

Appendix C

The Future of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland.

An Independent Review

Consultation Response- Phase Two

Introduction

This phase seeks to consult on proposals for potential options on the future of Qualifications and Assessment.

Questions and Responses

Question 1. Should information be gathered across all four capacities?

Response:

If we are true to the principles of CfE then the ultimate aim must be to ensure that we develop and ultimately assess the totality of the curriculum throughout the learner journey and in particular at the point of exit.

Question 2: Please consider each of the capacities in turn. What kinds of information should be gathered on learners' progress and achievements in each capacity?

Response:

As a consequence of meaningful learning experiences, the development of attributes beyond successful learning should be evident. This should not only be a feature of senior phase programmes leading to qualifications but be included in a deliberate and planned way in learning in the BGE.

Scottish Education should support young people with a portfolio/passport of progress and achievements encompassing each of the four capacities. All does not need to be awarded by a central body but there must be a cohesion in terms of the totality of assessed achievement. Careful consideration should be given to the relative value we give to each of the capacities under any new assessment and qualification framework.

Question 3: What, if any, information on learners' achievements obtained outside school and college should be gathered? Please explain your response.

Skills and Competences

During Phase one and through Professor Ken Muir's 2021 consultation we have heard the view that senior phase qualifications ought to focus more on developing learners' skills and competencies.

There are many different definitions of skills and competencies.

Skills

Skills are sometimes referred to as 'core skills', 'meta skills', or 'soft skills'. In this review when talking about skills, young people, parents, colleges, employers and universities have told us that learners need to be able:

- to work together as part of a team
- be creative.
- problem solve.
- have resilience.
- maintain their wellbeing.
- develop critical learning skills.
- to communicate effectively

Competencies

A competence is another term which can have different meanings. Academic competencies like written and verbal communication, attention to detail and active listening are soft skills essential for almost every job. These skills benefit students and ensure success in college and the workplace. A competence is more than knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to put different skills into practice in a particular context.

For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competence that may include an individual's knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating. Interdisciplinary learning offers learners one kind of opportunity to bring together knowledge and skills to demonstrate competences.

Response:

This provides a number of challenges for schools.

Firstly, there is a tension in schools being asked to collect and collate information and evidence that they are not in control of. Who would take overall ownership of such an approach?

Secondly there are issues around equity in terms of factors of deprivation as well as location and individual circumstances.

Thirdly there is a question around who would manage and curate this area ensuring that weightings, fidelity of engagement by young people etc would be appropriate in an area that would provide almost limitless options and permutations.

Question 4: Should information be gathered on learners' skills and competencies as part of their senior phase?

Response:

Yes, this would be a welcome addition to the assessment of skills and competencies achieved by young people throughout their learner journey. Similar to Q1 this is absolutely a worthwhile aspiration.

Question 5: Considering how we gather evidence on achievements, awards and qualifications - Exams and other forms of assessment.

The qualifications available for learners to undertake in the Senior Phase provide a variety of learning and assessment experiences including different learner pathways and have been designed specifically to support the aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE).

The majority of Senior Phase qualifications are internally assessed and provide flexible approaches to assessment including opportunities for interdisciplinary learning; for example, National 1 to National 4 Courses (SCQF 1 to 4), Awards (SCQF 1-7), Skills for Work Courses (SCQF 3 to 6), National Certificates (SCQF 2 – 6), National Progression Awards (SCQF 2 – 6) and the Scottish Baccalaureate (SCQF 7). National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses (SCQF 5 – 7) are largely externally assessed and pre-COVID had been designed to have a balance of coursework and examinations. This was intended to provide opportunities for depth, breadth and personalisation and choice in learning as appropriate to the subject area.

However, regarding national qualifications, we have heard many calls for there to be a 'better balance' between exams and other forms of assessment. We have heard the view that often subject based senior phase qualifications rely too heavily on end of year exams. In some countries teacher assessment counts for a significant proportion of a learner's grade. [Professor Gordon Stobart's 2021 report](#) includes discussion of how other countries approach a balance between external and internal assessment. Professor Stobart also noted that in comparative terms, Scottish upper-secondary school students are 'more frequently' examined than those in other jurisdictions, i.e., in S4, S5 and S6.

Response:

Given that skills and competences are evident throughout the Broad General Education these could be articulated more carefully into a senior phase curricular offer. Where those skills are currently taught and evidenced in the senior phase this is most often currently evidenced by learners writing about those skills- in an examination; internal assessment or learning log for example. In general, it feels incongruent that skills and competencies are assessed in an examination in particular.

Question 6: Please share your thoughts on what a 'better balanced' assessment system would look like. As well as considering the balance between external examination and internal assessment you may also wish to comment on the frequency of examinations.

Response:

This is probably the most critical issue to consider. The Alternative Certification Model showed that there was capacity in the system to generate a viable alternative to one-off summative examination. However the impact of assessment collection on teacher and system time and capacity would need to be carefully considered. At the moment learning and teaching is often skewed by peculiarities in the final

examination- particular phrasing that is rewarded for example- so it is beneficial to lose that but not at the cost of over-assessment.

There may still be a place for a question paper within a broad range of assessment possibilities but the current system is creaking under the weight of the number and range of alternative assessment arrangements in place during the examination diet. This is a sticking plaster to an archaic approach.

There should be flexibility in the timing of any assessment approach- when the learner is ready- and digital technology should be utilised to provide secure and flexible assessment opportunities.

Most crucially the assessment approaches should reflect what sits within an explicit and transparent senior phase curriculum that can be traced clearly from the BGE model. Current assessment approaches- assessment of practical skills; dissertation/folio; project work and question paper- are all valid but there should be a rebalancing between these in all subject areas.

Considering how evidence should best be presented – Achievement at the end of the Broad General Education (BGE)

In other jurisdictions, learning culminates in a certificate of achievement. We have heard views that it would be helpful to have the learning of all young people recognised when they complete the [BGE](#) phase (this is usually at the end of S3).

There has been a suggestion that this should be a digital profile where a young person is able to show the skills, experiences, learning and qualifications they have accumulated to date, before they go into the senior phase. For most learners, the BGE award would lead into the senior phase although could constitute a leaving certificate if an individual leaves school or college.

Question 7: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE.

Response:

Given that one of the biggest issues in the secondary curriculum at the moment is the lack of coherence between the senior phase and the BGE there is little appetite for this. If the senior phase curriculum is reviewed to be more consistent with the BGE experience it may seem like an arbitrary decision to introduce a qualification/award at this stage.

We would also need to think about the rationale for such an initiative at this stage given that it is not needed in terms of school leavers. If it is to introduce a motivational or credibility factor to the BGE that would be better achieved by better articulation between the BGE and the Senior Phase.

Recognising Achievement in the Senior Phase

We have also received suggestions that there should be a leaving certificate available as part of the Senior Phase. This could potentially include a broader range

of evidence of achievements than subject based qualifications. For example, a leaving certificate could include achievements, in individual curriculum areas, evidence of skills and competence development, contributions to communities and wider achievements.

Question 8. Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing a type of leaving certificate at the end of the Senior Phase.

Response:

There is widespread support for this as an approach. It would obviously need to be transparent, flexible and easily understood by all stakeholders. The idea of this being a digital award or passport with layers of information and detail that can be accessed from a landing page is attractive.

The language of “Highers” is decades old and is unhelpful in the public consciousness when trying to design 21st century assessment and qualification. A change to the current range of qualification nomenclature to talk only in SCQF level with the awarding of “extra” credit depending on depth of course would be essential in ensuring that any change “sticks”

This digital leaving certificate could also capture those skills, competencies and achievements that a young person experiences in their school journey.

Technology and Assessment - The Potential of Technology

Scotland has learned a lot from the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, including how technology can be used to support learning. However, we are also mindful that we cannot assume that everyone has equal access to technology or has the skills they need to use it effectively.

Some countries make much greater use of technology in assessment and qualifications. For example, some have a system whereby learners' achievements in their senior phase are assessed online. Others use technology to give learners different styles and types of assessment e.g., on-line simulations. Some countries use digital profiles to gather and present information on learners achievements.

Question 9: How should Scotland's qualifications and assessment system make best use of digital technologies?

Response:

It is encouraging that we are being asked how to make best use of this rather than whether or not we should. The role of the digital world in learning, teaching and assessment should be reflected fully in the more formal assessment and qualification approach. This is an area of significant research and innovation but at the moment it is not central enough in the debate around Scottish Education. We should seek to engage with best practice and research internationally to plan a digital approach that is seamless and flexible enough to evolve as required.

Some of the other key benefits, as outlined earlier, are assessment approaches that are inclusive and more bespoke to learner need and a qualifications suite that has a user interface allowing for as much or as little detail as is required to be extracted.

The potential risk in a digital approach is that it is under-funded or does not develop alongside other planning around development in assessment or qualifications. This could have the consequence of a system that does not create confidence through a number of bugs or ongoing fixes applied retrospectively. Consideration will also need to be given to the digital infrastructure in schools.

An approach that benefits all Learners' - Equity

One of the Review's proposed principles for the future of qualifications in Scotland is that it should benefit all learners. A future system of qualifications and assessment should fairly reward learners no matter their age, disability, gender identity, race, religion/belief, sex, sexual orientation or socio-economic background.

Question 10: How can we make sure that proposals for a future qualification system will uphold the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements?

It is crucial that we spend some time thinking carefully about the unintended consequence of any alterations that we make. For example, could it be that a reduction in examination assessment unduly benefits those who are able to engage with private tutoring thus disadvantaging those who cannot? How will the security and integrity of any new system be maintained while delivering the flexibility that disadvantaged learners most need.

Equity Impact Assessment of all proposed change must be in place and some of the current language ("vocational" and "academic") is archaic. SQA currently have a range of qualifications developed but bringing all of these under one assessment framework or umbrella denoted through SCQF Framework would bring greater parity of esteem and give a starting point to how any future qualification suite could look.

If we can design our assessment approach correctly much of ASN that is currently met through Additional Assessment Arrangements should be able to be assessed without any additional alteration to the process.

While this review is only addressing assessment and qualification it would be crucial that the curriculum that sits behind this reflects the full range of characteristics of the learners that it serves.

Question 11: Is there anything else in relation to the reform of qualifications and assessment which is not covered in this consultation which you would like to raise?

A carefully planned route map for any such radical (but long overdue) change will be essential to ensure both that the pace of change is manageable and also that it does not get bogged down by those with no wish for change. We must also protect the credibility of outcome for all young people, in particular those who are at some stage of transition in the process