

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

- We recognise the importance of this development for the future of Scottish Education. In addition, we consider that the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence provides sufficient reason to reconsider the nature and structure of national qualifications and, in general, offers a suitable frame on which to plan examinations for the next generation.

Notwithstanding these positive opening remarks, we consider that some aspects of the Government's proposals currently lack clarity; and we believe that this lack of detail may reduce the effectiveness of the consultation.

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?

- The proposed balance between the strengths of Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications is important and will, we believe, be fundamental to the integrity and sustainability of a modern exam system.
- However, we also note that the range of different levels and gradings suggested might create a risk of over complexity. Consequently, we would urge that time be taken to consider these proposals and their implications more fully before the development of any programme of examinations.

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

No

- The possible value of introducing an A-C grading was, on balance, outweighed in our deliberations by the need to avoid increased bureaucracy and to ensure effective baseline consistency at pass/fail levels across a wider range of qualifications.
- An alternative suggestion is that students who have passed all internal units be granted C pass equivalence at the level presented, thus allowing more able students the opportunity to move straight to a higher (or Higher) level; and other students the right to sit an external examination to gain a level higher

than C This proposal would, if accepted, require more detailed work on verification of centres' assessment profiles. On the other hand, it might also encourage greater use of summative assessment for formative purposes.

- Overall, we feel that there is a need to develop thinking on this matter more fully. The detail and structure of new units still requires to be identified and this requires early attention.
- Once this decision is reached, we suggest that assessment should be pitched at an appropriate level once unit drafting has been concluded.
- Currently, there are some problems with the levels of certain existing units and these issues should be resolved, where relevant, before further developments are put in place.

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

No

(See above)

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 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 studied.

- Our view on this question is consistent with points made under questions 3 and 4 above. We consider that there is a significant danger of complex bureaucracy and would welcome simpler and more coherent links within and across levels.

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.

No

- While having no firm view on this question, our preferred option would be to use the following range, with its recognisable and understood nomenclature:

Access, General, Credit, Higher, Advanced Higher.
(The term Advanced General, in particular, is confusing).

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

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?

- We consider that the current arrangements for Access courses should be used here, although this approach may have implications for the external verification of centres.

If this approach is not adopted, we believe that there is a need for discussion about how to balance internal assessment across a range of subjects in these areas with the demands of an external exam which will have a more limited focus.

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.

Equal weight

More weight to internal assessments

More weight to external assessments

- We recognise that there is an argument for other approaches here. However, our main concern is that there be suitable models and examples to assist schools in the planning of new approaches to the promotion and assessment of these key areas. Internal assessment would be practicable and would assist in the introduction of this as a priority in schools.
- The case for some use of e-assessment should be considered further.

10. 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

- We consider it would be valuable if students could develop a folder of achievements by age 15. This could reasonably contain attainment in literacy and numeracy. The other proposals would make arrangements in S4 very complicated and potentially impracticable.

11. Do you agree with the proposal to allow the study of Highers and Advanced Highers over 12 months, 18 months and 2 years?

No

- We do not see this proposal as practicable, especially if this required the introduction of other diets of examination. However, we consider the concept of pupils taking examinations (or being assessed) when they are ready to be very advantageous to their progress. It is difficult to see how this could be achieved in practice.

We nonetheless welcome continued emphasis on flexibility of approaches, including e-assessment, on courses planned for 12-24 months.

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

No

- Unfortunately, the earlier attempt to introduce a winter diet failed and perceptions in schools of the suitability of this proposal are therefore currently quite negative.

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

N/A

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

- We agree with this in principle, although we anticipate that few students would pursue this route. To support this development, however, we consider that some form of accredited safety net for students who might benefit from this flexibility should be considered. One such measure is offered in response to questions 3 and 4 above.

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

Possibilities might include:

- Greater emphasis on the use of teacher professionalism to ensure the assessment of internal performance.
- Consideration of the publication of exemplar models of curriculum structure.
- Consideration of the publication of exemplar timetabling models to assist understanding.
- Enhancement and development of work with colleges, building on skills for work and work experience programmes.

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

- This is very difficult to answer. Experience suggests that course outlines, specimen examination papers, Conditions and Arrangements documents etc would all require to be in place by spring 2010, if there is to be any prospect of reaching the preferred deadline of 2012/2013.

If, on the other hand, these milestones cannot be met, the current deadlines would require to be reconsidered.

- The rate of progress towards the development of curriculum structures and the production/ refinement of key course materials will be crucial to the pace of implementation of CfE and, consequently, to the introduction of new examinations.
- Finally, we feel that there is also a need for appropriate CPD time and additional in-service days, before full implementation of the programme

OTHER COMMENTS

The following issues are, we believe, worthy of further discussion:

1. Implications for the planning of the structure of the senior school if 5 subjects are chosen from S4-6. While we accept the advantages of this development, especially for greater depth of knowledge in subject areas, we also have some concerns about:
 - difficulties associated with early specialisation and any inappropriate subject choices.
 - The need to avoid an extended fallow period in S1-3.

2. Guidance would be helpful on
 - whether Mathematics and English should feature as part of the senior group of subjects
 - definitions of literacy (eg functional literacy)
 - tracking pupil progress across levels

3. How can we place appropriate emphasis on transitions, especially from the end of the general education period (S3) to the senior phase? We consider that there is a need for work on a credible statement of achievements at this stage.