

section 5: the consultation questions

A major element that we 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 youngsters particularly at the end of S4 and it would be a huge backward step if this went ahead.

Name/Organisation: Forrester HS Biology department

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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
Comment

Some subjects are very prone to change and have been held back by the exam system
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

Consideration must be made as to how many subjects will be taken from S4. If we reduce to 5 then the breadth of study in S.Grade will be lost

The new courses would have to dovetail far better from level to level. At the moment, in Biology, S grade does this well and therefore it is possible to have composite classes of general and credit. However, the other courses do not, especially Access/ Int 1 with Int 2. Courses will need to be designed so that it is much easier to have different levels in each class.

Units definitely put more pressure on pupils.

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

NO

Comment

Graded units are good indicator of progress but our department already uses graded tests to monitor progress throughout unit and course. This is because the NABS do NOT do this. Pupils need to know before the end of the unit whether or not they are coping and at which level so that they can set targets. However we do not think that this should become more formalised as you then get into the problems of 'cheating' and resits and what to do if pupil 'fails unit test' Unit passes, at the moment, seem to serve no real value other than the necessity to pass the final course. They are not recognised by colleges, universities, or exam statistics.

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

NO

Comment

Internal assessment is already time consuming and adds to the workload of the teacher. Would there still be opportunity to resit and how would that affect grade ?

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.

We would go for A or possibly B which as stated earlier our department already recognise unit passes as achievement. Having been presented for Units and assessed why hide or devalue them!

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

Probably OK with H and AH

Not happy with Access but can't offer an alternative.

Ordinary and advanced ordinary may be an alternative to replace S and Int 2

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

Explanation/other suggestion

But 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.

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.

There is a trivialising approach to developing basic skills. We 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 why not certificate through other subjects?

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 Opinion

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.

More weight to external assessment

Explanation

More weight to external assessment. Less chance for schools to cheat.

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

Explanation

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'!

This would be hugely difficult in a school of our size and might lead to additional parental pressures on the school that we could not meet.

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

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

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

We already do this with much success as long as contingency plans were in place should they not achieve that grade. Also there would need to be robust ways of assessing pupils in S1- S3 so that correct coursing decisions are made

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.

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

Absolutely ABSURD

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 daughters will not be involved in these exams is a telling comment. We fear this is a totally unrealistic timescale.

Remember the problems faced by SQA by rushing through the new higher still program

Other Comments

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

We have grave concerns regarding the S1- 3 course and how exactly it will prepare pupils for choosing and coping with NQs.

We feel that we are actually extending the old S2 'stagnant' year to a further year.

Early presentation at Forrester High school has been hugely successful in our department as it has been in other schools. It gives more flexibility and allows progression in a stepped phase for individual pupils. Pupils are much more motivated in S2 and S3 because they feel a sense of purpose in working towards a final exam/certificate. It also prepares them far better for future externally assessed exams

It allows much more accurate evidence for coursing into S4-6

The recent report by the Royal Society specifies that Scotland is topping the bill in the UK for science because our teachers are subject specific (ie Biology or Chemistry or Physics). We are convinced that this must also be true for other subjects

A more general course in S1-S3 would be detrimental to this progress and a cross curriculum approach even more so.

Primary teachers cope with the cross curricular approach because all subjects are at a lower level but even they require expert help for certain areas of the curriculum.