

the consultation questions

Please note that the Respondent Information Form MUST be returned with your response.

Responses can be submitted on-line, or on a copy of the questionnaire printed from the website, or by cutting out and completing this section of the document. Additional paper should be used if you wish to provide more extended responses but please ensure that any such pages include your identifying details.

Name/Organisation: CUMNOCK ACADEMY

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

With reservations pending more detailed proposals

NO

Comment

Given the outcomes within A Curriculum for Excellence are only presently in draft form and provoking much debate, it is difficult to give a definitive answer to the question. How can you therefore use something which has not been finalised as a basis for changing/ updating National Qualifications?

We agree that there needs to be changes to the National Qualifications system to try to unify all awards but there are many implications.

There will be big changes, as proposed, to the S1-S3 curriculum and with further changes proposed for S4-S6 this brings with it massive workload for staff and schools. Staff development, training, course reorganisation, new course materials etc will all be required. How do you propose to do this in the timescale currently proposed. In addition there will be financial implications at a time when schools are already struggling to cope with the constraints being imposed.

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

By stating the conclusions above you are already leading any new qualification system down a pre determined route. We agree that any new system must be fully inclusive but further debate and firmer proposals are required with regards to a unit structure. There is of course benefits in breaking courses down into units of work but there is also the very real danger of assessment overload which we are currently seeing. Any new system must take this into account.

You must, however, ensure that courses offer true progression from one level to the next. e.g. Intermediate 2 Maths does not have the necessary algebraic content to lead to Higher. In addition this question is difficult to answer from one perspective. Departmental responses vary. There needs to be thought to individual subject needs and therefore it may not be best practice to adopt one approach for all subjects.

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

If units are graded then this will increase workload and marking for staff in schools. In addition if they are to be graded new assessments will be required every year which would need to be prepared centrally. This would be a necessary requirement to ensure the unit tests were valid. Schools would find it very difficult and in some cases impossible to release staff to set these questions.

In addition there may well be parental pressure for pupils to resit unit tests to improve grades. This would further increase the assessment overload in schools and take yet more time away from actually teaching pupils.

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

YES

NO

Explanation

Having already said no to question 4 this question is not applicable. However given the nature of Q2 and Q3 it appears that this is seen as having some merit. Given this to be the case we would ask the following questions.
How will you guarantee consistency in awards throughout the country?
What level of moderation will be required to ensure consistency?
Who will set the unit exams each year?
What training will be required to mark them given markers must currently attend markers meetings for a number of years?

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

It is very difficult to give any one definitive response to this question as we feel the arrangement we best support is dependant on the level of exam being undertaken by the pupil. e.g. a pupil just failing a level 4 exam may well be credited with a level 3 pass but a pupil failing a level 7 exam may not be awarded a pass at the level below. We therefore feel that the options for introducing compensatory awards should be addressed at individual levels of study and not as one size fits all.

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

With this suggestion you will confuse the public yet further. Where no better suggestions are forthcoming it might be better to move simply to level 1, level 2 etc.

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 with their 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

This would be a very positive step forward, however there are implications. There are still many unanswered questions regarding exact content of assessment and the practicalities for implementation. There will be an inevitable impact on English and Mathematics departments and therefore a lot of discussion is still required.

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

First of all the consultation document states in page 25, *"there will be separate awards for literacy and numeracy, both available at SCQF levels 3 to 5; and the awards will accredit a broad range of skills on the basis of internally assessed evidence from a young person's work across the curriculum and an externally assessed examination."*

This appears to contradict the question.

We should not be setting up a system which allows pupils to fail. What if they do not turn up for the exam? Some pupils cannot, do not cope with the pressures of an exam. If there is no place in the system for those pupils who simply cannot cope with exam situations, then we can't be said to be fully inclusive. The new certificate for numeracy and literacy should have a high profile within the country and therefore we cannot allow pupils to leave school without giving them every possible opportunity to achieve to their potential. By enforcing pupils to sit an exam at level 3 we would be widening the gap currently occupied by the MCMC cohort instead of closing it. Sending our pupils out of school with a lower level of literacy and numeracy qualification is one thing; sending them out with nothing at all would be totally unacceptable.

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

Answer is totally dependant on level of award. Why is there no option for all weighting to an external exam?

Explanation

If we are talking about level 3 then the answer is as Q8. i.e. all internally assessed. However at level 4 and 5 this will be different. Certainly at level 5 we believe the outcome should at the very least come from more weight to external assessment but what about the option of entirely from external assessment?
In addition, it is difficult to respond to this question when we have no real clarity to the statement "*internally assessed evidence from a young person's work across the curriculum.*" The implications for organising the gathering of this evidence need to be fully (and realistically) teased out by the steering group before schools are asked to begin putting anything into action.

**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

This would allow pupils to then concentrate on 5 subjects in S4.
In addition they may wish to upgrade literacy and or numeracy by continuing it on to the next level e.g. from level 4 to level 5. By allowing pupils to choose literacy or numeracy in S4 would give it parity with other subjects.
Are they allowed to do numeracy and mathematics? If so there will be implications for staffing in schools. Do you only pick English and Maths if you attain level 5 in literacy and numeracy?

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

12 months and 2 years are fine but not 18 months.

Explanation

Eighteen months or a winter diet has already been tried and was not successful. It does not work in a school environment as was already shown during the previous trials in 2002. The two year Higher from S4 has a lot of potential but why are we only debating starting it from S4 and not S3. By doing so we are not being fully consulted. If the two year Higher is the way forward there must be a drop out built in at the end of S4 as pupils may have to leave the course at this stage for a variety of reasons. This could be a level 5 award and be externally examined. Courses should be designed to allow this to happen. i.e. Higher courses over two years would include level 5 work and offer a true progression and therefore offer a cut off point to suit the needs of all pupils. Why would we be studying Advanced Highers over two years? If a pupil is able to complete the Higher in S4 then it would be surely assumed they have the academic ability to meet the needs of the Advanced Higher in one year as is currently the case.

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

YES

NO

As above.
Who sets and marks the papers? Schools will not allow staff additional time out of school.
How do schools timetable pupils, especially under the current financial constraints?
This was tried before and it did not work.

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

Not applicable.

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

Explanation

However as already stated there has to be an exit point before the Higher exam i.e. at level 5 through an external exam at the end of year 1 if the Higher is being completed over two years. Pupils may start the Higher with the best of intentions and the necessary academic ability but many factors may stop them reaching their potential. Therefore all courses would need to offer true progression and this is not necessarily the case at present. This would therefore require complete overhauls in some cases and the time constraints and manpower required will be substantial.

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

Suggestions

As above.

The creation of a S4-S6 timetable is an attractive option as it should improve the choices available to pupils within the school. Schools will in theory be able to offer a wider selection of subjects. Through further development and partnership with colleges, pupils would have the opportunity to extend their qualification base. However it is necessary to bring together the method of certification which will allow pupils to achieve SQCF levels in traditional school based subjects and college based subjects.

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

The current timescale is completely unrealistic.
It is suggested that planning should already have commenced (2008/09)!
The proposals are vague, the outcomes for a Curriculum for Excellence are still in draft form and there is a great need for final plans to be put in place before anyone can realistically be asked to properly plan.
Approaches based on the new curriculum should be introduced next year! Subjects do not have new curriculums, only drafts which are still being vociferously debated in many cases.

ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

Regarding Numeracy and Literacy.

The exemplification on page 26 rings alarm bells. The Literacy examples are far too vague – especially in comparison to the examples provided for numeracy.

The content of the Literacy assessment: needs to be basic literacy – not English. We don't need two English qualifications. Examples of skills which should not be tested are: creative writing, interpretation of literature etc. Content should encapsulate the skills that employers/colleges require: pupils can spell and punctuate accurately; can read a non fiction text and summarise its main points etc.

The guiding principal should be:

English: reading, writing, listening, talking *with degrees of flair, style, sophistication.*

Literacy: reading, writing, listening, talking *with basic clarity and accuracy.*

National consultation about final content for both Literacy and Numeracy needs to include employers and colleges etc. Go outside the profession.

Current provision for basic Numeracy and Literacy within the primary sector will need to be altered in order to prepare pupils for the new awards.

Measuring Attainment

How will attainment be measured by authorities and HMIE?

If pupils are sitting exams at different times how do you measure like with like?

e.g. 5+ level 5 at end of S4, S5?

3+ level 6 at end of S5 or in total at end of S4 and S5?