

Appendix D

The Future of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland

An Independent Review

Consultation Response- Phase Three

Introduction

Thank you for taking part in this third and final phase of the Independent Review on Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland. This stage is final in that following consultation, a series of recommendations will be submitted to the Cabinet Secretary. However, the work on the Future of Qualifications and Assessment will continue long after this Review is completed. The partnerships developed during this review will remain crucial to ensure that the vision for the future of qualifications becomes a reality of every learner in Scotland.

In support of Phase Three we have developed a potential new model for qualifications and assessment in Scotland that reflects the consultation findings.

Questions and Responses

Question 1: Do you think the three areas described in the SDA offer learners the potential for a broader range of their achievements that are important for their future progression? Is there anything you would like to add or delete? Why?

Response:

The three areas provide a broad range of areas and achievements to be captured and recognised. It is imperative that all three areas are given parity of esteem going forward and that no one area becomes the focus for measuring schools or drawing comparisons between learners. It will be too easy to focus on the Subjects or Curricular Areas and it is important that colleges, employers and other partners do not prioritise this area while neglecting the importance and value of the other two areas.

Question 2: What are your views on the proposals for recognising achievements in subjects/curricular areas?

Response:

The proposed change which will stop young people experiencing and being presented for external examinations in the same subject, 3 years in a row, is welcomed. Our experience of the Alternative Certification Model during the COVID pandemic demonstrated that we can capture learners achievements without compromising standards or rigour. Providing the opportunity for learners to capture learning and achievement in subjects over a period of time via a combination of internal coursework, project- based tasks, presentations and open book assessments would be very welcome. It is important that the nuances of each subject/curricular area are recognised, however no one subject or curricular area should be assessed in a completely different way than any other. For example, currently there is no internal component for Maths qualifications, we cannot maintain

this. All subjects/curricular areas should be made up of a balance of internal and external assessment approaches. We welcome the two-year approach to capturing qualifications, so long as there are appropriate opportunities for young people who initially embark upon a two-year journey to exit after one year of that journey and have their achievements recognised and most of all valued by colleges, employers and universities. We must ensure our new system for recognising achievement in subjects/curricular areas does not return to an all-encompassing high stakes external exam at the end of the year and/ or two-year programme.

Question 3: What are your views on the proposals for recognising achievements in knowledge and skills in action?

Response:

Allowing learners the opportunity to demonstrate and apply skills and knowledge across a context, via an interdisciplinary approach is welcomed. The challenges will be around the assessment of this and the value it holds both within and beyond school. It is our understanding that this element will be a case of achieving the standard or not and young people will be able to specialise/choose an area of importance to them. It is important that key areas are suggested with a range of exemplar assessment instruments and methods of capturing achievement provided nationally. National exemplification, agreement and quality assurance processes are important in order to prevent similar pitfalls that have been experienced by schools and local authorities in trying to ensure and implement consistency in the Broad General Education. It should be made explicit to those outwith and beyond school, the key skills that young people are developing through engaging in this type of study, and the benefit of being able to demonstrate what they can do as a result to contribute to life beyond school.

Question 4: What are your views on the proposals designed to recognise achievements in respect of personal learning?

Response:

This is what provides young people with additional evidence of skills and attributes when it comes to applying for jobs, college or university. The 3 main areas; social, cultural and economic are appropriate pillars to capture the four capacities. There is however a danger here that this model continues to benefit those more affluent learners and will further widen the poverty related attainment gap. How will we ensure that those from more socially deprived areas, where perhaps there is less capacity for parental support, will be given the same opportunities to widen their social, cultural and economic experiences? If this becomes an entitlement, then it cannot be left to individual Guidance teachers to be working with caseloads in excess of 300 pupils and ensuring that this is captured appropriately. This will result in little support for learners and those more able or supported at home given distinct advantages over those experiencing poverty or less supported at home.

This part of the proposal is exciting and reads well on paper, however it will require careful planning and a restructuring of pupil support if we truly are going to provide every young person in every school with high quality support and opportunity. There is a real danger that this becomes an inequity in the system, providing advantages for those young people already well equipped and exposed to a range of opportunities and experiences, while others are disadvantaged through not having access to such experiences.

Question 5: (A) What do you think of the idea of introducing a Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA)?

Response:

The SDA is a good idea and capturing and recoding this digitally would be beneficial. It is important that no single element is viewed as more important than the others and all three should have parity in order for young people to be recognised as having achieved the SDA. Much work will have to be done in educating employers, colleges and universities on the SDA and what each element means, as well as communicating that excelling in one area of the SDA to the detriment of any other area indicates less balance and potential gaps in achievement and/or skills/knowledge/application. We would not want an SDA to be awarded on the basis of a young person excelling in subjects/courses, detailing lots of wider achievement opportunities via the pathway but not having demonstrated a particularly strong Learning in Context experience for example.

Question 5: (B) If you support this idea, what actions should be taken to make this approach work in practice? What alternative would you propose that would be consistent with the Vision and Principles identified in Phase One of the Review?

Response:

There is broad support for this idea but a clear national framework on what the SDA looks like as well as what it means to achieve it is important. Perhaps there may be room for gaining an SDA and then gaining an SDA with Merit or Distinction? It certainly should take cognisance of the development and achievement across all three areas equally and there should be some form of national benchmark or standard for this.

Question 6: What changes to existing practice, if any, would you recommend to support the development of a new qualifications and assessment system? For example: Accountability - the ways information is gathered on the relative success of educational settings; Inspection, Professional Learning, Initial Teacher Education, Professional Standards, College and University Entrance, Recruitment procedures for employers.

Response:

There must be more opportunity for young people's learning and achievement to be captured throughout their study and we must avoid high stakes external exams as being the only or the main way of assessment. The Alternative Certification Model in 2020/2021 demonstrated that with clear guidance and internal rigour within and across Local Authorities alternative assessment and gathering evidence of learners achievements is possible.

We must guard against the subjects/courses part being the only focus of any potential SDA. If we are serious about transformational change then tools like INSIGHT must also be able to measure and demonstrate performance within both the 'Learning in Context' and 'Personal Pathway' aspect of the SDA. Attainment and achievement of all three areas should be a clear focus for National Standards and targets going forward. We already have Interdisciplinary Learning as a feature within our curriculum as one of the four contexts for learning, however how much has that been challenged or its success measured or tabled? We value what we measure and therefore all aspects of the SDA must be measured, challenged and compared consistently.

Clarity and parity of esteem needs to be communicated with colleges, universities and employers. It is important that all stakeholders are engaged in this consultation and contribute to these developments. However, If Colleges and Universities ignore the Learning in Context and Personal Pathway elements, in terms of entry requirements then ultimately nothing will change and we will revert to a rebranding of the current system, where attainment in individual subjects is what ultimately counts. This will lead to the full opportunities and transformational impact of what is being suggested not becoming reality and once again leave our young people short changed.

Question 7: To promote parity of esteem across all qualifications, academic or technical and professional, should all qualifications at a particular SCQF level have the same name?

Response:

Having a similar name would help however much more needs to be done to educate all stakeholders with regard to the content of each programme of work/course, the skills developed and the impact that undertaking each specific course will have on learners.

Question 8: Do you have any additional comments about the proposed approach to qualifications and assessment set out in this presentation?

Response:

There is a real structure and sense that the proposed approach can make for transformational change which will better challenge and prepare our young people for the future. However, the same feeling occurred when CFE was initially designed and introduced. The much-promised hope and transformation failed to become the reality as time progressed. This was due to a lack of National guidance, exemplification and standardisation as well as a lack of clarity. The system did not, in terms of progression beyond school, take a considered and joined up approach.

The current standards and processes as well as tools for measuring remain too focussed on exam results and performance in course assessment and qualifications. We need to ensure that going forward, any comparison tools or Virtual comparators take into consideration all three areas of the SDA in a more balanced way.

Question 9: Given we are now in the final phase of the Review, we would be interested to receive any feedback on our approach to this important exercise.

Response:

There has been ample opportunity for all stakeholders to be involved in this process. However, in a world of increasing workload for teachers the opportunities for them to feel that their voices are heard remains a challenge. The timescales for responding to the consultations, allowing time for engagement with stakeholders was extremely tight. We would also like to see further engagement and get a sense of feedback from colleges, universities, employers, and other training providers to ensure we have a system that is recognised, valued and accepted by all.