



QCEC Response to Draft 2 Consultation on Stage 2 Senior Syllabuses

10 February 2017

Introduction

Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) again welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the draft 2 consultation on ten Stage 2 senior syllabuses under redevelopment. QCEC is the peak strategic body for the 300 Catholic schools in Queensland which are operated by 22 different Catholic school authorities and include 107 secondary schools impacted by changes to senior secondary assessment and tertiary entrance processes.

QCEC recognises the very significant time constraints that have surrounded each phase of consultation in the syllabus redevelopment process. This current consultation has spanned a four week period, and included only nine days of school time, at the beginning of the school year and recognised as among the busiest of times for school. Concerns are raised yet again about the quality of consultation that can meaningfully occur through teachers in schools when their focus is rightfully elsewhere – on their students. None-the-less, two Catholic school authorities, collectively representing about half of the senior secondary students in Queensland Catholic schools, did convene teacher meetings that have informed QCEC's response. Schools and teachers were also encouraged to submit their own responses to QCAA surveys on syllabuses in this consultation phase but QCEC highlights the constraints in such involvement in the first two weeks of schools. The risk to the integrity of the syllabus development processes is raised yet again as a concern.

The QCEC response to this consultation on Stage 2 syllabuses focuses on high level issues across syllabuses. Those providing feedback to QCEC appreciated that a number of recommendations provided through the draft 1 consultation have been reflected in this current draft of syllabuses. However, there do remain some overarching areas of concern that have emerged across all consultations.

High level issues across the curriculum

Continued concern about risks in syllabus consultation processes

QCEC continues to highlight the risks and constraints on syllabus redevelopment in a compressed timeline. While also recognising that each syllabus will have three drafts for consultation, our Authorities continue to express concern about the limited consultation period and, most particularly, the timing in the school year, both of which limit teachers' ability to engage meaningfully with the syllabus documents and provide effective feedback. Some of the syllabuses within this consultation are

totally new or very significantly modified from those already in existence and demand even greater consideration in responding.

Issues re-raised

This round of consultation on Stage 2 syllabuses has raised some similar concerns to those raised in consultation on Stage 1 syllabuses and QCEC believes there are some fundamental issues in the syllabus design brief per se that will transfer into potential problems in curriculum. However, QCEC accedes that the design brief is as approved by the QCAA Board. The opportunity to review the design brief now with the benefit of hindsight in its application, could be fruitful in helping to eliminate some problems. QCEC advocates for such review, while acknowledging the time constraints under which the syllabus development is taking place.

QCEC also recognises the group of 21 subjects agreed for redevelopment in order to accommodate more flexible delivery options through composite or combined classes. Despite this agreed approach in relation to those identified subjects, feedback from Catholic school authorities continued to raise concern about the ability to offer composite classes in both Business and Food and Nutrition.

There also remained concerns to ensure that the volume of content included in syllabuses was possible in realistic timeframes and would enable a depth of learning and understanding to be developed. This is particularly so since there is still no common understanding of what constitutes senior schooling, when it begins and ends for certification purposes, or even whether four semesters of learning are required. QCEC again recommends that an overarching framework be developed for senior schooling, while recognising that this may be provided, by default, either through legislative requirements or via the development of the Guidelines Handbook.

Introduction of new subjects

In respect to new or significantly varied subjects such as Engineering and Design, feedback highlighted the need for considerable professional development for teachers to support them in teaching these subjects and recommended ongoing opportunities for upskilling teachers. Physical resourcing concerns were identified for Engineering; and management of health and safety risks (cross contamination) were identified as considerations in relation to food spoilage elements in the Food and Nutrition.

Assessment

The ability of students to demonstrate higher levels of performance within the stated assessment conditions (both word count and time frame) was raised across many of the subject areas. Teachers identified the weighting of assessment between internal and external as needing review, for example, English and Literature Extension has an internal assessment of 2500 – 3000 word academic research paper worth 35% and external examination of 800 words worth 25%. The timeframes for tasks and nominated percentage of unit time allocated for assessment was also recommended for review in terms of implications for explicit teaching and class time.

Feedback indicated too that teachers would welcome sample student responses as guides. Further, the format and application of ISMGs continued to be a concern for teachers, especially in respect to the capacity to make consistent judgments when there are several descriptors included against a mark, or a range of marks included against a descriptor and even several descriptors, each should be defined. Moreover, the use of subjective language as qualifiers is recognised as a challenge when making a judgement. QCEC recommends that, despite best efforts of glossary definitions, such subjective

language can only attain a common understanding across teachers through ongoing opportunities to hone comparability and consistency of understandings. This will require teacher discussions and professional networking opportunities, supported well beyond the implementation of the new syllabuses.

Glossary

Feedback acknowledged the extensive glossaries provided (Digital Solutions has 20 pages) and indicated that respondents would welcome hyperlinking of terms when the syllabus is presented in an online format to improve usability. It was also observed that not all terms used in assessment were included in the glossaries and further information and clarity is needed to assist in the application of the ISMGs. QCEC recommends that glossaries provide consistent definitions and explanations for cognitive verbs and descriptors across subject areas to promote consistency and common understanding.

Conclusion

QCEC welcomes all opportunity to input into the process of syllabus redevelopment and will be happy to discuss further any issues raised in this response.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee-Anne Perry', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Lee-Anne Perry AM

Executive Director