

A consultation on the next generation of National Qualifications in Scotland

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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.

- I have a concern about the "keep the name, change the qualification" that could result. This would lead to a loss of the "gold standard" referred to in the report.
- An update to Access 3, SCQF 4, SCQF 5, Higher, Advanced Higher and assessment tools for S1 to S3 in line with Curriculum for Excellence at the same time would inevitably lead to a huge workload issue and be a very large upheaval.
- We have just undergone a radical change at Higher in maths and this is more change before the previous one has really settled.
- I would not wish to see the same style of outcomes and experiences from Curriculum for Excellence becoming the standard for National Qualification course outcomes. We need very clear expectations for these pivotal exams.

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?

- In mathematics, the balance between "Knowledge and Understanding" and "Reasoning and Enquiry" from Standard Grade (or Routine and Non-Routine in National Qualifications) should feature.
- The dual presentation policy (C/G and G/F) is a strength of Standard Grade. Either this should be kept or a compensatory award at the level below given to those who narrowly fail.

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

- Yes, if the content of the assessment bank is updated to include more challenging material.
- There should continue to be an assessment bank of materials (possibly produced annually) so that schools are not placed in the position of having to produce up to five exams at each level on an annual basis – i.e. a Unit 1 exam, Unit 2 exam, Units 1 & 2 prelim, Unit 3 exam and Units 1, 2 & 3 prelim some of which contain multiple sections and papers.

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

- Only if we can be certain that they are not open to abuse and over-inflation of pupils' grades.

Q5. Which option for introducing compensatory arrangements would you most support? Please select 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.

- A compensatory grade B award at the level of course below that studied would overcome the stated problems with D and E.
- "Extra recognition" are perceived as recognition of degrees of failure and probably receive no recognition at all from employers.
- "No grade" as compensation is unlikely to be understood by employers.

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.

- Calling the SCQF level 4 course "General" implies there is no change from Standard Grade general level. This is clearly not the case as we are looking at a new qualification.
- The notion of "Advanced General" does not make logical sense.

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.

- A better system of recognising these core skills from where they appear in other subjects at all levels should suffice, rather than the expectation of two additional exams for young people.

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?

- No, if external exams are not appropriate for youngsters who are operating at Access 3 levels in other subjects why would they be appropriate for a literacy or numeracy qualification?

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

- More weight to external examination so that there is not room for artificially inflating the attainment of youngsters.

Q10. When should young people be assessed for literacy and numeracy awards?

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.

- No exam is the preferred option.
- Option C would be the mere preference
- Option A leads to inconsistency with the advice on early presentations. If it is not appropriate for youngsters to sit external exams at the end of S3 presently then why would it become appropriate in the future,
- Option B leads to disruption of the learning in other areas. I would imagine that the winter diet would mainly be used by those studying in S5 or in S6 or the very able in S4.

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, and this is already in practise in some schools.

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

- Yes, the previous pilot was too short and with too little notice to allow schools to participate fully with it.

Q13. If you agree with the proposal to introduce a winter diet of examinations, what subjects and levels of qualifications might first be offered?

- Maths, initially at SCQF level 5 and then at Higher. This would allow youngsters to sit SCQF earlier than present for the most able and have 18 months to sit Higher in June of S5 and also allow moderately able youngsters 18 months or 2 years to complete a Higher course starting the at the beginning of S5.

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?

- I agree that some courses could be bypassed most notably at SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5.
- I was concerned with the language in the paper which implied that Higher could be bypassed to go straight on to Advanced Higher (Section 2, Proposal 1, paragraph 7 implies the need for effective progression routes from SCQF level 5 into Advanced Higher). The intent of this statement needs to be clarified.

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

- Exams taking place in June rather than May would reduce so-called "dead time" at the end of the academic year and allow a longer uninterrupted time to complete courses.

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.

- Given the number of new qualifications, I count at least 6 in maths which will change (Access 3, SCQF level 4, SCQF level 5, Higher, Advanced Higher Pure Mathematics, Advanced Higher Applied Mathematics), departments will be unlikely to produce new courses in the timescale available.
- This is an even greater change than the one bringing in the Higher Still framework and will require time at the consultation on content, writing of course outcomes by the SQA, consultation on course outcomes, and finally with school's producing coherent courses and internal assessments for every course.
- As stated previously, we could be in a position where schools are expected to produce 30 new internal assessments for maths alone in 2012/13. i.e. a Unit 1 exam, Unit 2 exam, Units 1 & 2 prelim, Unit 3 exam and Units 1, 2 & 3 prelim for each of six courses.