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# A new system of assessment

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The Radford Report advocated a more radical solution to the problem - replace external examinations by a system of internal assessment and a system of moderation to achieve comparability between schools.

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## The Radford Report

The report of the Radford Committee was presented to the Minister, The Hon. Alan Fletcher, in May 1970. The Committee had considered 26 written submissions and had reviewed the public examination systems of the other Australian States as well as those of New Zealand, England, Scotland, Canada, and the USA. The advantages and disadvantages of continuing public examinations and the possible effects on pupils, schools and teachers were considered. Attention was also given to the relationships between secondary school performance and success in university studies.

Serious objections to the existing system of examining were that the objectives of the syllabus were not tested very well, and that a good examination result was achieved at the expense of attaining other educational goals associated with a broad education and preparation for living. The Report recommended the abolition of the Junior and the Senior external public examinations and the use of school assessments, a trend which had recently developed overseas. The major recommendations relating to examinations were that:

- the existing two boards be replaced by a single Board of Secondary School Studies;
- the existing Junior and Senior Examinations be replaced for the purpose of awarding Junior and Senior Certificates, by school assessment and that these Certificates be awarded by the Board on the basis of school assessment;
- the Certificates indicate whether the subjects studied have Board approval or are courses offered by the school on its own initiative;
- the Board maintain comparability of the Certificate gradings through a Moderation Committee and Chief Moderators and that the Board's Certificate be available only to students in those schools accepting Board moderation;
- in the assessment of achievement for the Senior Certificate, an order of merit list be prepared, based on a combination of scaled school assessments and special examinations not based on prescribed syllabuses (e.g. scholastic aptitude tests); and
- for correspondence and part-time students the Board provide a Senior external examination<sup>51</sup>.

These and other detailed recommendations were to provide a blueprint which was followed closely by the Board of Secondary School Studies when it was subsequently established.

## Initial reactions to the Radford Report

Following the publication of the Radford Report, the Minister for Education, the Hon. Alan Fletcher, stated that his Department wanted to test reactions to the Report before any decisions were made about implementing its recommendations. Therefore, he requested that copies of the Report be issued to teachers, the universities, educationists and educational boards<sup>52</sup>. Furthermore, in the next few months the Radford Report was widely publicised in the press and by brief lectures at school speech nights, meetings of Parents and Citizens Associations, Adult Education Centres, and meetings of various other organisations. Generally speaking, the Report was received very favourably.

The Board of Junior Secondary School Studies held a special meeting on 16 July 1970 to examine the Report. The members were unanimous that it had been carefully and thoughtfully prepared and well documented. The Board supported the recommendations but agreed to recommend to the Minister that provision be made for an external examination at the Junior level for correspondence and part-time students<sup>53</sup>.

The Board of Senior Secondary School Studies discussed the Report on 17 July 1970. The members generally commended it and agreed that it had widespread support. However, one member stated that, if the Board went so far as to regard secondary education as having little or nothing to do with tertiary education, the University might be forced to set examinations to ensure students had the necessary requirements before they undertook university studies. Another Board member pointed out that the Australian National University had been accepting entry standards similar to those outlined in the Report. The only recommendations for changes that the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies made were related to representation on the proposed new Board of Secondary School Studies. It was recommended that the proposed one nominee of each University in the State and one representative of the Queensland Teachers Union be replaced by two nominees of the University of Queensland and one nominee of each of the other Universities in the State, and two representatives of the Queensland Teachers Union<sup>54</sup>.

The changes proposed by the Junior and Senior Secondary School Boards were accepted by the Minister, the Hon. Alan Fletcher, and were finally incorporated into the Act which gave legislative effect to the Radford Report.

The Council of the Union supported the principles outlined in the Radford Report except for representation on the proposed Board of Secondary School Studies. They wished to reduce the eight nominees of the Director-General to four and increase the one representative of the Queensland Teachers Union to five<sup>55</sup>. Another concern of the Union was that changes should not be introduced until the teachers had been adequately prepared.

An editorial in the *Queensland Teachers Journal* on the Radford Report stated<sup>56</sup>:

Thus the Report anticipates autonomy for the teacher in modifying courses of study, in choosing teaching methods and, within the moderation system, in selecting methods of assessment. Teachers *will* now be in a better position to serve individual students and communities. Furthermore, they *will* be much closer to full professionalism, the chief characteristic of which is freedom to adapt special skills and knowledge to suit the situation in hand.

The Assistant Secretary of the Union prepared a report on the Radford Report<sup>57</sup>. In this he first described the reactions of teachers:

Generally speaking, staff teachers can be divided into three groups in their reactions to the Radford Report. Older teachers tend to be opposed to it; they can recall suffering inconvenience and frustration during previous innovations by the Department of Education. Younger teachers are inclined to favour the Radford proposals; they tend to be idealistic. In between these groups *is* another. It can see the value of the proposals but feels that there are serious problems of implementation.

The Assistant Secretary then went on to describe some of possible problems of implementing the Radford Report. The problems related to assessment were chiefly concerned with teacher competence, size of classes, administration, the time element, facilities for compiling and storing records, staffing requirements and moderation procedures.

Nearly all the principals of non-State schools supported the Radford Report. Some of them pointed out the need for preparing teachers by some in-service training and avoiding an over-emphasis on assessment. A Roman Catholic School principal criticised the composition of the Board which gave too much representation to State controlled institutions and not enough to non-State schools<sup>58</sup>.

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland, Zelman Cowen, was rather guarded in his comments, but he did say the Report seemed thoughtful and well set out and that he had been concerned about the ability of the present Senior Examination to predict success at the University<sup>59</sup>. A Senior Lecturer at the University, Rupert Goodman, wanted inspectors excluded from the role of moderators<sup>60</sup> and hoped that the tyranny of examinations would not be replaced by a new despotism of evaluating evaluations<sup>61</sup>.

The public response to the Radford Report was much less enthusiastic. While some letters to the editor welcomed the changes, many of the letters<sup>62</sup> were concerned with such possible difficulties in the system as the following:

- How would gross inconsistency between assessments of different scattered schools be avoided?
- Would teachers be objective in their assessment of students?
- Would private schools upgrade their marks to improve their status?
- Would teachers be adequately prepared?

Business representatives were opposed to the possible abolition of the existing public external examination system. The Queensland Employers Federation Director said that such a step could be a cause for concern for employers because they might not be able to rely on the Junior and Senior Examinations as assessments of prospective employees<sup>63</sup>. The Queensland Chamber for Manufacturers claimed that an external examination was not an unfair test upon a student and it provided a fair assessment<sup>64</sup>.

In December, 1970, the Minister for Education, the Hon. Alan Fletcher, introduced in Parliament a Bill designed to give effect to the Radford Report proposals. The Bill was mainly concerned with making provision for the discontinuance of external public examinations at secondary school level. In support of the Bill, the Minister stated<sup>65</sup>:

This is what is suggested for students - continuous assessment by the teacher. This would be more reliable and penetrating. But the most serious objection to the external examination is that it does not test the extent to which the objectives of the syllabus in each subject have been met. Only limited areas in the syllabus can be examined in the Junior, Senior examinations. For example, in the English syllabus, spoken English is regarded as very important...

But the written external examination cannot test ability in spoken English. It is understandable, then, that some teachers do not give spoken English the attention it deserves.

Let us admit, too, that the build up of tension in examinations constitutes a great disadvantage to a child whose achievement over the years is to be assessed in two hours. What is also disturbing in the present situation is the emphasis the external examination places on memorising and the accumulation of knowledge, often without understanding.

The external examinations also bring about a rigidity within syllabuses. Teachers, in fact, consult past papers more frequently than they consult the syllabuses. Those teachers with special talents are afraid to exploit them fully since students' attention might thereby be taken away from examination material.

To the argument that the external examination result implies the use of a common measure to all students ... with 30 000 Junior candidates, 125 examiners mark say 60 000 English papers. With all the safeguards it is possible to devise, one must get a fairly wide variation in the marking particularly of the essay type questions. So with the larger numbers involved now, a common measure is not really being applied under the existing system.

In the Bill presented, some minor changes had been made to the constitution of the Board of Secondary School Studies as outlined by the Radford Report. The representation of the University of Queensland and the Queensland Teachers Union was increased from one to two for each of those organisations and the representation of four teachers from the Association of Independent Schools was changed to a representation of four from non-government secondary schools to ensure as wide as possible a representation.

The opposition spokesmen welcomed the Bill and concentrated their criticisms on the problems related to the implementation of the Report<sup>66</sup>.

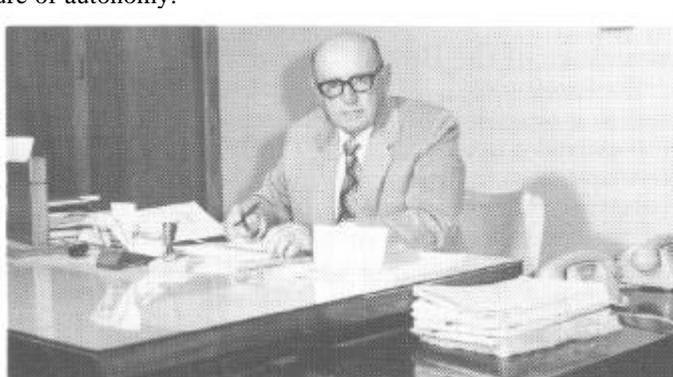
The Bill, assented to on 21 December 1970 became *The Education Act Amendment Act of 1970 No. 2*. This Act provided for the replacement of the Boards of Junior and Senior Secondary School Studies by a single Board of Secondary School Studies, to comprise:

- a Chairman, appointed by the Governor-in-Council;
- eight nominees of the Director-General (three of whom were to be practising teachers);
- two nominees of the University of Queensland Senate, and one nominee of each other University in the State;
- one representative of colleges of advanced education other than teachers colleges (nominated by the Minister);
- one representative of teachers college (nominated by the Minister);
- four non-government teachers nominated by the Minister;
- two nominees of the Queensland Teachers Union;
- one nominee of the Queensland Association of Teachers in Independent Schools (to be a teacher in a non-government secondary school); and
- the Executive Officer of the Board (ex officio).

The main functions and powers of the Board of Secondary School Studies were:

- to give general advice to the Minister on secondary education;
- to issue the Junior and Senior Certificates, and to determine the assessment procedures for the award of those certificates;
- to approve syllabuses for subjects designated, or to be designated as Board Subjects on the Junior and Senior Certificates; and
- to appoint a Moderation Committee and Subject Advisory Committees, and any other committees considered necessary.

If one compares these functions and powers with those of the earlier boards, it would appear that the Board of Secondary School Studies was given a greater measure of autonomy.



*Ray Roberts was Director of Secondary Education, 1965-1973, during a period of radical changes. He was appointed to the Board of Secondary School Studies in 1971.*

The Department of Education was concerned that teachers should be informed as soon as possible of changes to be introduced by the implementation of the Radford Report. Anticipating *The Education Act Amendment Act, 1970, No. 2*, the Director of Secondary Education, C. R. (Ray) Roberts in November 1970, had forwarded a circular to principals of all high schools and headteachers of primary schools with secondary departments. Included in the circular was the following information about assessment:

The continuous evaluation of students' educational progress must be carried out seriously and competently because the assessments given by teachers will be the bases for the various awards shown on the Board Certificates. Evaluation of achievement is not new - it is

fundamental in all teaching so teachers should have little difficulty in meeting this challenge. What is new in the scheme, however, is a need for re-examination of the areas of the syllabus in which student effort should be evaluated. Our assessments in the past have generally been confined to those sections of syllabuses in which the external examination assessed student effort. Some major objectives set out in syllabuses were consequently neglected. There is an urgent need, therefore, for all teachers to study the syllabuses they are following and take steps to ensure that all worthwhile objectives are recognised.

Another important matter for your reconsideration is the type of examination or test to be set. The Department is not going to issue specific directives regarding length of test papers, but I ask you seriously if the three-hour paper serves any useful purpose in the new scheme of things. Did this type of examination grow out of the need to stage rehearsals for the Junior and the Senior? If this is the only reason for it, should we not drop it? A number of short tests on various aspects of the syllabus would probably give a more reliable evaluation and would eliminate student fatigue. While saying this, however, I urge you to be temperate in your testing program. Do not over-examine. Do not let the learning which should be going on be unduly interrupted by testing.

Assistance will be available to teachers from this Department and also from the Board of Secondary School Studies. Early in the new year, seminars, particularly for Principals and Headteachers and Subject Masters, will be arranged. Within schools, subject teachers will have to co-ordinate their assessing and recording of marks. In many schools this is already being done. Moderators will visit schools and advise on testing and on moderating procedures. The details of the moderation machinery have not been worked out at present. This is a task which must be left for the Board of Secondary School Studies.

On 15 January 1971 new education regulations came into force. These included regulations dealing with the composition and functions of the Board of Secondary School Studies in conformity with the Act.

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# Implementation of the Radford Report, 1971-1979

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The newly appointed Board of Secondary School Studies experienced difficulty in implementing the Radford Report. In practice, the new system experienced some victories but experienced also much resistance. The QTU emerged as a powerful critic. The Scott Report modified the system to remove some of the criticisms and to make it more acceptable to current educational and social needs.

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## **The major characteristics of the period**

The period 1971 to 1979 was characterised by new procedures established by the Board of Secondary School Studies and changes made in response to internal problems and external pressures. The internal problems appear to have been caused by a lack of understanding of the spirit of the Radford Report. The external pressures were caused by the different goals of the various groups and organisations affected by the Board's early initiatives. The University of Queensland was still interested in the maintenance of entry standards. The students and their parents expected some entry qualifications for the University or for employment. The Queensland Teachers' Union was concerned with professionalism and working conditions. The new colleges of advanced education were mainly concerned with their own consolidation and growth and therefore created less pressure.

The Department of Education, however, played a highly supportive role because of its responsibilities to the Minister for Education and its responsibilities for the implementation of certain provisions of the Education Acts and Regulations.

One of the major difficulties faced by the Board was the need to reconcile section 37 of the Act which required the Board to advise the Minister on secondary education, regard being had to the requirements of a sound general education and to the special needs of students related to their age, aptitude, ability and special interests, with Regulation 55 of The Education Regulations of 1971 which stated, 'In 1973 and thereafter the Board shall compile and make available for the use of appropriate authorities an order of merit list on which students shall be ranked'.

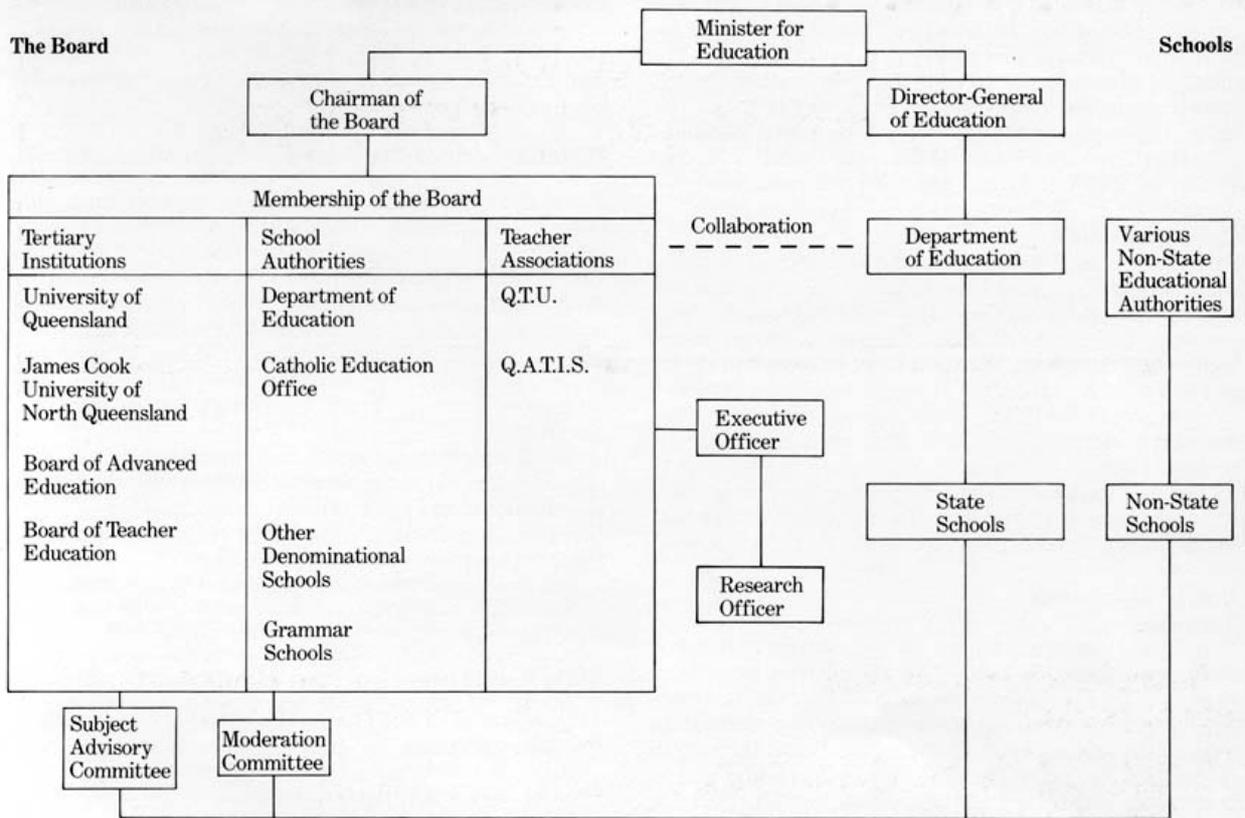
Thus the Board of Secondary School Studies had to face up to a problem similar to that which had plagued the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies.

## **Early stages of the Board of Secondary School Studies, 1971-1973**

### **Structure of the Board**

The Board considered that it was important to establish itself as a separate entity with its own distinctive role and responsibilities (see Diagram 1)<sup>67</sup>. In 1973, sub-committees were appointed to investigate and make recommendations concerning the financial needs of the Board's operation, the manner and methods of reporting achievement, the nature and form of information which the Board should supply as a service to education institutions, and the effect which the use of this information has upon the functions of the Board and the effect of Board policies upon schools<sup>68</sup>. Subsequently, the Board adopted a committee structure and the following committees were appointed - Management and Finance, Public Relations, Assessment and Moderation, Curriculum, Research, and Junior Standing<sup>69</sup>.

Diagram 1: Structure of the Board of Secondary School Studies as established by the *Education Act, Amendment Act, No. 2, 1970*.



## The Moderation System

The relationships between the moderators is illustrated in Diagram 2<sup>70</sup>.

Diagram 2:

