p. 5)

Section 6 – Reference Testing

- Notes that much of the criticism of internal testing has resulted from an alleged decline in the standard of education achieved by most students, particularly in numeracy and literacy, but that this alleged phenomenon is a universal concern and the evidence for it is indeterminate.
- States that “Claims by the lay public that educational standards are declining are widespread and are independent of either the structure of the education system or the

- method of assessment of individual students.” (p. 5)
- Notes the rate of change over the past 25 years, the rising percentage of students continuing beyond Year 10 and the strains this has placed on the system and teachers and the “rise in the minimum entry level of competence necessary for the school leaver”. Argues that “The important question is not so much whether standards are rising or falling, but rather whether the standards are appropriate.” (p. 5)
 - Remarks on the lack of information concerning the levels of skills that school leavers actually need. Claims that “A changing world demands... a positive and continuous effort on the part of the education system and the community at large, to maintain a consensus on what can be achieved, to define and re-define appropriate standards and to strive to achieve and then to surpass those standards, for the ultimate benefit of the whole of our society.” (p. 6)
 - Cites public concerns and misunderstandings concerning the present moderation system. Notes that the Committee supports in principle the Scott recommendations regarding the replacement of the moderation system with a system of accreditation of work programs and certification of reported standards of achievement, backed by a comprehensive system of reference testing. Notes that “Such testing would be applied to the cognitive and practical skills specified in the curriculum and to the core content of the syllabus.” (p. 6)
 - Argues that each subject should be tested on a state-wide basis, perhaps every 4 years and overall standards in individual subjects should be reported to Parliament in the annual report of the BSSS. Argues that “The proper concern should be for the maintenance of appropriate standards.” (p. 6)

Section 7 – Reporting

- Alludes to the problems presented by a norm-based system, especially for students who do not intend to continue to tertiary education.
- Disagrees with the Scott-recommended system of reporting where there is advocated a scale of levels of competency with terms ranging from “Highest level of competency” to “Very Limited Competence” and “Ungraded”. Presents two criticisms of this: that the terms used for the lower levels of achievement have pejorative overtones; and that the terms “Competent” and “Competence” have been over used and are liable to lead to confusion.
- Suggests the following terms be adopted: Highest Degree of Attainment; High Attainment; Very Competent; Competent; Coped with Basics; Low Attainment; Not Tested.
- Recommends that brief descriptors for each reporting term are printed on all report forms in order for them to be accepted as meaningful by the community at large and offers tentative definitions for each.

Section 8 – The Tertiary Entrance (TE) Score

- Notes that the TE Score has been subject to much criticism, but after careful consideration of the issue the Committee does not believe the criticisms are substantiated in any important respect.
- Notes that tertiary institutions do not wish to recommend any changes at this time, and are satisfied with the predictive capacity of the TE Score.
- Notes that the Committee supports the TE Score for the present, but expects the BSSS to continue research in efforts to refine and improve the system of tertiary selection in

Queensland.

- Supports the recommendation of the Scott Report that provision be made for inclusion of two semester units of certified School Subjects in the TE Score by choice.

Section 9 – Conclusion

- Notes that the Committee seeks to foster a greater community involvement in secondary school education in Queensland.
- Notes that the Committee has, in general, supported the proposals of the Scott Committee.
- Argues that “our research shows quite clearly that what has been achieved in Queensland is gradually being accepted as the norm, in other states in Australia and in other countries around the world.” (p. 7)

Section 10 – Summary of Recommendations

- Provides a summary of 25 recommendations.

SECOND INTERIM REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND THE AIMS OF OUR SCHOOLS AND THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL EDUCATION (Presented to Parliament on 27 March 1979)

Section 1 – General

- Reiterates the Select Committee’s terms of reference.

Section 2 – The Aims of our Schools and of Social Education

- Notes that with technological developments producing a demand for a more highly educated and skilled workforce, some question the usefulness of social education but affirms that education must serve other purposes besides the preparation of our youth to enter the workforce. (p. 1)
- Notes that Social Education for the purposes of this report comprises Social Studies, Religious and Ethical Studies, Health Education and Sex Education.
- Notes that before the adequacy of social education courses can be discussed, the general question of the aims of the school system as a whole must be addressed, and provides a summary of the aims of education as follows:
 - “The principal aim of education in Queensland Primary and Secondary Schools is to help and guide children to progress towards the full attainment of their potentialities as individuals and as adult members of our society. In particular, it is the duty and responsibility of our teachers and educational administrators
 - i. to help children develop lively, enquiring minds giving them the ability to question and to argue rationally, and apply themselves to tasks;
 - ii. to help children to the maximum development of their physical qualities, giving them an understanding of the means of achieving and the benefits of physical fitness, health and hygiene.
 - iii. to help children to use language effectively and imaginatively in reading, writing and speaking;
 - iv. to provide a basis of mathematical, scientific and technical knowledge, enabling boys and girls to learn the essential skills needed in a fast

- v. to instil respect for moral values, for other people and for oneself, and tolerance of other races, religions and ways of life;
 - vi. to help children understand how our country is governed and to instil an awareness of the social, civic and political responsibilities and rights of adult citizenship;
 - vii. to teach children about human achievement and aspirations, and in particular to make them aware of the traditions and culture of Queensland and of Australia and of the heritage of our past;
 - viii. to help children understand the world in which we live, and the interdependence of nations;
 - ix. to help children to appreciate how the nation earns and maintains its standard of living and properly to esteem the role of agriculture, industry and commerce in this process;
 - x. to encourage and foster the development of the children whose social, physical or environmental disadvantages cripple their capacity to learn, if necessary by making additional resources available to them.” (pp. 1-2)
- Argues that the issue relates to how these aims should be translated into a practical school curriculum. Notes issues in the field of social education such as whether to teach eclectic courses such as “Study of Society” or retain traditional academic disciplines (History, Economics and Geography).
 - Notes that difficulties arising from the general lack of communication between the education system and the community and the lack of consensus that inevitably attaches to the purposes, content and methods of social sciences in particular. States that “Not all the expectations held by the public are compatible, and the availability of time and facilities precludes all expectations and needs being met.” (p. 2)
 - Argues that it is nevertheless necessary to arrive at some conclusions as to community opinion on desirable priorities in social education and discusses three recent reports on this issue.
 - Argues that “The Select Committee believes that the evidence supports the view that a majority of the people of Queensland regard social education in its broadest sense as an essential component of our formal education system...the adequacy of social science courses...must be judged in terms of the extent to which such courses help and guide children to progress towards full attainment of the potentialities as individuals and as adult members of our society.” (p. 3)

Section 3 – The Social Structure of Queensland Society

- Presents selected statistical “social indicators”, drawn mainly from 1976 Australian Census tabulations, to give a picture of Queensland’s current social structure.

Section 4 – Social Education and the Teacher

- Reviews theories on how the student learns and teaching techniques.
- Notes that the Committee is not convinced that techniques associated with the discovery method of teaching are superior to those associated with the expository method.
- Expresses disquiet concerning techniques involving simulation, role playing and dilemma stories and argues that above all a balanced approach to teaching methods is

considered important. Discusses the handling of controversial issues and values education in the classroom.

Section 5 – Social Studies in the Primary School

- Outlines the history of Social Studies in Queensland primary schools.
- Discusses the need for a “central core of ‘essential facts’” underpinning the syllabus in Social Science, the need for community involvement in decisions on content and implementation, and the setting up of a “Primary School Studies Committee”. (p. 11)
- Recommends the teaching of values.

Section 6 – Social Studies in the Secondary School

- Recommends that the present policy of offering social studies courses based both on traditional academic disciplines (suitable for those intending to proceed to tertiary studies) and eclectic courses, be continued.
- Recommends the teaching of values.
- Recommends the institution of a High School Advisory Council.
- Discusses the suitability of the Social Education Materials Project (S.E.M.P.) for Queensland schools and the review of resource materials in general.

Section 7 – Religious and Ethical Education

- Discusses the place of religious and moral education in Queensland state schools. Recommends that accredited representatives of religious bodies continue to have right of access to schools for 1 hour of instruction a week in accordance with the Education Act; that a program of Bible reading at primary school be encouraged; and that a scripture-based course be available in secondary school, at least in Years 8-10.

Section 8 – Health and Safety Education

- Discusses the Health and Physical Education program.

Section 9 – Summary of Recommendations

- Provides a summary of 50 recommendations.

THIRD INTERIM REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND LITERACY AND NUMERACY (Presented to Parliament on 29 May 1979)

Section 1 - General

- Reiterates the Select Committee’s terms of reference.

Section 2 – Literacy and Numeracy Standards

- Notes that the employer community has expressed very serious concerns about essential skills.
- Presents up to date information that show that Australian students are at least on a par with students in other English-speaking countries, and that Queensland students continue to out-perform students of other States in reading, writing, and mathematics and numbers tests.
- However, argues that “it would appear that although educational standards have been maintained in absolute terms, they have not kept pace with social and economic needs” and that “‘threshold levels of education’ necessary for effective participation

in today's society have risen." (p. 4)

- Argues that there are three issues involved in raising educational standards in our schools: the problem of providing assistance for teachers in evaluating the effectiveness of different teaching practices; the problem of individual screening, diagnosis and remediation; and the question of teacher education.

Section 3 – The Evaluation of Teaching Practices

- Recommends the setting up of a program called the Teaching Practice Evaluation Programme (TPEP). Proposes that the total school population in Years 3, 6 and 9 be tested, and reporting be at school, regional and State levels, with reports on individual schools supplied only to schools for the information of the teachers.

Section 4 – Individual Screening, Diagnosis and Remediation

- Argues that systematised measures should be taken for the careful observation and recording for each child during the compulsory years of schooling by teachers.
- Argues that health checks should be carried out for all children in Years 1 and 7 at least.
- Notes that efforts with respect to literacy and numeracy should be concentrated on the critical first three years of schooling. Notes that class size is an important factor and recommends a target of 25 in these years as a first priority.
- Recommends streaming in Years 5-10.

Section 5 – Teacher Education

- Makes a number of recommendations, including making both Year 12 Mathematics and English pre-requisites for teacher registration.

FOURTH INTERIM REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND: HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS (Presented to Parliament on 7 June 1979)

- Discusses human relationships courses and recommends the establishment of a committee to develop a program of human relationships, including sex education.

FIFTH INTERIM REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND: ISOLATED CHILDREN AND ISOLATED SCHOOLS (Presented to Parliament on 9 August 1979)

- Discusses educational isolation, staffing issues, distance education and communications technology for distance education.

SIXTH INTERIM REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND: POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION (Presented to Parliament on 4 October 1979)

- Discusses the provision and coordination of post-secondary education, post-secondary education courses and the roles of post-secondary education.

FINAL REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND (Presented to Parliament on 11 March 1980)

Section 1 – General

- Reiterates the Select Committee's terms of reference and discusses the process leading to the final report.

Section 2 – A Brief History of Education in Queensland and the Background to the Present Inquiry

- Notes that this is the report of the first wide-ranging investigation into the structure of education in Queensland in all its aspects since 1875 and provides a sketch of the historical development of education in the State.
- Notes that the present review was commissioned in the context of a dramatic increase in the unemployment rate in the 15 to 19 age group, criticism from employers as to the standards being achieved by school leavers, and a major public debate about social studies programmes in Queensland schools and the suitability of courses and resource materials.

Section 3 – Early Childhood and Primary Education

- Discusses the non-compulsory status of the Pre-School year and the age of entry into primary school.

Section 4 – Secondary Education

- Discusses the necessity of an explicit statement of the aims and objectives of secondary education and approves those set out in the Scott Report under Recommendation 1.
- Discusses the need for effective communication at Departmental, Board, school and teacher levels; the role of secondary schools in preparing students for the workforce; the provision of a broad range of courses to match student needs; and the trialling of alternative organisation patterns, especially in senior schools.
- Supports the recommendation of the Scott Report that provision be made for inclusion of two semester units of certified School Subjects in the TE Score by choice.

Section 5 – Queensland Schools

- Discusses school issues including: accountability in education; school discipline; community use of school facilities; special education; and gifted children.

Section 6 – The Interim Reports of the Select Committee

- Provides updates to the Interim Reports.
- In regards to the First Interim Report, notes that the BSSS has recommended moderations to the achievement based categories which have been accepted by the Select Committee. These revised categories include: Very High Achievement; High Achievement; Moderate Achievement; Limited Achievement; Very Limited Achievement.
- In regards to the Second Interim Report, notes that based on concerns regarding the lack of explicit reference to the arts in the proposed statement of aims for education, the following had been added:
 - xi. “to help children develop an understanding of and sensitivity to the arts, and to become aware of the value of the arts in their own lives and in the lives of others.” (p. 20)
- In regards to the Third Interim Report, further discusses the proposal that mathematics be a pre-requisite for teacher education and reiterates the Committees view that teachers should be required to have studied some form of post-compulsory mathematics.
- Discusses the responses to the recommendation that human relationships courses

should include a sex education component in the Forth Interim Report and argues that despite the arguments against the proposal, it would be irresponsible to leave such education out of state schools.

- Discusses the responses to the Fifth Interim Report regarding the difficulties isolated education students face in undertaking more vocationally oriented courses.
- Discusses concerns expressed with the recommendations in the Sixth Interim Report regarding regional community colleges and notes that no rigid organisational model has been recommended.

Section 7 – Concluding Statement

- Discusses the submissions and community input into the report.
- Notes that there is a great deal of support for the current education system and that most of the criticisms provided were constructive in nature.
- Discusses the broad nature of the terms of reference and notes that the Committee has concentrated its review on those aspects of the system which have been major sources of public concern.

Section 8 – Summary of Recommendations

- Outlines the Report's 91 recommendations. These recommendations include:
 - 7 recommendations regarding Pre-schools including the extension of the establishment of early childhood classes at Class 4 Primary Schools, that where appropriate Pre-schools should be placed under the full control of the Principal of the associated Primary School and that Pre-school attendance should not be made compulsory. (p. 20)
 - 5 recommendations regarding Primary School including the continuation of the policy on curriculum time allocations and the continuation of the policy that students move into Secondary Schools at the end of Year 7. (p. 20)
 - 22 recommendations regarding Secondary School including the introduction of Manual Arts and Home Economics courses into all schools as a matter of urgency, wider publicity for policies enabling students to return to senior education after a period away, local employer involvement in the development of school based courses, the introduction training in computer awareness in the year 8-10 curriculum as a matter of urgency, and that the age at which compulsory education ceases should not be extended. (pp. 20-21).
 - 46 recommendations regarding schools including proposals for a more flexible approach to organisation and administration, closer liaison between the Department of Education and the Department of Children's Services and schools given ready accessibility to social workers, regular review of school rules and procedures, changes to the Education Act and Education Regulations and continuation of the trend towards decentralising Special Education services. (pp. 21-22)