

Ref: S809/gb



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The Knowledge Network

Qualifications Consultation CRE 1013
CSU, Spur U5b Saughton House
Broomhouse Drive
Edinburgh
EH11 3XD

23 September 2008

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Consultation on Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on the next generation of national qualifications in Scotland.

The IET has 150,000 members worldwide with 10,000 in Scotland. These members represent a wide range of expertise, from technical experts to business leaders, encompassing a wealth of professional experience and knowledge, independent of commercial interests. This capability in Scotland is enhanced by its Engineering Policy Group, a cross profession group of volunteer senior industry and academia experts, led by Professor John Roulston.

In preparing this response the Trustees sought input from its general membership and in particular its Scottish Engineering Policy Group and Local Networks, as well as its education expert groups.

The response addresses those questions (see Annex) where the IET has the competence to respond. No part of this response is regarded as confidential.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Davies'.

Paul Davies
Head of Policy
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Enc: Annex response to questions and Respondent Information Form

PROPOSAL 1

National Qualifications at Access, Higher and Advanced Higher will be retained as point of stability. Highers in particular, will remain the 'gold standard' of the Scottish education system. The content of all National Qualifications will be updated to reflect the values, purposes and principles of *Curriculum for Excellence*. Some aspects of the structure of these qualifications will also be reviewed.

Q1. Do you welcome the intention to update all qualifications at Access, Higher and Advanced Higher in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*? Please comment on any implications to be considered.

YES ✓

NO

Comment:

Retention of Access, Higher and Advanced Higher is seen as benefiting the study of STEM subjects, as it enables students to select 5 subjects in their 5th senior year which enables greater detailed study in science and mathematics.

It is noted that the STEM subjects are seen as being some of the most difficult subjects to study and in which to achieve good examination grades which impacts the numbers undertaking STEM subjects and thus the viability of relevant technology departments within schools. To compensate it is important that co-operative working with colleges is available so that every school, and especially smaller schools, can offer STEM courses to students and STEM subjects get equal promotion throughout a student's compulsory education.

The Scottish Skills for Work courses at Intermediate 1 and 2 in Engineering Skills and Energy (SCQF 4/5), and their new proposed counterparts (Proposal 2) are seen as offering Scottish students equal opportunities to those of the 'Diploma' courses being introduced in England and Wales.

Intermediate 2 was supposed to be an alternative progression route to Higher qualification. Clarification is required as to how with the proposed new qualification (Proposal 2) structure SQA will provide the same progression path to Higher to maintain its 'gold standard' status.

The retention of Access, Higher and Advanced Higher, matches with, and plays to the strength of, the Scottish universities four year undergraduate degree courses.

PROPOSAL 2

A new qualification will replace the present Standard Grade General and Credit levels and Intermediate 1 and 2 (SCQF 4 and SCQF 5) qualifications. The new qualification will be available in a wide range of subjects, as at present. The new qualification will reflect the best features of Standard Grade and Intermediate. Standard Grade Foundation level will be removed and Access 3 will provide certification at SCQF level 3. (See Annex A Table 1 for illustration of new qualifications on SCQF framework.)

Q2. Earlier consultation has identified the 'best' features of Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications as:

- The 'inclusive' approach to certification contained in Standard Grade; and
- The 'unit based' structure of Intermediate qualifications.

Are there any other features in the present Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications which should be included in the new qualification at SCQF levels 4 and 5?

Comment:

None noted.

This proposal is not seen as detracting from STEM subject study and may well benefit students with learning and attainment.

The demise of Standard Grade is seen as removing what had been tarnished as the last resort of 'failures' whereas new Access 3 is seen as a mark of achievement.

Q3. One of the proposals is to grade units. Do you agree that units should be graded A-C rather than pass/fail?

YES

NO

Explanation:

The content of unit courses was often levelled at minimum competence so by grading units attainment may go up.

A consequence of grading may be that teaching staff are more heavily loaded; plus consistency in grading between centres will have to be addressed.

Q4. Do you want graded units to count towards the final award?

YES

NO

Explanation:

Grading will benefit learning and attainment but clarity will need to be given as to how grading will be reflected in the final course award.

Q5. Which option for introducing compensatory arrangements would you most support?

Please tick one option or suggest an alternative

- Option A Extend the range of grading in course awards to grade E.
- Option B Recognise unit passes only
- Option C Compensatory award at the level of the course studied with no grade awarded.
- Option D Compensatory grade C award at the level of course below that studied.
- Option E Compensatory grade A award at the level of course below that studied

Explanation/other suggestion:

No comment.

Q6. The proposed name for the new award is General (SCQF4) and Advanced General (SCQF 5). Please indicate if you are content with this suggestion. If not please offer an alternative and explain your choice.

YES

NO ✓

Explanation/other suggestion

The term "Advanced" has been linked with 'Advanced Higher' for years. Confusion will result if it is now used in connection with a more junior qualification. Account has to be taken of the tendency to abbreviate terminology. With the proposed SCQF4 "General", and SCQF5 "Advanced General" terminology it is likely students will talk about having '4 Generals and 3 Advanced' - but what will this mean to an employer? Worse still a student who has 2 Advanced Highers might advise a future employer he has '4 Highers and 2 Advanced' which could be interpreted in the context of the new terminology and would denigrate the student.

Terminology such as General (SCQF4) and General Plus (SCQF5) might be less prone to confusion.

PROPOSAL 3

New awards in literacy and in numeracy will be available at SCQF levels 3 to 5. *Curriculum for Excellence* brings a sustained focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills in our young people. To help strengthen this focus, the Scottish Government is proposing new separate awards to accredit young people's literacy and numeracy skills – the Scottish Certificate for Literacy and the Scottish Certificate for Numeracy. The awards will be available at SCQF levels 3 to 5. The explanation is that all young people will be presented for these awards unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so. The intention is also to ensure that the structure of these awards is flexible enough to make them available to adult learners.

Q7. Do you agree with the proposal to offer literacy and numeracy awards at a range of SCQF levels (3 to 5)? If not please offer an alternative.

YES ✓

NO

Explanation/other suggestion

Numeracy and Literacy awards (SCQF levels 3 to 5 and for adult learners) respond to issues being raised generally by industry over time, and is seen as being important for the future.

The proposal is seen as helping to raise baseline competencies in schools.

The teaching of English and mathematics are the core subjects in all compulsory education within schools and the introduction of these examined awards (see response to Q8) should not raise the number of teacher requirements. More teachers would help obviously, but 'lean' principles require that the education system is operating at its optimum before increasing resources has the desired effect otherwise it simply masks existing shortcomings.

Q8. National Qualifications at Access 3 (SCQF level 3) do not have an external examination. Do you agree that any new awards in literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 3 should have an external examination?

YES ✓

NO

Explanation

It will help in their general acceptance, and even becoming a 'passport' to basic level occupations. In turn this will improve their achievement focus by young and adult learners alike.

That said, Access qualifications have been successful in schools because of the ability to internally assess. The types of student who normally are presented at these levels are often those who are/become disaffected by formal education in S4. Getting them in attendance at school can be a problem and the flexibility to assess them when they are present makes this a genuine opportunity for them. External examination may mean these students will fail on practical grounds rather than educational grounds.

Q9. Should the weighting between the internal and external assessments for the literacy and numeracy awards be equal? If not should more weight be attached to the internal or external assessment? Please explain.

- Equal weight
- More weight to internal assessment
- More weight to external assessment

Explanation

More weight to internal assessment. This addresses and resolves both the issues raised in the explanation of Q8.

Q10. When should young people be assessed for literacy and numeracy awards?

Please tick one option.

- Option A At the end of S3 as part of the summer diet of examinations.
- Option B In the December of S4 as part of a winter diet of examinations.
- Option C At the end of S4 as part of the summer diet of examinations.

Explanation

Option A. For the more capable pupils this would clear the ground. For other pupils it may be a challenge, but could introduce early, motivational success and include the pupils who can become disillusioned during S4. Presumably S4 would be a re-sit safety net for a few? Reference the relative success of early presentation currently practised in some schools.

PROPOSAL 4

Increased flexibility to better meet the needs of young people. Suggestions include:

- studying National Qualifications over 18 months (or 2 years) as well as one year;
- introducing a winter diet of examinations; and
- encouraging the most able young people to bypass lower level qualifications and to study Highers from S4 onwards.

Q11. Do you agree with the proposal to allow the study of Highers and Advanced Highers over 12 months, 18 months and 2 years?

YES ✓

NO

Explanation

On balance yes!

If a student needs 18 months or two 2 years, rather than one year to attain a National Qualification there is in principle no reason why they should not have the opportunity to do so. However, implementation of this level of flexibility may be a challenge to achieve in schools, particularly smaller schools. A "winter diet" allows for a 're-sit' but what then - does the successful student leave school, join another class already half way through a course, undertake more study time? The school administrators will have to provide for the original class numbers in terms of room space and staff. Fast tracking a group of students or allowing them two years for either a Higher or an Advanced Higher are a challenge to the school operation. Probably only larger schools would be able to facilitate such flexibility. The more complex the school timetable so too is the complexity of allocating of resources.

It appears overly restrictive to only allow demonstration of competence in a subject just once a year and would allow "Christmas Leavers" an opportunity to gain further awards. It also encourages students to attempt an upgrade in their previous achievements - a feature of assessment which may be expensive and difficult to support with an availability of markers in the middle of a school session.

Q12. Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a winter diet of examinations?

YES ✓

NO

Q13. If you agree with the proposal to introduce a winter diet of examinations, what subjects and levels of qualifications might first be offered?

Suggestions

No comment

Q14. Would you agree with changes to the systems which allowed the most able students to bypass qualifications at lower levels and begin study for Highers from S4 onwards?

YES

NO

Explanation

No comment

Q15. Do you have any other ideas for increasing flexibility within the senior phase (S4 to S6)?

Suggestions

No comment.

TIMELINE

Q16. It is intended that planning for the new curriculum should commence in 2008/09, with approaches based on the new curriculum introduced from school year 2009/10. This suggests that the new and revised qualifications and any increased flexibilities would be required from 2012/13 onwards to ensure smooth progression between the curriculum and qualifications. Is this indicative timeline realistic? Please comment on any implications to be considered.

YES

NO

Comment

No comment.

ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

Flexibility of the teacher is probably just as important as the flexibility of the learning, if teacher numbers are not to escalate to accommodate the proposed qualification changes.

A rigorous programme of staff development will be required with the envisaged new (total) qualification structure.

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