

Assessment in Queensland Secondary Schools: Two decades of change 1964-1983

Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Issues in Queensland Education No. 4

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Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Issues in Queensland Education

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Introduction

During the late 1950s and early 1960s changes in society, and the educational expectations of individuals led to changes in the provision of secondary education. This, in turn, placed stresses on the existing external examination system - the Junior and Senior Public Examinations.

External examinations were controlled mainly by the University of Queensland and were designed to assess the capability of the minority of students who intended undertaking university studies. The examinations were also used as a major criterion by employing bodies to assess the capabilities of potential employees.

This historical study endeavours to identify the major forces for change in the assessment system, trace the changes made, and indicate the problems and the conflict which have emerged during the process of change.

One thing appears certain. Historians of the future will not lack evidence of the intense interest generated by the operation of the Board of Secondary School Studies in the 1970s.

From Report of the Board of Secondary School Studies, published in *Annual Report of the Minister for Education and Cultural Activities*.

Secondary school external examinations, 1876-1964: A brief historical background

For almost a century, Queensland secondary school examinations were subordinated to the requirements of universities¹.

Shortly after the establishment of the first grammar schools (the first secondary schools in Queensland) during the 1860s, the examinations and the syllabuses of these schools came under the control of the universities. The first public examinations for Queensland secondary school students were the Junior (now Year 10) and Senior (now Year 12) Examinations of the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne. These examinations were conducted in Queensland for the first time in 1876. Three university scholarships, each of £100 per annum for three years, were awarded by the Queensland Government from 1878. These were retained until 1910 when they were replaced by 20 Open Scholarships to the University of Queensland.

When giving evidence before the University Royal Commission in 1891, J. G. Anderson, Under Secretary for Public Instruction, stated, 'There is no doubt that at present the curricula of our grammar schools are more or less affected wholesomely affected - by the Senior and Junior examinations of Sydney². As the number of Queensland candidates increased, so did the influence of these examinations on the curriculum and teaching methods of the schools.

The University of Queensland Act of 1909 provided for the establishment of the University of Queensland, which opened in 1911. This Act, giving power to the University Senate to conduct public examinations and to issue certificates, led to the replacement of the influence of Sydney University on examinations and syllabuses by that of the University of Queensland. The Senate would not accept a proposal by the Department of Public Instruction (now the Department of Education) for an accrediting system whereby certificates issued by schools would admit students to the University without further examination. In December 1910, the first Queensland Junior and Senior Public Examinations were held.

In 1912, the University of Queensland Public Examinations Board (the Board) was established. This Board was responsible to the Senate for the setting and conducting of the Junior and Senior Public Examinations in Queensland, and consisted of 14 academic staff members of the university, one representative of the Public Service Board, head masters of three secondary schools, and two representatives from technical colleges. Because of the way it functioned and its system of representation, the Board was dominated by the academic staff of the University. When the new State high schools came into existence in 1912, the Department of Public Instruction found it necessary to comply with the examination and syllabus requirements of the Board. In 1915, the Secretary for Public Instruction stated, 'the curricula of the secondary schools were determined and governed by the standards prescribed by the University³.

Junior and Senior Public Examination Certificates were issued to those students who had passed a specified number of subjects. A student gained entry into a faculty or faculties of the university by passing specified subjects.

In 1941, the University of Queensland Public Examinations Board was abolished when *The National Education Coordination Act* and *The University of Queensland Acts Amendment Act of 1941* gave the Governor-in-Council the authority to constitute the Board of Post-Primary Studies and Examinations. The Act provided statutory representation for bodies outside the University. The first meeting of this Board was held in 1945. Membership comprised four representatives from the Department of Public Instruction, seven from the University of Queensland, seven from approved secondary schools and one from the technical colleges. In 1949, the non-State School Assistant Masters' Association and the Assistant Mistresses' Association each secured representation on the Board. However, University staff members occupied most of the Chief Examiner positions, and were usually the most prestigious members of the subject committees. Consequently, University influence on syllabuses remained strong.

The functions of the Board as set out in the Act were to make recommendations to the Minister for Education and the Senate of the University concerning the curricula and courses of study in post-primary schools, and the arrangements for the conduct of the Junior and Senior Examinations. In the case of a disagreement between the Senate and either the Minister or the Board, the matter was to be resolved by the Governor-in-Council.

In 1951, the minimum pass for a Junior Certificate was abolished and a certificate was issued to all candidates who passed in one or more subjects. A letter rating A, B, C, N, indicated the performance in each subject for which the candidate sat. There is little doubt that this gave schools some measure of freedom to adapt courses to the ability levels of their students, and encouraged more children to remain at school for the Junior Examination. A similar step was taken for the Senior Certificate in 1956.

An important change was made in 1959 when the responsibility for the administration of the Junior Public Examination was transferred from the University of Queensland to the Department of Education. The first examination conducted under these new arrangements was in 1960. The setting and marking of the papers remained the responsibility of the Board as before, and the influence of the University staff on the examinations and the syllabuses continued to be dominant.

In 1961, The *Interim Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into Secondary Education in Queensland* (the Watkin Report) was released. Many of the changes recommended in the Watkin Report were subsequently implemented. Thus, in 1962 the last Scholarship Examination was held. In 1964, Year 8 was transferred to the secondary school, and *The Education Act of 1964* raised the compulsory leaving age to 15 years. Secondary education was now being provided for all children up to the age of fifteen.

Attempts to reform the examination system, 1964-1970

Economic, social and educational changes demanded changes in the examination system. Attempts to reform the system were, however, only partially successful.

The Education Act of 1964

The Education Act of 1964 made it clear that secondary education henceforth was to be designed primarily for the needs of the students and not merely for preparation of students for the University. The recent rapid increase in the number of secondary students with a wide range of abilities made such an approach imperative. The Minister for Education, the Hon. Jack Pizzey, asserted that one purpose of the Act was to establish new Boards 'so that we will have a board that will look after secondary students who do not want to go to the University yet will protect those who do'. Pizzey said that the boards would have almost complete autonomy in the field of post-primary studies⁴. Section 25 of the Act stated:

For every child attending a State secondary school there shall be provided secondary education that is to say, having regard to the age, ability and aptitude of the child concerned and to the period for which he is expected to receive secondary education, progressive courses of instruction in such subjects and of such duration as the Minister approves.

The Act provided for a Board of Junior Secondary School Studies and a Board of Senior Secondary School Studies.

On the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies, nine members representing the Department of Education had a clear majority. Five members represented the nongovernment secondary schools, two represented the Queensland Teachers Union and one represented the University of Queensland. Consequently, the influence of University staff on the Junior Examination was replaced by that of persons directly concerned with the provision of secondary education. On the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, the Department of Education had a representation of nine, the University of Queensland seven, non-government schools six, and the Queensland Teachers Union, two. While the Department of Education did not have a majority on this Board, it had the largest representation, and a combination of those organisations directly involved with secondary education constituted a majority on the Board. The DirectorGeneral, by virtue of his office, became Chairman of both Boards.



The Honourable Jack Pizzey, Minister for Education, 1957-1968, steered through Parliament legislation designed to reform the existing system of external examinations.

The major functions of these Boards were

- to advise the Minister on courses of study which were required to provide for the aptitudes and abilities of students concerned;
- to make recommendations to the Minister on the conduct of examinations and the issuing of certificates;
- to make arrangements for these examinations; and
- to appoint subject committees.

The Education Regulations of 1965 made the Director-General of Education responsible for the administrative work associated with the functions of the Boards, and made further provisions in relation to the subject committees. The special committee appointed for each subject by the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies consisted of:

- the chairman appointed by the Board;
- six secondary school teachers appointed by the Board, four from State and two from non-State schools;
- a representative nominated by an appropriate learned society;
- not more than two members co-opted by the special committee; and
- the Chief Examiner in the subject for the Junior Examination.

Each special committee appointed by the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies consisted of:

- the chairman appointed by the Board;
- five secondary school teachers appointed by the Board, (three from State and two from non-State schools);
- one University representative;
- a representative nominated by an appropriate learned society;
- not more than two members co-opted by the special committee; and
- the Chief Examiner in the subject for the Senior Examination.

The special committees were to recommend to the Board prescribed courses of study, persons for appointment as Chief Examiner and Assessors each year, and to recommend on matters referred to the committees by the Board. The Chief Examiner was responsible for setting the examination papers and the Assessors were responsible for checking these to ensure that they were reasonable papers.

The Junior Public Examination 1965-1970

The Examinations Committee of the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies

At the second meeting of the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies on 28 April 1965, it was resolved to set up an Examinations Committee to keep the Junior Examination procedures under constant review and advise and make recommendations to the Board about developments in examination techniques.

The Committee consisted of certain Board members, representatives of secondary schools, members of the Research and Curriculum Branch of the Department of Education, and a nominee of the University of Queensland. This committee drew upon the expertise of the Research and Curriculum Branch of the Department of Education and became influential in guiding the examination policies of the Board.

Role of Chief Examiners

At a meeting on 7 July 1965 following a discussion by the Board about the content of an English examination paper, it was generally agreed that henceforth, within the syllabus set, the Chief Examiners would have more freedom in the content of the examination papers.

Several years later, however, on 20 November 1968, the Board decided that no author of a textbook used for the Junior Examination should be allowed to act as Chief Examiner. The rule was enforced on 25 February 1970 when the nominations for Chief Examiners in History and English were not approved by the Board because the persons nominated were writers of textbooks⁵.

The system of grading results

In 1966, the Parents and Citizens Association of one of the State high schools asked the Board to discontinue the publication of the results of the Junior Public Examination. At that time, much criticism in education circles was levelled at the annual public 'circus' of the publication of examination results. The following year in April, the Board agreed to this request and submitted a similar proposal to the Minister for Education. In October of the same year, Cabinet agreed that names of candidates and the names of schools would no longer be published but that the numbers allocated to the candidates, accompanied by results, would be released to the press⁶.

This decision was generally approved by the public including the Queensland Council of State Schools Organisations⁷, but it was extremely unpopular with the press. A spokesman for Queensland Provincial Newspapers stated that his company would not publish examination results in this form as it had no news value⁸. However, that company subsequently published the results in the form of candidates' numbers and results. This form continued to be unpopular with some parents during the next few years⁹. In 1969 the Premier tried unsuccessfully to persuade Cabinet to reverse its decision¹⁰. Also an attempt was made in the Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) to adopt a policy of supporting the publication of names but this was defeated in the Union Executive Council¹¹.

Another change in the form of results took place in 1969 when the grading system, A, B, C, N, was replaced by a descending numerical grading system of 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. The numerical system led to some confusion when it was first used. Many parents, thinking in terms of the previous system, wanted to know what was a pass¹² Furthermore, it quickly became a common belief, despite Departmental protests, that 4 was equivalent to a C on the old scale, and 3 was placed with 2 and 1 to represent failure. The result was that many employers and institutions were imposing higher entry requirements than before, because, by using this criterion of assessing a pass and a failure, a higher percentage of students failed when the new system was interpreted in this way¹³.

Examination techniques

In 1965, the Examinations Committee expressed to the Board the belief that Chief Examiners and teachers in schools needed advice to improve examination techniques. With the support of the Board, the Examinations Committee then obtained the assistance of the Research and Curriculum Branch of the Department of Education to prepare, in 1966, *Examining in the Secondary School: A Guide to the Purposes and Construction of Examinations*.

In 1969, the Board blocked what seemed to be an attempt to revert to earlier examination practices which were not considered desirable. When the Queensland Teachers Union requested that examination answers and marking schemes be sent to all high schools on application, the Board replied that this was neither practicable nor desirable for all subjects and that the Chief Examiner was encouraged to forward as much information as was considered desirable¹⁴.

Standards of the examination

The Board constantly endeavoured, with some measure of success, to ensure that the standards of the examinations conformed to 'the aptitudes and abilities of students concerned'.

To cater for the academically less able, examinations were offered in 1967 and thereafter in the special subjects English Expression, General Mathematics, General Science, Social Studies and Homecrafts. The Chairman of the Board, however, pointed out on 4 August 1965 that, because these subjects were to be offered at the Junior External Examination level, the Board might be doing a disservice to those students who were doing examinations in other subjects which required a higher level of ability¹⁵. In actual fact, the students and the general public quickly realised that standards in special subjects were not equivalent to standards in other subjects.

To ensure constant standards, in 1965 the Board approved a recommendation made by the Examinations Committee that the Chief Examiners should aim at achieving a distribution of marks having a mean of 62 and a standard deviation of 12 with a distribution as follows:

Results	Percentage of Candidates	Cut-Off Marks
90-100	1	
80-89	6	
70-79	19	75A
60-69	32	65B
50-59	27	50 C
40-49	12	
Under 40	3	

Where the obtained distribution deviated to a significant extent from the above and where the percentage of failures and/or of As, Bs, and Cs differed considerably from the above, scaling of marks was to be carried out¹⁶.

Responses of students, teachers and the public appear to have been quite favourable to the standards subsequently established by the Board, but some problems did arise. In 1966 the Examinations Committee believed that the failure rate in some subjects, especially Maths A, was too high and the cut-off points were adjusted before the results were released. In 1967 the Board agreed on a principle that the failure rate should be reduced by adjusting the standard of difficulty rather than lowering the pass mark. However, following the 1968 examination, the Queensland Assistant Mistresses Association complained that the standard of Science B was too high and the Board was of the same opinion.

On 27 March 1968 the Examinations Committee reported to the Board that on the basis of research conducted, Technical Drawing was not beyond slower students. In the 1967 Junior Examination, of 548 Special Course students who took English Expression and Technical Drawing, 51 per cent passed Technical Drawing. At the same meeting, one of the members of the Board tried to have the Typing rate lowered but this was rejected by a majority of the Board because it was felt that a lower rate would not be acceptable to employers¹⁷.

For the new system of numerical grading to be implemented in 1969, the Board established the following cut-off points:

Numerical Score	Percentage of Candidates
7	3- 5
6	10-15
5	16-24
4	30-40
3	12-20
2	10-15
1	3- 5

This system was passed on to the examiners¹⁸.

Another aspect of standards is the relationship of the standard of examinations at the Junior Level to other levels of study. Early in 1966, the Board discussed what the minimum Junior Examination pass should be to allow a student to proceed to the Senior level. It was decided that henceforth this decision should be made by the principals of schools and that it was not a matter for the Board¹⁹.

In 1965 and 1966 Commonwealth Secondary Scholarships (for Years 11 and 12) were awarded on the basis of results in the Junior Examination of the previous year. In 1967 the awards were based on results in special examinations (set by the Commonwealth Government) and then in 1968, 1969 and 1970 the awards were based on a combination of results in the special examinations and school assessments in the ratio of three to one²⁰.

Efforts to abolish the Junior External Examination

On 4 August 1965, the Board discussed the relative merits of internal and external examinations in the special subjects introduced for the less capable students. A majority decided that parents generally would not accept internal examinations. One member of the Board, however, remarked that the Board might appear somewhat inconsistent in introducing further external examination subjects when it should be working towards the abolition of the Junior as an external examination²¹.

In the following year during the Address in Reply in Parliament, the Hon. J. Murray, MLA for Clayfield, stated that the Junior Examination should be conducted by the school, with the student's record taken into account, and that a certificate be issued by the Department of Education²².

Then in 1967, the Executive Council of the Queensland Teachers Union carried a motion put forward from Redcliffe Branch that the Junior Examination be discontinued. The following points were made in support of the motion. External examinations were out of favour because of the rigid curricula, the formalising of subjects, and the neglect of certain subjects such as religious instruction and music. Also, employers were wrong to use an academic measurement as a recommendation for vocational training. Furthermore, a more realistic evaluation of a student's ability could be given by school reports. Finally, it was pointed out that Victoria had recently abolished the Intermediate Examination²³.

This was discussed by the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies and the following arguments were raised against such a change. It was claimed that if the examination was abolished it would be difficult to assess teaching and employers would have no guide to employing students leaving school. If an external examination was replaced by an internal examination it was doubtful whether there would be sufficient specialists to set papers. It was also doubtful whether the staff of the schools were ready for the abolition of external examinations, and there was the question of who would issue the certificate. An opinion was also expressed that the grammar schools were in favour of some kind of terminal examination.

A decision was deferred first when the Bassett Committee was established to consider the introduction of a Leaving Certificate. A further delay resulted from the decision to obtain the views of professional people and business organisations first. Then further discussion was deferred when the Radford Committee was established in 1969 to review the complete system of public examinations in Queensland. Thus, the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies finally never made a decision on this issue, before the Board ceased to exist in 1970²⁴.

In 1969, two university lecturers were outspoken against a continuation of the Junior Examination as an external examination. Rupert Goodman, Senior Lecturer in Education in the Department of External Studies, stated that the examination tended to be the objective of the Junior course instead of the end product, and that it was characterised by the rigidity and elements of unfairness in questions, marking and assessment. He believed that the correct approach to the question should be in terms of assessment of individuals, and teachers were best able to do this. Robert Lang, Senior Lecturer in Education, asserted that after the scholarship was abolished, the employers soon accepted the changed situation even though before they considered the scholarships important, and, consequently, the claims that the Junior External Examination was important to employers should not be taken too seriously. Furthermore, Lang claimed that this form of examination cultivated rote learning and over concern for the reproduction of facts. Lang also advocated a system of accrediting by schools²⁵.

The Senior Public Examination 1965-1970

Minor reforms of the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies

The System of grading results

The Board of Senior Secondary School Studies adopted the policy of the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies towards the form of results. For the 1967 Senior Examination, the Board implemented a numerical rating system of one to seven with the following recommended distributions:

Number	Description	Percentage of Candidates
7	Excellent	4- 6
6	Very Good	8-12
5	Good	10-20
4	Very Fair	25-50
3	Fair	10-20
2	Unsatisfactory	8-12
1	Very unsatisfactory	4- 6

Also, the Board recommended in 1967 that henceforth the results of the Senior Examination should not be published in the press. As a result of the decision made by the State Cabinet, the candidate's number was published together with the candidate's results²⁶.

Examination techniques

In 1969, the Queensland Teachers Union requested that the Board provide secondary schools with examination answers and marking schemes for subjects. The Board of Senior Secondary School Studies responded in an identical way to that of the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies, stating that it was neither practicable nor desirable to do this²⁷.

Continuing influence of the University of Queensland

University representation on committees

The Board and its special committees were constituted by *The Education Act of 1964* so that a majority of the members were representatives of organisations and educational institutions actually engaged in providing secondary education. However, various circumstances combined to result in the representatives of the university having a great measure of control over the Senior Public Examination. Firstly, they continued to set the matriculation requirements and to administer the examinations. Secondly, probably because of deference to tradition and expertise, university lecturers continued to occupy a majority of the chairperson positions of the Special Subject Committees.

For example in 1968, 19 of the 21 chairmen of special subject committees were university lecturers and in 1969 the proportion was 16 out of twenty. Furthermore, of the eight members of a special committee, there were usually three university lecturers - the chairman appointed by the Board, the official university representative, and the representative of a learned society. These university lecturers, because of their status and expertise in the particular subject areas, would have exerted a considerable influence. Also, university lecturers were appointed as examination assessors. At a meeting of the Board on 21 April 1969, the Board had to refer back to the Special Committee for Economics the Committee's nominations of two Assessors. The Board informed the Committee that at least one Assessor should be a person who was not a university lecturer. At the last meeting of the Board in 1970, the Board had to take similar steps with the Special Committees for Geology, Home Management and Art²⁸.

Conflict over goals

Under s.47 of *The Education Act of 1964*, the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies was responsible to the Minister for providing Senior Examination Certificate courses suitable for the aptitudes and abilities of the students concerned, and for providing senior examinations. This matched the responsibilities of the Department of Education outlined in s.25 of the Act. Furthermore, it matched the interests of non-State schools which required similar examinations.

However, the University of Queensland applied a different criterion to the nature of the Senior Public Examinations. The University, which continued to administer the examination and set matriculation requirements, had as its goal, academic excellence. In discussing the topic, 'Excellence in the University', the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Fred Schonell, in 1965 stated that the University should concern itself with the talent of the students admitted. He also claimed that, over the past six years, standards of admission had been raised. He proposed that in future the matriculation rules be reviewed to require adequate passes²⁹. Furthermore, the strong University influence in the Special Committees ensured a strong commitment in these

Committees to the subjects as a prerequisite for university study and the maintenance of standards established in the subject in previous years by more capable students.

Thus the Senior Public Examination was required to continue to carry out a dual role. It served as a terminal examination for those not proceeding to the University and an entrance qualification to those proceeding to the University.

Because of the University's continuing strong influence on the Senior Public Examination and its imposition of its own standards of excellence, problems were created for the Board in its endeavour to fulfil the role required of it by *The Education Act of 1964*. These problems were aggravated when larger numbers of less able students proceeded beyond Junior.

The Board made an early attempt at a meeting on 7 April 1965 to grapple with the problem when it resolved that Special Committees should be invited to submit to the Board at its third meeting any suggestions as to the form of examinations which would test adequately those who wished to proceed to the University and those for whom the Senior Examination was a terminal examination. Reports from the Special Committees in English, Latin, Greek and Ancient History, Chemistry and Maths suggested that a Matriculation Examination should be offered a year after the Senior Examination.

Then, later in the year, the Board made the following suggestions to the Special Subject Committees for the 1968 Examination so that it would be possible to distinguish between candidates of different levels:

- Setting a paper or papers with questions to be attempted by all candidates.
- Setting papers in which the more able candidates are required to attempt a certain number of more demanding questions marked with an asterisk.
- Setting a paper for all candidates to determine which candidates may be awarded a standard of competency, and a further paper for those seeking to qualify for higher grades of passes, the grades of passes being determined by the results of both papers³⁰.

In 1966 students and teachers were highly critical of the physics examination papers set which they regarded as unrealistic and extremely difficult³¹. It was also reported that the university professor who set the paper had, in the previous year, set a question in the physics paper which was not in the Senior Syllabus³². During a parliamentary session, Mr Fred Bromley, MLA, drew the attention of the Minister for Education to the difficulties of the physics paper and asked him whether, in future, papers would be set more in accordance with the teaching and capabilities of the students³³.

The Minister referred the matter to the Board which, in April 1967, discussed the questioning of marking in all subjects. The ratings used and their marks (for matriculation purposes) at this point in time were: A - 6; B - 5; C - 4; P 3; N - failure. To matriculate in most faculties, a rating of at least a C was necessary in specified subjects. The Board was concerned that in some of these specified subjects, particularly physics, the number of P ratings was out of proportion to the number of other ratings. The range of Ps for all subjects set in the Senior Public Examination was 1. 14 per cent to 30.7 per cent, the highest being in physics. This practice provided high entry standards in some faculties but depressed the percentage of those receiving A, B, or C ratings, as indicated in the table below:

Percentage of Candidates receiving A, B or C		
	1962	1966
English	88	85
Latin	84	75
Geography	79	68
Economics	71	58
Maths 1	71	62
Chemistry	80	60
Physics	71	56

The board drew the attention of the University to this situation³⁴.

In an effort to gain more control over the papers set by Chief Examiners, the Board stipulated that a condition of their appointment was that they were to conform to a list of requirements. These requirements basic-ally aimed at ensuring that the papers set were of a reasonably consistent standard not beyond the average student's ability.

However, the 1967 Physics paper once more caused considerable criticism³⁵. Moreover, the results of the 1967 Physics paper varied widely from the distribution approved by the Board. The Chief Examiner, Professor R. W. Parsons, failed about 70 per cent of the candidates. Consequently, the Board added one point to each grade and recommended to the Minister that the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland make this adjustment. The Board agreed that if this situation were to happen again, the grades should be decided by the Vice-Chancellor and the Director-General of Education or their representatives. For all subjects with an excess of 400 examination candidates, the following distribution was recommended³⁶:

Grades	Percentage of Candidates
7	2- 6
6	6-12
5	10-20
4	30-50
3	10-20
2	4-12
1	0- 6

The Bassett Report

Meanwhile, the headmasters of many independent schools were faced with the problem of providing for larger numbers of less able, Sixth Form (Year 12) students. Dissatisfied with the University controlled examinations, a number of these headmasters in 1966 began to agitate for the introduction of a Leaving Certificate for the less able, Sixth Form students. They envisaged this to be based on an entirely different course from that prescribed for University matriculation. They finally requested the Board to investigate the possibility of providing a Leaving Certificate³⁷.



Professor George Bassett, Professor of Education at the University of Queensland, was chairman of a Committee which recommended in 1968 a leaving certificate as a separate qualification for those who had no intention of proceeding to a tertiary institution.

In March 1968, the Board decided to establish a committee to consider and make recommendations to the Board concerning the introduction of a Leaving Certificate. Professor George Bassett, Professor of Education of the University of Queensland, was appointed Chairman and seven members of the Board were also appointed to the Committee.

The Committee's report (The Bassett Report)³⁸, published in August stated that:

Present senior examinations are too hard for a significant proportion of students who at present stay on at school beyond Junior. At the completion of their secondary schooling all these students have is a record of failure. This with the results of 7595 students who sat for five Senior subjects in 1967. Of these only 50.6 per cent matriculated, matriculation being defined as the gaining of a point score of 22 in five subjects, (a minimum of 4 in each) English being a compulsory subject...

When the result is reduced to a total of 20 points to include those qualifying for entrance to the Institute of Technology and the Teachers' Colleges, the percentage rises to 65.6. Hence it appears certain that more than one-third of the 1967 Senior candidates failed to obtain any qualification and that considerably more than one-half failed to qualify for enrolment in the degree course aimed at.

If the sub-senior year is taken as a starting point, the failure rate is higher still... of the 8456 who began sub-senior in 1966, approximately 45 per cent only obtained minimum requirements for matriculation in 1967...

In a situation in which a significant and increasing number of students are staying on to the completion of the secondary school without qualifying to enter a tertiary institution (and perhaps without wishing to do so), there is a definite need for a different provision for them. At present the Senior examination has to serve them, and also those proceeding for further study. In attempting to do both of these tasks it falls between the two, not serving either as well as it might.

The committee concluded that a serious problem existed and that courses and examinations did not adequately meet the needs of post-Junior students, and those students who entered tertiary institutions and those who left for work would benefit from the introduction of a Leaving Certificate which should be established at the twelfth grade level, and be concurrent with the Senior.

Attitudes of the Department of Education

In the same year, 1968, the Minister for Education, The Hon. Alan Fletcher, indicated Departmental attitudes in Parliament when he said that examinations were needed to provide a measure of a person's educational standards. He thought that some day they might be able to abolish the public examinations and have a Leaving Certificate attested to by a headmaster³⁹.



The Honourable Sir Alan Fletcher, Minister for Education 1968-1974, supported the abolition of external examinations.

The Report of the Director-General of Education, Gordon Murphy, for 1968⁴⁰ also gave considerable attention to the need for changes in the Senior Public Examinations. The Director-General pointed out that the secondary school population in 1969 was considerably different from that in 1959. The total secondary population (in State and non-State schools) had grown in those years from 36 590 to 116 330, largely due to higher retention rates. Of those who entered Year 8 in 1954, 16 per cent remained to complete Year 12, but the retention rate had risen to 26 per cent in 1964. Further, a longitudinal study of the careers of Year 11 students begun by the Research and Curriculum Branch in 1964 showed that only 40 per cent of the students entered full-time education after Year 12. The courses provided, being geared to tertiary education, were thus unsuitable for the majority. The Director-General concluded:

An emphasis on a general education and an acceptance of the ideas that an examination at the end of secondary school should be an assessment of a student's work in the upper secondary school rather than a predictor of his suitability for further study are changed approaches that must be seriously considered in the next few years.

Acting on a request from Professor Bassett, the Minister for Education asked that the contents of the Bassett Report be widely circulated and he encouraged public discussion on the topic of examinations⁴¹.

Appointment of the Radford Committee

On 9 June 1969, the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies held a special meeting to discuss the Bassett Report. According to one of the participants⁴², Maxwell Howell, the Board met in an atmosphere which reflected the considerable concern expressed in educational circles about University domination of secondary education, about the educational value of external examinations, particularly the Junior Examination, and about the failure of the existing Senior course to provide a satisfactory education for the growing numbers of secondary students staying on in the final two years.

At this special meeting, an opinion was expressed that the trend was away from external examinations and a reference was made to a Western Australian Report on this subject. One Board member believed that, an overall revision of the Queensland examination system was required rather than a patching up.



Max Howell, Headmaster of Brisbane Grammar School, was a member of the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, the Radford Committee, Board of Secondary School Studies established in 1971, and the Scott Committee which produced ROSBA in 1978.

Another member stated that a proposal was before the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies that the Junior Examination be abolished and this member claimed that the Bassett Committee might not have made the same recommendation if they had taken that proposal into consideration. The Board finally came to the conclusion that the introduction of a Leaving Certificate was not the answer to the problem and they recommended that:

The Minister be requested to set up a Committee to review the system of public examinations for Queensland secondary school students and make recommendations for the assessment of students' achievements.

The unfortunate effects of domination by the University of Queensland had been openly acknowledged two years earlier by one University professor who spoke at the Wynnum State High School Speech Night in 1967. This professor said, 'I agree that in the past, the University, both through the public examinations and in other ways as well, has had a restricting and narrowing influence on the teaching of English'⁴³. Furthermore, influenced by a University study, *Promise and Performance*, the University of Queensland had doubts about the existing methods of selecting students for the University⁴⁴. Also, by 1969, the emergence of other tertiary institutes had made the examining role of the University of Queensland less tenable.

It is not surprising then, that in the opinion of one member at the Board meeting of 9 June 1969, there were no sharp clashes of opinion between representatives of the University, State and non-State schools on the need to review the system of public examinations⁴⁵.

The Board also requested the Minister to have this Committee chaired by someone from outside Queensland, so that there would be a chairman who might be expected to look at the problems to be solved unencumbered by prejudice about what had gone before and what was traditional⁴⁶.

On 18 July 1969, the Minister, the Hon. Alan Fletcher, appointed representatives of major bodies likely to be affected by any proposed changes in the public examination structure⁴⁷. The members were:

- William C. Radford, (Chairman) M.B.E., M.A., M.Ed., Ph.D, F.A.C.E., Director, Australian Council for Educational Research;
- Rev. Bro. J. S. Campbell, CY.C., O.B.E., B.A., F.A.C.E
- Provincial for Queensland, Christian Brothers Provincialate;
- M. A. Howell, B.A., B.Ed., Dip.Ed. Admin, M.A.C.E., Headmaster, Brisbane Grammar School;
- Prof. R. A. Plowman, Ph.D., D.Sc., A.S.T.C., F.R.A.C.I., Professor of Inorganic Chemistry, Department of Chemistry, University of Queensland;
- C. R. (Ray) Roberts, B.A., A.Ed., M.A.C.E., Director of Secondary Education, Department of Education;
- Gavin Semple, B.A., B.Ed., M.A.C.E., President, Queensland Teachers Union;
- William Wood, M.A., B.Ed., M.A.Ps.S., F.A.C.E., Director of Special Education Services, Department of Education; and
- Les Winkle (Secretary), B.A., B.Ed., M.A.C.E., Inspector of Schools, Department of Education.

The Committee's terms of reference were 'To review the system of public examinations for Queensland secondary school students and to make recommendations for the assessment of students' achievements'.



Dr William Radford, Director of the Australian Council for Educational Research 1954-1976, was an important member or chairman of major inquiries into education in practically every State and Territory of Australia. The Radford Committee's recommendations for changes to the Queensland examination systems were described in newspaper headlines as 'revolutionary'.

Role of the Queensland Teachers Union

Meanwhile, from 1965 to 1969 the energy of the Queensland Teachers Union had been directed mainly towards reducing oversized classes and raising comparatively low salaries. By 1969, conditions in these areas had begun to improve noticeably, and the Union became more concerned with the problems of examinations, especially the Senior Examination, which was responsible for low morale among students and teachers.

The president of the Union in 1969, Gavin Semple, was one of the members of the Radford Committee. Semple was advised by a special QTU committee. The policies advocated by this Committee were:

- An internal leaving certificate should be available to all pupils at the end of the fourth year. This certificate should have the following features:
 - It should be cumulative. That is, when a student completed a course, he should be credited for it and receive a grading.
 - Students should be assessed in such a course by means of continuous assessment. Marks gained for class exercises and assignments should be combined with those given for tests taken at the end of several assessment periods spread over a school year.
 - The certificate should combine internal assessment with a general school record.
- An accredited school should be responsible for developing its own educational program. The non-accredited school should have its assessment procedures and the content of its educational program moderated by an external authority.
- There should be established a Board of Secondary School Studies financed by, but not responsible to, the Education Department.
- This Board, in addition to specified responsibilities for the secondary school curriculum, was to be responsible for accrediting schools for the purpose of issuing certificates and for the publication of material designed to help teachers in the assessment of their students' work.

When the Radford Report was subsequently published, Semple pointed out the similarities between the spirit and content of the Union committee recommendations and key proposals in the Radford Report⁴⁸.

Further minor developments

Prior to the appearance of the Radford Report, some of the Special Subject Committees of the Board of Senior School Studies on 17 April 1970 introduced some minor reforms in examination assessments. In English, it was decided that in future the results would be based on an average of the results in two papers and that the grade of 1 or 2 might be raised to 3 if the mark in the first

paper was sufficiently high. In Modern History, it was decided that for the 1972 examination 50 per cent of the marks would be derived from the external examination and 50 per cent would be based on a school assessment standardised on the external examination⁴⁹. Also, early in 1970, a pilot study undertaken by the Research and Curriculum Branch of the Department of Education indicated that Senior Examination results did not correlate highly with first year university results in Arts or Science⁵⁰.



Gavin Semple, President of the Queensland Teachers Union, was a member of the Radford Committee. The Radford Report strongly reflected the Union's policies on secondary examinations.