

## **Response to Consultation**

### **Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland**

#### **Response from Woodmill High School, Dunfermline**

##### **General Proposals for Structure of qualifications**

We have not been invited to comment on the general structure of the qualifications, and how they fit into the new curriculum, but we see it as important to do so.

The new examination structure is not seen as an improvement on current arrangements. We see the following disadvantages to the planned changes.

- (i) Pupils will continue with a general, wide, course until the end of S3, selecting examination subjects at the end of S3 (instead of at the end of S2). Although in recent years we have seen improvements in the S2 curriculum, S2 remains the least satisfactory of the years of secondary education. Pupils often lose pace and motivation, particularly in subjects with which they do not plan to continue and in which they lose interest. Delaying the process of choice (and the increase in motivation which comes with choice of subjects for examinations) till the end of S3 (when many pupils have reached their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday) does not seem wise.
- (ii) Pupils in S4 will reduce their subjects to 5. Particularly for less able pupils, and for those who leave school at the end of S4, this will result in an unwelcome narrowing of their curriculum and excessive time on a small number of subjects.
- (iii) The reduction of the number of 'choice points' in secondary school from 2 to 1 is seriously undesirable. It gives pupils little room for error and change of mind. Pupils who wish to progress from S4 to S5 in all subjects will have no choice in S5.

##### **Consultation Questions**

- (1) Update of Access, Higher, and Advanced Higher

It is clearly essential that all examinations reflect the principles of the new curriculum, but it is not at all clear what this means in practice. There is strong opposition to major reforms at Higher and Advanced Higher.

- (2) Features of new qualifications

We do not accept that the 'unit based' structure of Intermediate qualifications is a 'best feature' of current arrangements.

(3) Grading of NAB's

We see this as a harmful development. There are already serious difficulties in Higher Courses caused by the time taken to complete NAB's. This will become far worse if NAB's are graded. Demands for re-sits to allow an improved grade would be difficult to manage.

(4) NAB's counting towards final grades

Not relevant in view of (3). Our comments about time and pressures caused by NAB's would become even more significant if this was done.

(5) Compensatory awards

This question, of course, assumes that the current arrangements of bi-level presentation at Standard Grade will not be available. Although this arrangement is time-consuming (and wasteful for many pupils) it ensures that all awards are based on actual attainment by pupils, rather than on some rather dubious compensation formula. It also ensures that pupils do not have to 'gamble' on a level of presentation. Of the options presented, Option D (Compensatory C award at the level below) is probably the least objectionable.

(6) Names of awards

Not seen as important at this stage.

(7) Literacy & Numeracy awards

Such awards are clearly essential if pupils are to be able to cease the study of English and Maths at the end of S3. However the present numeracy units are seen as seriously inadequate for this purpose. The numeracy outcomes for S3, as presently developed, do not appear to offer a worthwhile challenge to able pupils.

(8) Assessments of literacy/numeracy

Assessments of these skills should have an external element at all levels. SCQF Level 3 awards in these subjects will be seriously devalued if they do not have an external element.

(9) Weighting of internal/external elements of literacy & numeracy assessments

Emphasis should be on the external element.

- (10) Timing of literacy & numeracy assessments

This should take place at the end of S3. This is the natural place for such an assessment, particularly for pupils not continuing with the study of English and Maths. Any later assessment will give unfair advantages to pupils continuing with English and Maths.

- (11) Courses over 12 months, 18 months or 2 years

We cannot see how an average-sized secondary school can offer all these options in any effective and efficient way.

- (12&13) Winter diet

Of no value to schools. This was attempted a number of years ago, and the experiment failed due to lack of demand.

- (14) By passing of lower levels to allow study of Highers in S4.

This should be allowed, and indeed encouraged, but the option is unlikely to be taken up by many pupils. The old O-Grade was not intended as a stepping-stone/safety net on the way to Higher but that is what it became. Pupils opting into a 2 year course will not ignore a safety net if one is available.

- (15) -

- (16) Timescale

Not seen as realistic. A number of school SQA coordinators recall the difficulties of introducing Higher Still, and still bear the scars caused by the 'SQA fiasco' of 2000. More importantly, we must not risk treating pupils in that way again.