

section 5: the consultation questions

Response from Forrester High School Broomhouse Road Edinburgh

A major element that I would like to get into our response is the impact removing flexibility would be likely to have on us. Our students are currently comparing well with other young people particularly at the end of S4 and it would be a huge backward step if this went ahead.

A second significant element is the wish to have students bypass some exams. This would not happen without significant change to the system or very firm guidance as we can expect teachers and parents to opt for a safety net. External examinations at the point of exit from the system would seem sensible and a more radical approach might look to have internal examinations until S5 or even S6. There is obviously value in Access 3 and extending that approach to level 5 awards or beyond would deal with the most difficult issues facing schools. It would also be a resounding vote of confidence in the teachers who would have to deliver it.

Much food for thought and I hope the comments below are useful to you in your deliberations.

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Name/Organisation: Forrester – Curriculum for Excellence Working Party
Note that what follows is a group response but with individual comments.

PROPOSAL 1

National Qualifications at Access, Higher and Advanced Higher will be retained as points 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

Yes

Some subjects are very prone to change and have been held back by the exam system. Flexibility should be built in as well as progression

We need to ensure that we are thinking about NABs in particular and whether or not we want them to continue in their present format.

Very clear articulation between S1-3 and S4-6 in all subjects would have to be in place.

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. Early 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

Depending upon how wide subjects wish to take their curriculum content e.g. Units due to material constraints, local area strengths and features should be included. How much material needs to be altered or can present material be re-used? To ensure smooth transitions a clear list of specifications will have to be in place early

The breadth of study in S.Grade. The elements of internal assessment and student choice of personal study in both certificates. These allow for genuine development with guided support for all pupils without the pressure of a timed exam. They are also in keeping with the principle of student responsibility for learning.

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

Comment

Yes

Depending upon number of Units. Good indicator of progress. Possible early warning for change of level

This needs to have careful consideration in terms of the next question – some units are sat earlier than others and often as time progresses pupils very much improve on performance and can re-sit units etc? Who will set and mark Units? Will it be the same across all schools? Grading is a possibility but the failure to pass a unit should not preclude sitting or succeeding in the final exam assuming the same skills are tested. There should still be a minimum pass percentage for the external exam on a stand alone basis since we need to know what a student can achieve independently and under timed conditions.

If one of the major elements of the rationale is to reduce assessments and have student-bypassing some exams the key will be in how we deal with narrow misses for a pass.

we compensate such students. Is it a C or an A at the level below? If it is a C we may not be able to mark in terms of getting students to bypass.

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

YES NO

Comment

Yes

As a possible percentage final mark e.g. 30%. Recognition of effort and early motivator in the courses. If we are going to grade the units and include them as an element of the final award, this could be the basis of a move to wholly internal assessment. Unfortunately that is not what this is what is implied.

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

If the courses had genuine progression E would be the best option. (And if they did might a sliding scale of percentages be able to be used to decide on an A,B or C at the next level.

Q6. The proposed name for the new award is General (SCQF 4) 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

No

Not happy with Access and Higher names either. Chose one name then levels eg Higher level 1 to 7 or (SCQF1 to 7)

Not all that happy with the names but suggest that something doesn't sit well with moving from Access 3 to General or Ad Gen then to Higher and Ad H- doesn't sound very progressive.

Not happy at all with the name General/Ad General. Ordinary grade and advanced ordinary is even better than general.

I'd prefer some neutral labelling. We talk about levels 4, 5, 6 or 7 when looking at cumulative totals. Why not use these?

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 expectation 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

No.

A Unit award with grading for these could be built in to subject awards e.g. Literacy(c), Numeracy (b) XXX(b). These would then show in final awards. Again this would show strengths and weaknesses. Criteria for these unit grades would allow for failing but passing overall award
Concerned over the lack of information as to how this might happen – too open at present. Main concerns would be allowing pupils to sit the normal amount of exams and then these on top. Also concerned about how the information would be 'pulled together' from a range of subjects to allow certification if indeed that is an option for delivery.

There is a trivialising approach to developing basic skills. I suspect this has more to do with measuring outputs for political purposes rather than any other matter. It is also likely to have a knock on effect on numbers undertaking Maths and English. If we have to have them to get a certificate through other subjects?

There is an initial appeal about this idea but;

- a) I do not view literacy as totally distinct from literature, the latter providing an avenue for developing both functional and emotional literacy.
- b) Is numeracy totally distinct from Maths?
- c) I share concerns over the logistics of tracking and collating the skills if they are to be extrapolated from work done across the curriculum. If they are run discretely the knock on effect on staffing and resourcing would be enormous.

Yes

But who will be responsible for presenting pupils for these awards? I like the idea of numeracy taken separately from Maths (is this not what happened with old "O-grades"?).

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

No

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 for internal assessment with only limited external testing for National comparisons etc. Units over a number of subjects to make up award.

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

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

Yes, Although massive problems if teaching pupils over a number of levels and stages. Yes to 12 months or 2 years – no to 18 months – major complications with winter diet – paperwork, teaching of levels and stages – too 'messy'!

Enough time is already used up with administration for exams, study leave etc. If we believe in a broad education what is wrong with lateral development? This proposal would be difficult in a school of our size and might lead to additional parental pressures on the staff which we could not meet

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

YES NO

No

.Allow transfer to new courses and then revisit for summer examination. Problems with marking. Problems with Coursing. Re-sits may take place of appeals!

Yes. Opportunity for Resits or for pupils who need a bit longer before they are able to sit the exam (rather than having to wait another year). Yes if course content and time allocations stay the same. Also as much flexibility should be given as possible.

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 system which allowed the most able students to bypass qualifications at lower levels and begin study for Highers from S4 onwards?

YES NO

Yes. Pupils learn at different ages and stages. Evidence of ability could still be collated. As long as contingency plans were in place should they not achieve that grade.

No Not unless all pupils involved were to sit the exam at the end of S4 before leaving school and the ones who failed badly as well as those who just failed get some sort of recognition. As a general principle I do not think this is necessary but flexibility should be the key. It would be very difficult to plan for the possible range of failure and drop-out. There could be pupils who leave with little or nothing for their S4 year. There could be problems for pupils who move between schools. Would schools not simply give these pupils a mock S4 exam anyway to ensure they were selecting students appropriately?

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

Suggestions

More subjects or courses should be introduced for our less able pupils within schools. More subjects should be introduced with life skills and awarded as such. (for all abilities). Electronic learning and testing is here and more ways should be found to promote use of these. More vocational and practical courses should be introduced.

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.

NO

Comment

New materials need to be created and others matched up. Piloting possibly needs to be undertaken in some form even with a limited number of subjects

Timeline not realistic for such radical suggestions.

We have as much of a responsibility to the first cohort of students who are taught the new curriculum and sit the new exams as to any future years. The fact that, if I am honest, I am relieved my own daughter will not be involved in these exams, is a telling comment. I fear this is a totally unrealistic timescale.

Other Comments

Even a flexible curriculum needs a structure to hang on. We need a national structure for Curriculum for Excellence