


**Response to *A Shared Challenge:  
Improving Literacy, Numeracy  
and Science Learning in  
Queensland Primary Schools***



**29/05/2009**



## Your details

This information is sought to enable us to better understand the range of responses to the report – *A Shared Challenge: Improving Literacy, Numeracy and Science Learning in Queensland Primary Schools*. The information you provide will be treated with the utmost discretion, however, if you prefer you may choose to provide an anonymous response (NB: compulsory fields are marked \*)

Please complete your details below.

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### Please complete your details below

Name **John Ryan, Director - Queensland College of Teachers**

Postcode\* **statewide**

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### Check all that apply to you

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Student                | <input type="checkbox"/> General community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State school                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-state school       | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Principal                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Other school staff     | <input type="checkbox"/> University sector |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Training sector including TAFE | <input type="checkbox"/> Union                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Employer/industry |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government agency   | <input type="checkbox"/> Community organisation |  |

**Other (please specify)** It is important to recognise that this response has been compiled drawing on the breadth and expertise of the Board of the Queensland College of Teachers and its stakeholder members including practising teachers, employers, unions, higher education institutions and community representatives. In that sense it represents a statewide response and carries a stamp of authority and interest in enhancing and maintaining the professional standards and standing of members of this vital profession.

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## Your response

Please enter your response to the recommendations contained in *A Shared Challenge: Improving Literacy, Numeracy and Science Learning in Queensland Primary Schools* in the spaces provided below.

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### Recommendation 1

*That all aspiring primary teachers be required to demonstrate through test performances, as a condition of registration, that they meet threshold levels of knowledge about the teaching of literacy, numeracy and science and have sound levels of content knowledge in these areas.*

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) strongly supports the need for all teachers to have at least sound levels of content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge to underpin the development and strengthening of their professional practice. This applies to all teachers in the areas of literacy and numeracy and should extend to the ability for primary teachers to teach Science.

The QCT supports the goal of the proposed test notion in strengthening and ensuring the capabilities of primary teachers in these areas. However, the QCT believes that an approach that strengthens explicit requirements within preservice teacher education programs and requires explicit and strengthened demonstration of both types of knowledge and their application in practice prior to and as a condition of graduation (and provisional registration) is more appropriate and constructive.

The QCT wishes to draw attention to inadequate practices around entry to preservice teacher education courses. The strengthened requirements above need to be supported by investigating and taking action on supplementary and related measures including:

- ◆ setting minimum academic entry levels to preservice teacher education programs of OP 12;
- ◆ setting prerequisite and minimum entry level in mathematics (with necessary phased introduction); and
- ◆ analysing the relationship between teacher education places and their allocation to specific courses with teacher supply and demand trends and realities. The latter may also impact on the practice of 'filling quotas' that results in acceptance of students with low academic achievement levels.

A minimum level of academic achievement of 12 is proposed as a starting point taking into account that the top third of Year 12 students receiving a Queensland Certificate of Education obtain OPs ranging from 1-12.

The focus on preparation of primary teachers to more effectively teach science also demands exploration of the desirability and practicality of requiring prerequisite study in science at the senior phase. This would need to be considered in concert with directions set through the national curriculum initiative and would require adequate lead in time for implementation.

The QCT acknowledges that discussion and recommendations of strategies around programs that prepare primary teachers would necessarily encompass those preservice programs focusing on preparation for teaching in the early and middle phases of learning.

The QCT contends that it is timely to consider how realistic it is for Graduate Diploma programs preparing primary teachers to achieve explicit coverage of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and development of skills for eight Key Learning Areas within a one-year program. The QCT proposes that Graduate Diploma Programs preparing primary teachers be extended to a minimum duration of four semesters.

It is also timely and critical that early career (at least first year) teachers are better supported through focused and structured induction programs that incorporate greater release time (for example, .7 load) to enable such a program including increased capacity to undertake mentoring with more experienced teachers similar to the initiative proving successful in the Scottish education system. This will enable effective mentoring and transition to a profession with comparatively high levels of autonomy from appointment.

In the event that test performances are prescribed to demonstrate threshold levels of knowledge about the teaching of literacy, numeracy and science as well as sound content knowledge in these areas, the QCT accepts that it is the appropriate body to manage the tasks of setting, developing and administering the proposed proficiency tests. The appropriate juncture for such testing would be as a discrete but mandatory element of assessment prior to and as a condition of graduation and preceding provisional registration. It would be important to enable re-sitting of the tests.

As well, in this event, it is necessary to note the strong opposition of teachers to the testing notion and any suggestion that it be funded from the membership fees they contribute to the QCT. The QCT further wishes to underline the fact that the QCT is funded entirely by teacher member fees and the significant funding implications for development and administration would need to be met by government.

It may also imply an additional assessment component for applicants for teacher registration from interstate and overseas along with exploration of impact of mutual recognition legislation.

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## **Recommendation 2**

*That the Queensland Government introduces a new structure and program of advanced professional learning in literacy, numeracy and science for primary school teachers.*

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) strongly supports the tenet of this recommendation and applauds the intent of balance between prescription to ensure high quality, evidence-based learning and flexibility to enable schools to meet their individual needs.

The notion of a modular approach to the design of programs through broad specification for the set of modules with exact content and assessment requirements developed by providers and then accredited by a central agency is applauded. This principle already underpins and parallels the development of *Returning to Teaching in Schools* professional development programs currently being negotiated with potential providers for approval in the new renewal of teacher registration arrangements.

The QCT sees the relevance of such modules to the Continuing Professional Development requirements for renewal of registration and would accept the responsibility for accreditation of such modules if funding to support these processes were tied to the responsibility. The QCT emphasises that its only source of funding for heavy and increasing functions is membership fees paid by teachers and resources would need to be provided to extend functions to include this role to ensure high quality professional learning.

The QCT urges the government to acknowledge the significant and long-term investment, responsibility and role of employers in providing access to high quality professional development to build the expertise of all teachers.

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## **Recommendation 3**

*That additional funding be made available for the advanced training and employment of a number of 'specialist' literacy, numeracy and science teachers to work in schools (and/or district offices) most in need of support.*

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) acknowledges and supports the intent of this recommendation and the strong benefits for extending teacher practice through the ability to access 'specialist' literacy, numeracy and science teachers. It is important to acknowledge the necessity for such a strategy to address the *low equity* evidence that has emerged from the range of test data (eg PISA results).

It is important that the implementation of this recommendation acknowledges and is supported by adequate resourcing and funding to ensure penetration and sustainability of improved pedagogical practice.

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## **Recommendation 4**

*That standard science tests be introduced at Years 4, 6, 8 and 10 for school use in identifying students who are not meeting year-level expectations and for monitoring student progress over time.*

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) notes that the report points to a lack of confidence among primary teachers in teaching science as well as the limited opportunity for or uptake of professional development focussing on science by primary teachers. However, the recommendations proposing additional testing of students across Years 4, 6, 8 and 10 appear incongruent with those points.

It is unclear from the report whether the proposal intends a state-wide standardised test or the development of assessment items to comprise an Assessment Bank for access by teachers. The QCT acknowledges the benefits of such an item bank in building consistency of teacher judgment and in supporting teacher professional development and practice in quality assessment and consistent application of standards.

The QCT strongly agrees with the statement (Executive Summary, page xv) "... that high levels of central prescription can lead to de-skilling and de-professionalising of teachers" and therefore does not support the introduction of increased external assessment.

The QCT acknowledges the importance of monitoring students' progress in learning but contends that testing alone will not improve student outcomes. Teachers need support to identify students' achievements and learning needs including those not meeting (or at risk of not meeting) minimum standards as well as those achieving well accompanied by appropriate resourcing to raise expectations and achievement levels.

If, despite limitations, it is decided that additional science assessment be in the form of a single standardised test, clarification is required as to how the suggested 10 bands (paralleling NAPLAN) will be determined and allocated appropriately to the year levels of testing.

The QCT contends that a diagnostic tool to guide and support teachers in remediating and furthering student learning and linked to teacher professional development would be more advantageous than a standardised test.

Further, the QCT notes concern from its members teaching at primary level regarding the current lack of 'clarity of what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn by particular stages of schooling.' The QCT urges that this concern be taken into account when curriculum materials are developed at national and state levels. Primary teachers report that they particularly value guidance from curriculum support materials such as specific syllabus and *scope and sequence*-type documentation.

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## **Recommendation 5**

*That the Queensland Government initiates an expert review of international best practice in school leadership development with a view to introducing a new structure and program of advanced professional learning for primary school leaders focused on effective strategies for driving improved school performances in literacy, numeracy and science.*

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) recognises and champions the critical contribution of effective educational leadership as a constant and critical component of effective schools and so strongly supports this recommendation while acknowledging the need for resourcing and funding to enable it.

Further the QCT wishes to acknowledge the significant work that has been undertaken by Principals and school leaders in Australia in developing strong understanding of school leadership along with appropriate models and development of congruent cultures of learning and development. The QCT urges that this work be recognised and not overlooked in the comparison with international models.

Good educational leaders are vitally concerned with the development of good pedagogical practice of staff as an element of core business. They understand curriculum and support its implementation. They articulate and pursue a vision and their values impact hugely on what happens in schools. It is also important to ensure that leaders support the development of leadership skills across the career continuum and in formal and informal roles to sustain viability.

### **General Comments**

The QCT urges caution around an over-reliance on test results and suggests that measures that incorporate and recognise concepts of *value-adding* and *distance travelled* while charting student progress over time are more authentic and constructive to underpin improved learning outcomes for students.

In conclusion the QCT notes that the review report comprises significant discussion regarding the achievement of indigenous students. While it is acknowledged that high expectations and effective pedagogy underpin the pursuit of improved learning outcomes for all students, the QCT urges the government to consider whether specific recommendations may be appropriate to support *closing the gap* strategies.

The QCT notes and applauds the significant evidence accessed and the synopsis of *Highly Effective Practices for Continuous Improvement in Student Learning* and their consistency with the review's recommendations.

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**Thank you for taking the time to submit your response.**