

Section 5: the consultation questions

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

Responses can be submitted online, 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: HAMILTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL

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
Comment



The issues we identify are:

- A need to reduce the 'assessment overload' which afflicts current N.Q. courses
- A need to ensure that these courses articulate with the new S4 courses
- A concern about the time and resource implications of the changes (textbooks, curriculum development, c.p.d. for staff, etc.)
- If N.A.B.s are retained as pass/fail there is a worry that there will be insufficient 'stretch' for high achievers and if N.A.B.s are graded there are real practical issues around moderation, preparation, etc.
- Given the length of time required to set a paper and the continuation of existing arrangements for some years, is there enough capacity in S.Q.A. to produce these examinations?

RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS

EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS

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

The proposal is very light on detail. As above, there is need to reduce the 'assessment overload' which afflicts current N.Q. courses and a need to ensure that these courses articulate with the revised Higher courses. There is a concern that parents and employers may see little value in such a set of courses. S4 students will sit 5 subjects which represents a narrowing of the curriculum in S4 compared to today and may adversely affect some 'minority' subjects with potential staffing implications. Students will also be making potentially life influencing decisions at an earlier age.

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

Opinion on this was divided.

Explanation

If units are graded, then NABs will have to accommodate this. This is a complex issue particularly since existing NABs can carry a relatively small number of marks. NABs would have to be produced centrally and there are many complex issues around their use.

We feel that PASS/FAIL does not motivate pupils to produce best results but avoids the difficulties created by grading units.

CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS

SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS



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

NO

Explanation

If you grade units and allow this to count to the final examination, it leads to grade inflation and the potential complications outlined in Q3. We also anticipate that major training and extensive moderation will be required to ensure consistency between presenting centres, since internal assessments are inherently less objective than external assessments to a national standard.

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

We do not like any of these. B is the least objectionable. In particular we object strongly to Option E: it was attempted before and was withdrawn because of concerns about over-presentation. We can see no reason why it is being proposed again

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.

NO

Explanation/other suggestion

These are not very elegant titles. The SCQF number adds a degree of confusion for some users, e.g. an SCQF Level 5 award is a relatively high one but a Standard Grade 5 pass is a Foundation level award. Retaining nomenclature from a previous examination system is unhelpful.

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.

TOO LITTLE INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO MAKE A JUDGEMENT

Explanation/other suggestion

This is a key proposal yet there is no real insight into what this may imply at the practical level. In particular both literacy and numeracy are the responsibility of all teachers and its assessment should reflect this. Some exemplification would have been helpful.

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

Explanation

The current practice in Access 3 works well. It might be worth considering Access 3 to be internally assessed but to be nationally moderated.

CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS

SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS



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

This is the national literacy and numeracy assessment and should have a high level of public confidence. This is best assured where the external assessment demands have most weight. The history of some internally assessed elements is patchy with pupils doing better in these elements than in externally assessed ones. There may, for example, be inconsistencies between presenting centres if internal assessment is to be a major feature.

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

A winter diet carries major implications for SQA admin, invigilation and a number of other procedural matters. It is not welcomed. The S1-3 phase is not supposed to be about external assessment and so the end of S4 would be a natural and easy to administer option. There is also the issue of maturation for pupils sitting such an exam.

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?

NO

Explanation

This carries with it huge implications for SQA administration and procedures and will adversely impact on a very crowded school year. How could such an arrangement be timetabled in a minority subject?

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

NO

Logistically this is a nightmare.

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

n/a



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

Explanation

We do not have a good track record in this regard – a default position is the normal teacher reaction as we are held to be accountable for attainment. We would wish to reduce the overall assessment burden and allow able students to progress to Higher, but only if a light touch safety net is put in place. There is also concern that many pupils will embark upon a level 4 phase of study in S4, sit the external examination in S4 and embark upon a level 5 course in S5 – which is not addressing the issue of the two-term dash with its consequent limitation on attainment

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

Suggestions

There needs to be debate between the school sector and FE/HE if we are to move to a more flexible model. At the moment the university ‘tail’ wags the school ‘dog’. Employers also need to be involved in this discussion.

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.

NO

Comment

There are real concerns that this is not practical (see comment re SQA above). Teachers are going to have to cope with the major issues around getting the S1-3 experience as good as it can be and this will take a huge effort over 3 years. Most schools are running at or near capacity for change as it is and to add in the implications for curriculum planning, cpd, and resources for the senior stage is worrying. School capacity to deal with curriculum change is actually falling due to staffing, budget and cpd ‘efficiency savings’. We note the ethic behind the successful transformational change agenda in the Province of Ontario: a clear vision; a high level of support for schools, including funding of programmes; a consistent message from above; and small, incremental steps over a period of several years. There is a real need to re-think the implementation strategy for a Curriculum for Excellence. Previous major curricular reforms, e.g. Higher Still, had to be changed to allow eventual delivery. To expect schools to deliver in the timeframe suggested is not realistic.

ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

