

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

As indicated in section 3 – How to Respond, 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: Trinity High School - SMT

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

NO

Comment

In general terms the intention to update qualifications is to be commended. However a number of points require to be addressed in this exercise:-

- i) the perception of ACCESS level courses needs to be considered to ensure credibility/value in the award for students and the wider community. Is Access the best nomenclature for this level of course?
- ii) The influence of Curriculum for Excellence must be rightly acknowledged in the updated qualifications but there is a need to go further to ensure;
- iii) Issues of continuity, progression and consistency are robustly tackled without fear of resource implications. The weaknesses of the current National Qualifications Framework is that for many curricular areas there is insufficient progression in learning from one level to the next causing inadequate preparation for students, a confused understanding by parents and, at times, a lack of credibility in final awards.
- iv) Due regard will have to be taken to ensure developments at levels 4 and 5 clearly articulate both with level 3 and levels 6 and 7 so that progression is embedded in the study of all courses.

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

1. Inclusion is to be welcomed as is an effective unit based structure although concerns still remain over assessment implications for student and teacher alike.
2. Clear development is needed to ensure progression routes are in place to facilitate learning and increased attainment.
3. External assessment should be maintained at all levels to ensure credibility of all courses.
4. Due consideration of the assessment burdens contained within all courses must be given so as to facilitate effective learning and teaching to enhance pupil/student experiences and build on new S1 – S3 curriculum.

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

However there are a number of issues to be resolved:-

- i) current units very often describe 'minimum competencies'. Is this now to be a C pass?
- ii) If Units are being graded will the graded units be awarded a range of points' value?
- iii) Is there an intention to allow upgrading of Units and if so will the additional workload and assessments implications for students and staff alike be taken into account when planning course content and recommended periods of study for courses?

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

YES

NO

Explanation - Providing Unit assessment is appropriately designed and supportive of course understanding and attainment then candidates should be given some credit towards a final award in any course studied. However balance must remain in favour of external assessment for credibility and reliability.

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

Mixed views expressed ie if no change in Unit structure then Option B is preferred but if Units are to be graded then a compensatory, ungraded pass could be awarded for the course studied. No support was given for any of the other options.

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

Supportive of the view that SCQF 4 be universally named 'General' but would prefer SCQF 5 to be entitled 'Credit' which continues the current nomenclature of Standard Grade which most are familiar with. Advanced General suggests change for change's sake.

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

NO

Explanation/other suggestion

As with most questions being asked, a number of issues have to be considered further:-

- i) greater clarification is needed on how and what is to be assessed in these areas.
- ii) The relationship to English and Maths courses has to be clarified.
- iii) The pattern of disessment and its purpose has to be clearly established ie is the literacy and numeracy award to be an end point assessment or a progressive learning/attainment goal? If the latter multiple assessment would be required.
- iv) If awards are to be made at SCQF levels 3 – 5 external assessment is required for external credibility and consistency of award nationally.

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

For reasons of consistency, perception, credibility and progression in learning/attainment an external examination should be retained as part of the assessment of these courses.

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

Explanation

Given the lack of detailed information relating to assessment available at present, it is difficult to comment with any great sense of authority. However the suggestion of 'equal weight' in internal and external assessments meets with most support principally to ensure credibility and acceptance of final awards in this area.

**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 is favoured for a variety of reasons:-

- 1) it would help inform curriculum developments at S1 – S3 stage and provide a focus for achievements in these areas before entering the senior phase of the curriculum.
- 2) It would provide the opportunity for students achieving at levels 3 / 4 to progress their attainment in S4 or thereafter if deemed appropriate while still allowing them scope to study other courses.

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

Explanation

Would allow courses to be studied at a pace appropriate to the student as opposed to the current situation in which the student is made to fit the structure (largely) of annual exam diets.

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

YES

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

If this is to be introduced then major difficulties have to be addressed especially given the favoured option of all courses being made available at the same time. These include:-

- i) marking pressures – could 2 major Exam Diets be adequately and timeously carried out?
- ii) Workload implications for serving teachers assuming SQA marking.
- iii) Organisational issues for presenting centres.
- iv) Local Authority views on AH provision and presentation policy.
- v) Parental/student perceptions of 'best option' for presentation.
- vi) Resit provision in summer diet.
- vii) Costs to presenting centres as well as SQA.
- viii) Perception created that Senior Phase of the curriculum in schools is concerned solely with attainment and not achievement in its widest sense.

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

Concerns were expressed at the idea that large numbers of students would be encouraged to bypass level 5 courses in favour of level 6 courses in particular and in so doing leave themselves open to the possibility of reduced attainment in a range of courses outwith literacy and numeracy. However it was felt that for a minority of students this proposal was appropriate.

Great care would have to be taken in developing the S1 – S3 curriculum to ensure appropriate articulation/challenge facilitated this possibility in the Senior Phase.

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

Suggestions

As always practical consideration of increased flexibility returns to the reality of efficiency savings and current resource levels in terms of staffing levels, overall funding and available accommodation. However within this attainment agenda must also be found room to acknowledge/accredit the excellent citizenship related work being done by many students in the Senior Phase of schools across the country.

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

If the extent of the undertaking envisaged in Question 1 (along with comment therein) is fully understood and appropriate resourcing committed then the answer is YES!

If however, a full and proper review of course content and assessment practice designed to ensure a much more coherent and progressive learning experience and articulation between levels is not in place then regrettably the answer is NO!

The current decision on Free School Meals for all P1 – P3 pupils which was not contained in the original concordat between the Scottish Government and local Authorities and which is now to be funded “out of existing funding” does not give rise to optimism in the review of National Qualifications.

ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

The opportunity currently presented by the consultation on assessment and progression in National Qualifications should not be lost through a lack of commitment and resourcing in ensuring a coherent, progressive structure of courses of study which provides clear articulation between levels is made available to our young people. Without sufficient consideration and revision of existing provision then our young people will be shortchanged and the high aspirations of the Scottish Government seriously compromised. There is a willingness to look constructively and realistically at the National Qualifications programme and it is essential that this opportunity is not lost!

