QTU Position Statement

The purpose and use of data in Queensland schools

Background

The QTU acknowledges that effective school leaders and teachers use a range of information when making professional decisions as a part of their educational responsibilities. This is a responsible approach to the complex tasks of planning, delivering and assessing curriculum.

While such 'evidence-based decision-making' is not new, there have been increasing demands on schools to generate, record and publish more and more data that has questionable, if any educational benefit; in such cases, data is often used for compliance, not for collaboration and collegiality.

In part, this demand has been driven by technological advances that have enabled teachers, schools and systems to access and reflect on data in ways previously unavailable. It has also been driven by political and bureaucratic imperatives that focus on the kind of easily compared 'objective' measures presented by numbers, rather than on fuller measures of school effectiveness and student outcomes.

The result has been a massive increase in workload for the education professionals in Queensland's state schools. Teachers should be given professional development to access, understand, reflect and act on data but also need to be given the time to do this. It is clearly counter-productive when education professionals feel obliged to spend inordinate amounts of time on data tasks, at the expense of teaching. It is professionally repugnant when teachers and school leaders feel obliged to collect data to 'prove' that they are doing their jobs.

This following position statement addresses the prudent use of data to support informed decision-making, not drive it. This statement does not seek to be prescriptive. Instead, it provides QTU members with a professional benchmark against which to judge whether the expectations on data generation, recording and publication that are being placed on them are reasonable. It also sets out school-wide approaches to ensure the data workload is a productive use of teachers' and school leaders' time.

This statement is organised in two sections: first, administrative data and, second, academic data.

Administrative data

Under the Schools Performance and Assessment Framework, Queensland schools are required to maintain data that relates to student outcomes; that is, academic, attendance, behavioural and student well-being information. The processes around collecting and recording such data should be as efficient as possible, and avoid requirements for multiple data entry. Associated ICT – including connectivity – should be adequate and reliable.

Attendance data

The QTU asserts that the teacher's role is to monitor attendance via class roll marking. Where a pattern of poor attendance emerges, resources should be provided to assist schools in supporting students to re-engage effectively at school. Classroom teachers should not be required to call parents/caregivers seeking an explanation for periods of student absence.

Behavioural data

The QTU understands that teachers will put in place processes to recognise positive behaviours and provide consequences for poor behaviour, both within their own personal teaching philosophy and school-wide behaviour programs.

Schools should establish systems that make it simple for teachers to recognise and reinforce positive

behaviours and record disciplinary support/consequences. For example, if schools adopt a process to capture all positive behaviours to be recorded on OneSchool, they should ensure it is supported by time and resourcing. The process should necessarily ensure these are entered during school hours and not as yet another additional task for teachers to complete in their own time.

The Union believes that any behaviour program being undertaken in a school must not be onerous in terms of record keeping by classroom teachers.

Student disciplinary absence data is maintained by the administration of the school via OneSchool.

Other data

DET expects that schools will systematically monitor data on school completion, student destinations, stakeholder perceptions and engagement.

The QTU asserts that such data should be able to be collated from existing school records – i.e. OneSchool, School Opinion survey. Teachers should not be responsible for generating additional data in relation to these areas.

Similarly a reasonable approach should be taken to the logging of parent communication and interaction. It is not practical nor is it warranted to attempt to record every interaction of even the most superficial nature that occurs about a student.

OneSchool should be used to record only those contacts that are critical to the ongoing support, care and well-being of the student and would be considered essential to the student's "whole" story particularly if this student is case managed. This enables all persons involved with the student to have an understanding of the ongoing provision of support and records this securely in the OneSchool record.

Academic data

It is the view of the Union that data should be used to inform school level decisions, interventions and initiatives – i.e. data is used to inform practice not drive it. Data collected by schools should be directly related to the intended student learning outcomes of the learning program (including goals within an Individual Education Plan where the student is required to have one).

QTU members have identified there is a significant impact on workload with an unrelenting focus on student performance data as an indicator of school and/or teacher success. Such misuse of data serves to marginalise important aspects of schooling and has significant considerations for curriculum delivery and teaching pedagogy.

The primary data used at a school relating to student academic achievement should be consistent with the curriculum and pedagogical framework adopted by the school. In accordance with the P-12 Curriculum and Assessment Framework, school pedagogical frameworks should be the subject of consultation with the school community and should focus on how the curriculum in the school is taught to best support the learning needs of students within the school.

The QTU supports the reasonable collation of purposeful data: when curriculum, assessment and reporting are aligned, student progress will be monitored and reflected upon on a regular basis in order to support student learning needs. The school's pedagogical framework should lend itself to the collation of purposeful data.

The QTU asserts that the most important data pertaining to student achievement is that relating to the curriculum being taught within the classroom. Student achievement and progress is best reflected by the A-E or five point/year level scale in each learning area. The only tests or assessment which should be routinely undertaken in the classroom are those items that are planned for within the learning program (including goals within an Individual Education Plan where the student is required to have one) and occur as a consequence of the teaching and learning cycle.

Assessment purely for the purpose of obtaining data to measure student improvement should not occur.

The QTU has noted that, in a number of schools, an implication of the public scrutiny of data produced by the National Assessment Plan for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) has been a 'narrowing' of

the curriculum to emphasise content tested.However, such moves have not been accompanied by a corresponding move to reduce the expectation that teachers will also deliver all areas of the curriculum as required by ACARA, the QCAA and their employer. The curriculum adopted by the QCAA should be the main focus of student learning. The incorporation of literacy and numeracy experiences in the delivery of the QCAA curriculum will reduce the need for NAPLAN preparation and NAPLAN-style testing to be undertaken as schools program.

Rather than a narrow focus on NAPLAN literacy and numeracy elements (i.e. writing) and attainment (i.e. upper or lower two bands) schools, through consultation with teaching staff, should identify the literacy and numeracy aspects within the general capabilities and across the curriculum that will be the focus of school-wide improvement plans. This should reduce the reliance on external testing programs to identify student improvement as it will be reflected in the natural assessment cycle and the data arising from learning area assessment.

Where a school determines to adopt a program of testing, including diagnostic testing, beyond that related directly to learning areas, it should ensure that these programs align to the pedagogical framework and are either built into curriculum time or that resourcing is provided for the program to occur outside curriculum time. The most effective way to ensure that such testing is beneficial and resourced is through consultation and collaboration among teaching staff before the programs are introduced.

This means that either (a) the program of testing is planned for within learning time and that the expected curriculum to be taught in the classroom is adjusted according to the time to be taken to teach, learn and test in relation to these programs; or (b) appropriate release time or additional resourcing is provided to recognise the impact of these additional programs on the workload of teachers. If the program of testing does not align to the school's pedagogical framework, it should not be undertaken within the school.

The Union rejects the concept of strictly enforced data cycles where they:

i)   Are short-term so as to not allow for the regular interruptions to daily routine that are experienced during a term (for example, when a 'five-week testing cycle' is compressed into a 'four-week testing cycle')

ii)   are not conducive to differentiation

iii)   do not allow teachers as professionals the autonomy to prepare for student interest, engagement and respond in an agile way to identified gaps or need for consolidation in student learning.

Emerging trends

Data display/walls/visible data

The QTU supports the celebration of distance travelled and understands student goal setting and awareness of progress can be an important factor in their engagement. However, members have expressed concern about the potential of visible data to have a negative impact on students and teachers particularly when it is evident that progress as captured by data may be limited.

Data walls cannot reflect the complexity of factors influencing student achievement. Privacy concerns also exist when student names and achievement are displayed in locations that may be accessible by non-school staff.

A school may determine, in consultation with the LCC, preferred school-wide methods of tracking and monitoring student data, however, these decision should be made cognisant of the potential impact of this on privacy, student/teacher development, teacher workload and professional autonomy.

Data conversations

Data should be used to inform practice, not drive it. Consequently, data may be an element in

professional conversations about teaching and learning but it should not be the primary focus. While in these conversations data may be the starting point, the substantive focus of these conversations should be on pedagogy and curriculum.

The purpose, timing and frequency should be agreed to by the participants before any 'data conversation' takes place. Release time should be given to teachers to engage in teaching and learning conversations. Except by mutual agreement, non-contact time should not be used for teaching and learning or data conversations. Under the terms of the Teachers Award State 2012, non-contact time is to be used for the purposes of preparation and correction. Any use of this time for meetings is at the discretion of the teacher.

Conversations may occur outside of teaching time through mutual agreement between the teacher and school leader. These should not be onerous and should be focused on assisting the teacher to identify and implement strategies and additional resourcing and support for student learning and the development of teaching practice.