

Linwood High School

Response to a consultation on the next generation of national qualifications in Scotland.

This considered response reflects the views of the staff of Linwood High School and has been formulated by members of its SMT.

The publication of the consultation document is very much welcomed since it provides schools with some clarification on the structure of the proposed qualification system.

Some concern was however expressed over the structure and content of courses S1 – S3 in particular the lack of clarity relating to how the end points of courses in S3 relate to courses in S4, the issue of progression from S3 into S4, continuity and content levels of study and how schools support the transitions from holistic to subject specific learning.

Responses to the questions which relate to the proposals within the consultation are as follows.

- Q1. The updating of Access Higher and Advanced Higher courses is welcomed provided the outcome ensures that progression and coherence are major features of the new course thus ensuring that they link into each other at different levels, offer seamless progression (ideally) and provide opportunities for bi-level teaching in one class. It remains unclear as to how the content and approaches currently featuring in *Higher and Advanced Higher* will be affected by changes to the framework at levels below Higher and above Access.
- Q2. Standard Grade courses require 2 years for completion and offer opportunities for reflection/consolidation and provide most pupils with a qualification on their completion. The proposed unit based structure offers 1 year qualifications based on performance in the units and the final exam. Adoption of this arrangement is likely to increase the number of 'no awards' as pupils fail to pass/complete units thus rendering it less 'inclusive' than its predecessor. The current gap in achievement between Access 3 and Intermediate 1 if replicated in the new arrangements will pose a significant challenge to progression.
- Q3.& 4 Grading units and offering recognition for those with the higher performance by contributing to the final award was considered worthy of further development/investigation. Workload issues in the form of additional marking for teachers were identified as difficulties.
- Q5. Provided the unit assessments gained at one sitting are retained for future reference no further compensatory award is required.
- Q6. The school is not in favour of the terms used since they will be confused with current terminology and are clumsy.
If the new 'General' is SCQF4 then level 4 would suffice whilst 'Advanced General' is SCQF5 would be level 5.
It follows that Access 3 would be level 3 with Higher level 6 and Advanced Higher level 7. Do we need any more than this?

Q7. General consensus was that the case for the introduction of qualifications in numeracy and literacy in schools has not been convincingly made. OECD seems to be inferring that current S Grade and Intermediate courses in Mathematics and English do not promote these skills. If so and it is not clear that there is evidence to support the assertion, then should these courses not be modified to ensure the core skills are developed.

The basic skills of numeracy and literacy are introduced in early years schooling and progress in their development has been monitored through the use of 5-14 assessment banks. In spite of being widely recognised as unfair and unreliable both in content and degree of difficulty within one level they have provided some measure of learning progress. Why not introduce better performance descriptions throughout the Primary stages and relate this to Access level 1 or 2 by the end of Primary 7 and perhaps Access level 3 by the end of S3.

That all teachers should be involved in promoting the skills of numeracy and literacy is fully accepted; ensuring that all contribute effectively to their delivery is a challenge which few schools have successfully met in the past 30 years no matter how commendable it may be; that all staff be involved in the evaluative aspect of performance is highly impractical given that teachers of English can hardly agree on marking standards let alone those from all subject areas.

The examples of the skills to be assessed (para 9 page 26) are recognised as core skills by English and Mathematics teachers who feel they are best placed to teach, monitor and evaluate pupils' progress in them.

It may be that awards in numeracy and literacy are necessary for the world of employment so perhaps Further Education should be their domain

Q8. If other level 3 subjects are assessed internally then so should numeracy and literacy.

Q9. see above

Q10. See Q7 - option A if at all.

Q11. Courses should last multiples of the school year – not in favour of 18 month duration since it ensures that on completion students have insufficient time to complete the next level before the end of session. The prospect for employment or starting Higher Education /Further Education courses in the middle of an academic year are not good with the result that many would waste the following 6 months or so until courses became available.

Q12. The last time a winter exam diet was introduced the outcome demonstrated its impracticality and hence expense. It generates yet more exams in a system already burdened with too many. Totally opposed to this proposal.

Q14. Not great enthusiasm for this – most recently HMIe have made clear that adherence to age and stage arrangements should be the norm and only in exceptional individual cases should this be varied. Changing the system would result in some students gaining entry qualification to university before the age of 16. Is this likely to meet with acceptance from the Higher Education sector.

Q15. Flexibility is needed to support the less academic students in S5/6 through provisions of skills based work related qualification as provided by ASDAN and City & Guilds.

Q16. Not realistic. This consultation exercise has been very limited in nature, has failed to adequately engage the teacher workforce and bears no semblance to the radical changes to Scottish Education proposed by it.

It is extremely limited in vision and lacks specificity and clarity. As a result the timeline proposed is totally inadequate particularly in view of the lack of details within Building the Curriculum 3 the guideline to course structures.

Serious consideration must be given to engaging the profession and parent in a detailed discussion of future purpose, structure and delivery of our education system.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Neil McLean".

7/10/08