

23 October 2008

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

Dear Sir/Madam

A Consultation on the Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland

Please find attached Skills Development Scotland's response to the above.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) was created in April 2008 from:

Careers Scotland; Scottish University for Industry (learndirect scotland, learndirect scotland for business, ILA Scotland and The Big Plus); skills elements of Scottish Enterprise; and skills elements of Highlands & Islands Enterprise.

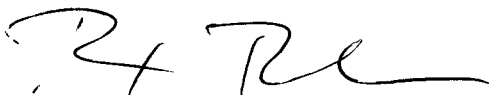
The development of SDS is guided by Scotland's national skills strategy, "Skills for Scotland". The strategy articulates a new national skills system that responds to: economic demand; individual need; and the requirement for joined up policies and services for the benefit of individuals and businesses. Central to the strategy is the recognition that Scotland's success, both economic and social, is not only dependent on investment in skills and attainment of qualifications but ensuring that the skills of the Scottish people are fully utilised to achieve sustainable economic growth. SDS is charged with playing a key part in delivering the strategy.

The vision for SDS as stated in the current Operating Plan is: "Skills Development Scotland will be a catalyst for real and positive change in Scotland's skills performance. We will help individuals to realise their full potential, we will help employers be more successful through skills development and we will work in meaningful partnership to enhance Scotland's sustainable economic development."

SDS is building on the successes of the four legacy organisations to maximise the opportunities for delivering a better integrated service of career information, guidance, brokering and training throughout Scotland, whether it is in urban areas or sparsely populated rural areas.

We hope you find the SDS response to the consultation valuable.

Yours faithfully,



Robert Pollock
Director, Strategic Support and Development



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A Consultation on the Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland

Consultation Questions

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.

Question 1

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

Comments:	The current system serves many young people well but also needs to find ways to teach and recognise a variety of skills to equip pupils for challenge within school and for life beyond school, especially through vocational learning opportunities and the development of employability skills. We also support the development of career self-management skills and opportunities to meet the learning needs of all. The qualification system needs to reflect this broader requirement and build it through the SCQF to ensure parity of qualifications and recognition of achievements as equal importance in schools. HMIE need to inspect as fully in this wider achievement agenda as they do on attainment matters. A more personalised portfolio needs to promote all learning and skill development as valuable and as a passport to on-going learning throughout life. Learning in future needs to have a reflective element to enable skills to be recognised and developed. This should be accredited within qualifications.
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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.)

Question 2

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?

Comments:	The unit based structure helps to meet a wider range of learning styles and abilities and this is also to be commended. Smaller credit levels which can be built up need to be continued and improved to be effective. Further opportunities for stand alone units would be welcomed. Consideration should be given to opportunities for portfolio building as evidence of competence and which can move forward with learners from school throughout their lives, thereby supporting a culture of lifelong learning.
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Question 3

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:	Agree with the benefits of unit grading for those learners who may not complete whole awards. The issue may be the currency of these graded units and where they may fit on the SCQF.
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Question 4

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

- Yes

No

Explanation:	All work should be recognised and this builds in the flexibility of stand alone units – learners achieve credit. Learners may also understand where their strengths, aptitudes and competences may particularly lie and this is fundamental to understanding how to recognise skills and build on them in future.
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Question 5

Which option for introducing compensatory arrangements would you most support?

- 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:	This is consistent with a more inclusive approach, recognition of strengths and recognition of achievement to date. It would provide a platform and ease for on-going learning, possibly leading to full awards post-school for learners. This provides greater opportunities for cohesion and progressions and breaks down barriers between in-school learning and potential beyond.
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Question 6

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:	Prefer Scottish qualification – SCQF 4 or 5. This would encourage the wider public and employers to use SCQF terminology and help with understanding progression routes and a lifelong approach to learning using these units and awards as the foundation, achievable within school or beyond..
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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.

Question 7

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:	These are fundamental to future personal,community and country prosperity. It also begs the question about other core skills, above and beyond these particular skills. We welcome these qualifications for all-ages..
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Question 8

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	External examinations will bring core skill achievements into sharper focus and give credibility on its own and as part of a wider suite of qualifications. Recognising and providing awards for skills development are strongly supported by SDS.
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Question 9

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

- Option A - Equal weight.
- Option B - More weight to internal assessment.
- Option C - More weight to external assessment.

Explanation:	Weighting should be equal to reflect individual learning styles and give equal value to these.
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Question 10

When should young people be assessed for literacy and numeracy awards?
Please select 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 is important in career decision-making terms so that S4-S6 can then build on their achievements. S4 is too late for this, should learning choices need to be re-assessed in light of achievement/attainment and career options.
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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.

Question 11

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:	The greater the flexibility the greater the reach to engage learners. It also allows some time for reflection on learning ability and styles which can be critical in future learning and career decisions. This is in keeping with the spirit of Curriculum for Excellence and having a degree of personalisation which works at the pace of the learner.
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Question 12

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

- Yes
- No

Explanation:	Again greater flexibility to the system is welcomed. It can support those leaving at winter S5 and encourage their participation in exams and in continuing learning beyond school through 16+ learning Choices. Again it is in keeping with more personalised learning.
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Question 13

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

Suggestions:	The new literacy and numeracy qualifications and the General and Advanced General qualifications. Some Highers such as Maths and English could be offered before other subjects for those requiring 18 than 12 months to complete. This would allow students to initially focus on these critical subjects and allow them to spread exams out over a longer timescale, building on initial success. Universities and colleges may have to adjust their admissions policies in this light.
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Question 14

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:	Flexibility needs to include and respond to the needs of all young people including those who are more able. It would also allow opportunities to create the time and space to empower those more able learners with employability and career self management skills, often ignored to focus on academia only and which can result in short-term career choices. The Senior Phase in schools needs to work universally for all ability levels.
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Question 15

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

Suggestions:	More emphasis on the importance of career planning and the skills to cope with change; and choices and attainment/achievement in school which affect life chances beyond school. Employability skills, coupled with qualifications, is a stronger passport to economic prosperity as individuals are more likely to put their qualifications and knowledge into practice. Taking on board employers' views of the readiness of school leavers, more needs to be done to encourage critical thinking and adaptability to thrive in the future workplace and excel in any future learning. Cognisance should be taken of the learning which young people undertake out-with schools e.g. part time employment, volunteering, youth work activities as a critical component of employability and ways should be found to reflect upon, recognise, assess and accredit these skills..
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TIMELINE

Question 16

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:	Schools, teachers and Local Authorities may be ready within these timescales, but will all the other stakeholders eg parents, HEI's, employers? Awareness needs to start now throughout Scotland to achieve this successfully.
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