

Independent Review of Qualifications & Assessment in Scotland

Interim Report

March 2023



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Foreword

This Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment was established by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, to ensure that all future learners are well prepared for the exciting, yet uncertain, world that they will encounter. Recognising every learner's achievements will be crucial if Scotland as a society is to thrive socially, culturally and economically.

In undertaking this Independent Review, my main aim has been to work with others to make principled and practical recommendations for the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland. The Review builds on the findings from the OECD report *Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence - Into the Future (2021)* and reflects on the aspirations of those who originally designed Curriculum for Excellence. It considers the recommendations of the Stobart Report (2021) *Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective*. However, the starting point for this Review lay in conversations with colleagues from The Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children's Parliament about their vision for the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland. They worked with me to develop the first draft of the Vision and Principles and recognised that a qualifications and assessment system that improves outcomes for all learners is key in helping to create a fairer and more prosperous society in Scotland. We are seeking to promote meaningful engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including those seldom heard groups whose voices are often absent in policy discussion.

At the heart of this model of engagement has been the Independent Review Group (IRG) and the associated Community Collaborative Groups (CCGs). Originally 13, the number of CCGs was expanded to include a wider range of communities who had specific interests in the work being undertaken. The commitment of the IRG and CCG members has resulted in deep and sustained discussions about the future of qualification and assessment amongst approximately 400 people. Schools and colleges across the country have also been involved in the discussions and more than 700 responses were received to the public consultation. Many of these responses have been from groups of participants, often including young people.

Discussions have been open, challenging and, at times, robust, but always constructive, undertaken by people determined to design a system of qualifications and assessment that will make a positive difference to every learner's future.

In this Interim Report to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, I would like to express my thanks to all those who have worked with me to explore the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland. Together, we have engaged with stakeholders from all corners of the Scottish Education landscape; learners, parents /carers, teachers and lecturers, school and college leaders, employers, policy makers, national bodies, politicians, wider practitioners, researchers (national and international) and universities. Insights from the wide range of communities involved in this Review have informed thinking to date and act as a major source of evidence for this Interim Report.

The process of consultation has not always been perfect, and not always successful in involving all those we intended to take part in the three phases of the Review. As

we have moved through each phase, we have been learning how to improve engagement with ever-increasing numbers of people. We are still learning,

The Review's engagement strategy has also offered opportunities to visit, both virtually and in person, a number of schools and colleges across Scotland. I would also like to thank all of those who have so willingly shared their practice and who discussed the future of qualifications and assessment with insight and enthusiasm. I have particularly valued the opportunities I have had to hear directly from young people. While it is vitally important that the Review engages with a diverse range of groups with a stake in Scottish education, it is of the utmost importance that the "voice" of young people be heard, understood and upheld. It is their future and it is they who will be at the vanguard of change in Scottish culture and society in the years to come.

In various ways, the current qualification and assessment system has served many learners in Scotland well. Scottish Education remains highly regarded internationally and Scotland's qualification system has contributed to that. School and College partnerships have become an increasingly positive feature of the educational landscape. However, experience gained as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a more resilient assessment system. Although never the intention of those who designed the qualifications, learners report narrow, often formulaic experiences in national qualifications where learning feels distanced from life.

The COVID-19 experience also brought into sharp focus the need for an approach to qualifications more closely aligned to Scotland's ambitions to achieve greater equity in education. For there to be greater equity, and more generally, for Scotland to thrive socially and culturally, there needs to be prosperity and the nation's future prosperity is dependent on a healthy economy. Currently, in Scotland, there are gaps between the existing skills' base and the skills needed to support economic growth. Making better use of information about future opportunities in the workplace will provide learners with better evidence to make informed decisions about pathways they may wish to pursue.

Societies across the world are changing at pace as globally we begin to glimpse the fundamental changes underway, for example, in artificial intelligence. They look to education and to qualifications to support their learners as they transition beyond school and college. Scotland cannot be left behind. As a country, we must ensure that all learners are supported to face the challenges of a future we can be certain will be very different from the world as we know it. Risk lies not in changing our qualifications and assessment system, but in not making sure that it is fit for the future. The risk of not changing our approach to qualifications and assessment is too great both for individual learners and for Scotland as a nation.

This Review, therefore, is not asking if the system should change, but what should change and how change might best be supported. The pace of change and the phases of change; what might be achieved in the short, medium and longer term are key considerations for this Review. Crucially, we need to identify what we will stop doing to create the space for new practices to be developed. New practices cannot

simply be added to existing practice, yet deciding what practices to end is not an easy task. No longer doing what we have always done is never easy in any context. For example, very few people believe that the current approach of the two-term dash to Higher is good practice. Yet, moving away from that will require more than system change. Crucially it will require a change in mindset.

This Interim Report tells the story of the Review so far. It describes the research that informed the design of the Independent Review. It explains the structure and workings of the review process, the Independent Review Group and the Community Collaborative groups. The three phases of the review process are described and findings are reported from the first phase which set out to develop a shared Vision and a set of Principles to inform the design of future qualifications and assessment in Scotland. Findings from the second phase are also presented. During Phase Two the Review sought views on what evidence should be gathered as part of qualifications and assessment, how evidence for different kinds of achievement should be gathered and how evidence might best be presented in ways that would be consistent with the agreed Vision. Feedback from these two phases was independently analysed and currently, we are using this feedback, together with evidence from the sources referred to previously in this foreword, to design a possible future model for qualifications and assessment in Scotland.

Following the publication of this Interim Report, we will begin Phase Three of the consultation. We will invite views on a possible model, asking if it is consistent with the Vision that has been collectively agreed. We will also seek views on what actions need to be taken to make sure that the model, or an adaptation of it, will work in practice. Throughout this process of Independent Review, the Independent Review Group has sought to be both principled and practical. For example, any ideas proposed in the model for the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland will already be in practice in the qualifications' system of at least one other country. However, I am strongly of the view that ideas cannot simply be transferred from one country to another, practices will be adapted for the Scottish context.

This Review is one of a number of Scottish Government Reviews that are looking to the future of education in Scotland and seeking to build on the best elements of current practice in Scottish Education and beyond. The National Discussion, the Morgan Review (2020), the Muir Review (2022), the Career Review and the Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape are all policy reviews likely to have and or continue to have an impact on school and college education in Scotland. I am also mindful of the opportunities and challenges set out in Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (2022).

Taken together, this suite of work has the potential to represent a turning point in Scottish Education. For this Review, that turning point will position qualifications and assessment as drivers for a better future for every learner and for Scotland as a society. I have confidence that by adopting a learner-centred approach that is both principled and practical, together we can release the creative, collaborative potential of the Scottish Education system.

On behalf of the Independent Review Group, I look forward to submitting a final report with principled and practical recommendations to the Cabinet Secretary at the end of May.

Professor Louise Hayward: Convener, Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment



Part 1 – The Independent Review So Far

Introduction

This section of the paper provides an update on the work of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment. The Review has now completed its first two phases and following the publication of this interim report will seek views on a draft new model for Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland. The Review will conclude by the end of May 2023 with the submission of a final report and recommendations to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

The Context for Qualifications and Assessment Reform

The Cabinet Secretary initiated this Review of Qualifications and Assessment in response to issues raised during the pandemic and subsequent reports on Scottish Education.

COVID-19 disrupted the traditional approach to qualifications in Scotland. Following the cancellation due to COVID-19 of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams in 2020 and 2021, there has been a renewed public debate in Scotland about assessment, particularly in the Senior Phase including school and college partnerships.

The OECD report on Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence - Into the Future (2021) suggested that the original potential of Curriculum for Excellence was yet to be realised. They argued that whilst CfE "continues to be a bold and widely supported initiative, and its design offers the flexibility needed to improve student learning further...the structure, learning practices and assessment approaches in the Senior Phase also need adapting to be consistent with CfE's vision, and to allow for the smooth curriculum experience promised from 3 to 18." (OECD, 2021)

As part of that OECD Review, the report by Professor Gordon Stobart, Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective (2021) sought to provide insight into the perceived 'misalignment' between curriculum and assessment and to highlight opportunities for reform of assessments in the Senior Phase. Professor Stobart argued that Scottish Education was part of an anglophile tradition heavily dependent on examinations and that learners in Scotland were amongst the most heavily examined in the world. He presented a range of alternative traditions in practice internationally and suggested that if the aspirations of CfE were to be realised, Scotland should consider a broader approach to Qualifications and Assessment.

The starting point for this Independent Review was to consider evidence from the COVID-19 experience and the international reports on Scottish Education. In addition, Qualifications and Assessment had been a major theme emerging from the Muir Review and the Morgan Review. Evidence from both Reviews has been influential in the thinking underpinning this Review.

Methodology

Any innovation that seeks to lead to change that is deep, meaningful and sustainable has to pay attention to a number of features. Often change focuses on what has to change and, of course, that is crucial. However, it is equally important to consider why the change being proposed is important for learners and for Scottish society, how change might best be achieved and what the journey should look like as we move from where the system is now to where it wants to be in future. Finally, for change to be sustainable, it is important to identify what needs to be different in the wider educational system to support the innovation in practice, e.g. accountability, Inspection and ITE.

The approach to engagement throughout this Review is based on the Integrity Model of Change (2010) that pays attention to:

Educational Integrity - the need to ensure that what is done will lead to better educational opportunities and better life chances for every learner, i.e., is informed by policy, practice and research. The development of the Vision and Principles focused attention on the educational purpose driving the Review.

Personal and Professional Integrity - the importance of ensuring that everyone who has a role to play in making the innovation successful is involved in its design and development, recognising and valuing the crucial role that each will play. The development of the Independent Review Group (IRG) and Community Collaborative Groups (CCG), the engagement with schools and colleges and the public consultation were vehicles to promote personal and professional integrity within the Review.

Systemic Integrity - the need to ensure that the various parts of the system e.g. teacher education, inspection, professional organisations, national and local government and national bodies are aligned to support the innovation in practice. Meetings of Review members with key groups and organisations as well as membership of strategic committees sought to ensure attention was paid to systemic integrity.

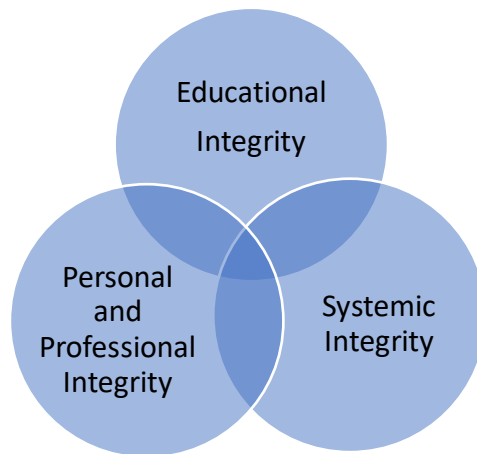


Figure 1 – Model of Change

The Review Process

Independent Review Group - IRG

Central to the process of collaborative review has been the Independent Review Group (IRG). The IRG operates as a matrix model.

On one side of the matrix, three distinct groups of participants are involved in the Review:

- those for whom qualifications matter most including individual learners and, as appropriate, parents or carers;
- those involved in the design, development and offering of qualifications - educational professionals including teachers and lecturers, school and college leaders and local and national policy makers;
- and users of qualifications such as colleges, employers and universities.

On the other side of the matrix are research-based groups including researchers on aspects key to the Independent Review. The purpose of these groups is to ensure that the work of IRG is informed by leading edge thinking. These areas include Equity, Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications, Change Processes and Policy Alignment

All of these groups are crucial if a qualifications system is to be credible and practical.

Each member of the IRG links with a broader group of members from their community. The number of groups has increased since the start of the Review as interest has grown in the topics and sub-topics under discussion. These groups include a wide range of participants and we will continue to ensure an inclusive and participatory approach as the Review progresses. The aim is to recognise and embrace the diversity of Scotland's learners and communities. These groups seek to involve people whose voices are seldom heard in policy discussions. IRG members do not represent their own organisations, but instead act as facilitators to communicate with their wider communities exploring how the qualifications system in Scotland might best support all learners.

The IRG has been considering issues such as:

- the purposes and uses of a qualification and awards system, including recognition of learning, accreditation, selection and accountability, and the relationship between qualifications and lifelong learning;
- approaches to assessment in professional and technical subjects and lessons that could be learned from these approaches;
- fairness, equity and the impact of different approaches to assessment for qualifications;
- from ideas to practice - the process of change and learning from our past to understand why there are significant gaps between the original intentions for qualifications in CfE and current practices, where rote learning, formulaic approaches to examinations, constant examination rehearsal and complaints of having no time to learn in the 'two-term dash' are commonly reported experiences;
- wider National and International approaches to the future of Qualifications Assessments.

This Review has predominately focused on learners aged 15-18 in all educational settings, this will usually be school or college but also includes learners in other educational settings and learners who are home educated. There are also implications for some adult learners who study courses which fall within the remit. The focus of this work has been on the framework of school and college qualifications accessible in the Senior Phase. The Review will not consider or make recommendations on the content of individual courses.

Collaborative Community Groups (CCGs)

A key responsibility of IRG members has been to facilitate wider community engagement. Each IRG member was asked to bring together individuals from their extended community to form a CCG. Through their CCGs, IRG members have gathered perspectives and views from individuals and groups that reflect the diverse make-up of their communities, including seldom heard voices. Ideas being considered in IRG are discussed with CCG members and evidence and insights from the CCGs has been brought back to the monthly IRG meetings to form part of the wider evidence gathering process.

Three Phases

To provide a structure for engagement at key points in the Review process, we adopted a 3 phased approach:

- Phase One – August to September 2022 – this focused on the development of an underpinning set of Vision and Principles. The IRG and all CCGs were involved and supporting materials were sent to all secondary schools and colleges in Scotland.
- Phase Two – October 2022 to January 2023 – this provided more detailed questions designed to lead to a preferred Qualifications and Assessment model. The IRG and all CCGs have been involved and supporting materials were sent to all schools and colleges. The Review also engaged in a public consultation which closed on 13 January 2023.
- Phase Three – this phase will commence in March 2023. The aim is to consider a future model for qualifications and assessment the design of which is drawn from the reports previously cited, responses to consultation in Phases One and Two of this Review. The intention in Phase Three is to seek views on a proposed approach and, crucially, the practical steps that would be needed for this model to be successful in practice. During Phase Three the Review will also take into account relevant findings from the National Discussion on education. Phase Three will operate in a similar way to Phase One. Materials will be circulated to all schools and colleges and there will be IRG and CCG discussions. In addition, a number of school and college visits will be undertaken to inform thinking on the model and its implications in practice.

Phase One – Vision and Principles

The draft Vision and Principles were developed in partnership with colleagues from the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children’s Parliament. Phase One of the Review was live between August and September 2022. Responses were received from Collaborative Community Groups and allied discussion groups. A total of 221 responses were received from schools and colleges. A number of schools and colleges held group discussions with multiple teachers / lecturers and learners, and these responses were submitted on behalf of the group. The feedback from Phase One was independently analysed. The report on the analysis can be found at [Analysis of Phase One consultation](#).

The evidence from the Phase One consultation suggested that there was little challenge to the fundamental ideas in either the draft Vision statement or the draft Principles. However, there was a clear request to simplify the language and to sharpen statements being made. To address these points, we have clarified the language of both the Vision and Principles and have reduced the number of principles. The latest iteration of the draft Vision and Principles is provided below. The Vision and Principles will remain as ‘draft’ until we have concluded the final phase of the Review.

The redrafted Vision and Principles were then used to inform the second phase of the Review, where options, consistent with the Vision and Principles, were explored.

Current Draft of Vision and Principles

Vision

An inclusive and highly regarded qualifications and assessment system that inspires learning, values the diverse achievements of every learner in Scotland and supports all learners into the next phase of their lives, socially, culturally and economically.

Principles

Scotland’s qualifications and assessment system should:

1. Recognise, value and promote the rights and achievements of every learner.
2. Reflect the Scottish curriculum whilst being responsive to the changing needs of individual learners and of society, creating a positive and sustainable future for learners, their communities and the wider world.
3. Develop and maintain an appropriate range of approaches to assessment including through digital mechanisms.
4. Be clear, coherent, credible and easily understood as part of a lifelong learning journey.

5. Be adaptable and subject to regular review using the vision and principles as a touchstone against which change can be tested.

6. Ensure that all groups* with a stake are involved in future decisions related to design, implementation and practice.

*This should include learners, parents / carers, teachers / lecturers, national bodies, colleges, universities, employers and the voluntary sector.

Phase Two - Options for Change

Phase Two of the Review began in October 2022 and closed in January 2023. The consultation for this phase was designed to explore options that would help define the parameters of a possible new approach to qualifications and assessment in Scotland.

IRG discussed the options in detail and held meetings with their CCGs. In addition to feedback from IRG, almost all CCGs submitted detailed views and there was just over 700 responses submitted from the public consultation on this phase of the work. As with Phase One, the responses have been independently analysed. All consultation responses will be published where permission to do so has been granted alongside a final copy of the consultation analysis. Discussions in the IRG, CCGs, other Convener led meetings the Review has undertaken, and school / college visits suggest that there is almost universal consensus on the need for change in qualifications and assessment.

In this Interim Report, the section that follows reports only on the broad-brush messages emerging from the analysis of the consultation. The final report will include more detailed evidence from individual CCGs, from learners and parents/carers; those who design, develop and offer qualifications and those who use qualifications (colleges, employers, universities and the voluntary sector).

Phase Two Consultation – Analysis

This section includes extracts from the independent analysis comprehensive summary written by The Lines Between. In considering responses to the Phase Two consultation, a framework has been developed to convey the most to least commonly identified themes across responses to each of the questions posed:

- *Many participants*; more than one in five, a prevalent theme
- *Several participants*; between one in 10 and one in five, a recurring theme
- *Some participants*; fewer than one in 10, another theme
- *A few / a small number*; fewer than one in 20, a less commonly mentioned theme

This analysis is primarily drawn from 708 consultation responses. Within this sample, 526 responses were from individuals, and 182 from a range of organisations, including many schools and colleges. Individuals were not asked if they were learners, teachers or parents, but for analysis purposes a separate category of Pupil / Teacher / School response has been created. The 262 responses in this category include all organisation responses submitted by schools, as well as all individual responses submitted from email addresses which include Glow or sch suffix.

Respondent classification	N=	%
Individual – unclassified	372	53%
Pupil/Teacher/School response	262	37%
Organisation:	74	10%
- Colleges and Universities	10	1%
- Trade Unions and Professional Bodies	13	2%
- National Agency or Public Body	15	2%
- Young person’s organisation	9	1%
- Other non-education	8	1%
- Local Government and Local Authorities	7	1%
- Other education	7	1%
- Parent body/group	3	<1%
- Unknown	2	<1%

Q1a: Should information be gathered across all four capacities?

Almost all (96%) respondents answered Q1a. Among those who answered there was clear support for gathering this information: 61% agreed, 23% disagreed and 17% were unsure.

Q1b: Please consider each of the capacities in turn. What kinds of information should be gathered on learners’ progress and achievements in each capacity?

Successful Learners - Several respondents noted that progress in this capacity can be evidenced through achievement and attainment in subject qualifications.

Confident Individuals - Respondents gave various suggestions about how to gather information related to this capacity including family and caring responsibilities.

Effective Contributors - As with Confident Individuals, several respondents suggested that Effective Contributors could be evidenced through coursework, especially group tasks and presentations. Several felt information about extra-curricular activities could be gathered.

Responsible Citizens - Responsible Citizens was viewed as the most challenging capacity to gather information about. Some respondents noted this is another subjective principle, with some uncertainty about what measures should be used to identify a Responsible Citizen.

Other themes - Some respondents commented on the importance of considering a learner's strengths, weaknesses, and circumstances as an individual, including any additional support needs, learning difficulties and socio-economic disadvantages. These respondents emphasised the importance of recognising all learners' achievements and acknowledging that progress will look different for some learners than others. Another theme raised by some respondents was a concern about the workload implications if teachers were expected to devote additional time to collating information related to the four capacities out-with what is already collected for subject qualifications.

Q2: What, if any, information on learners' achievements obtained outside school and college should be gathered? Please explain your response.

Many respondents called for information about learners' participation in extra-curricular activities to be gathered. This included participation in a broad range of clubs and hobbies, including sports, music, drama, art, baking, youth organisations such as the Guides, Scouts and Cadets, religious organisations and learning opportunities outside school, including lessons in modern languages. Among these respondents, opinion was evenly split on whether only accredited activities should be recorded. Several respondents pointed out that gathering information about achievements outside of school or college could discriminate against those who may not be able to access extra-curricular activities to the same extent as others for various reasons, including cost, time limitations, parental support, local availability, health issues and caring responsibilities.

Q3a: Should information be gathered on learners' skills and competencies as part of their Senior Phase?

Q3a was answered by almost all respondents (96%). Among those who answered there was strong agreement that information about learners' skills and competencies should be gathered as part of their Senior Phase: 75% agreed, 11% disagreed and 14% were unsure. The initial analysis shows slightly higher agreement among organisations, at 80% compared to 74% among individuals.

Q3b: If you have views on how this might best be done, please provide them here.

The most prevalent suggestion, mentioned by many respondents, was for skills and competencies to be embedded and evidenced through subject-based qualifications. There was a clear preference among many for coursework and continuous assessment, rather than formal end of year exams, to capture evidence of skills and competencies. Some respondents identified challenges in gathering objective, fair and consistent information about learners' skills and competencies across different schools, particularly in terms of the types of information that should be recorded.

Q4: Please share your thoughts on what a 'better balanced' assessment system would look like. As well as considering the balance between external examination and internal assessment you may also wish to comment on the frequency of examinations.

There was no clear consensus on what a better-balanced assessment system would look like. Many participants favoured a mixture of continuous assessments or smaller, more regular tests and exams. This included mixed views on the weighting between regular assessments and final exams, including the need for different weightings to be used depending on course level, e.g. Higher vs Advanced Higher. There was acknowledgement that some courses currently take continuous assessment into consideration alongside exams, such as Higher and Advanced Higher English, and there was mixed preference without clear consensus as to whether those courses should be kept as is, or changed.

Eliminating end-of-year exams entirely was also requested by many, who supported more regular or continuous assessment as an alternative. Others supported more, smaller tests, occurring at regular intervals, such as end of term, end of topic, monthly or weekly. Some respondents argued that exams are a poor measure of learners' abilities. They pointed out that there was potential on the day to underperform or that learners may be affected by anxiety that hinders their performance. Conversely, the current exam structure was supported by some respondents who felt exams are fair, that qualifications are valued, and that final exams allow students to gain a recognised qualification.

Several respondents suggested or recommended using a variety of alternative types of assessment. These included: open book exams, oral exams, practical assessments, group projects, longer-term projects, multiple choice assessments, and support for creating portfolios to assess work produced over extended time periods. Digital or online exams were highlighted as a way to manage workload and ensure consistency in marking. The idea that assessment type should depend on the course, subject or the learner's educational pathway was suggested by several respondents.

The frequency of exams was mentioned by some respondents. This included a preference for less frequent exams over S4-S6, i.e. two rather than three exams over the three years. A few highlighted the intensity of the exam diet, suggesting there was insufficient time between exams, whether internal or external, to allow students to learn, study or have moments of less stress. The lack of a National 4 exam was highlighted by some respondents as especially problematic. They expressed a preference for an exam, suggesting that the lack of an exam has devalued the course in the eyes of employers and left students unprepared for National 5 if they were to continue. This was mentioned most often in relation to National 4 Maths.

Several respondents highlighted concerns about the consistency and equity of using internal assessments alone. Some felt it devalued a qualification as it would mean marking lacked national consistency and was open to marking bias.

With regards to internal assessments, some were concerned about the extra pressure it would put on teachers in terms of time and resources required to mark assessments.

Employers involved in the CCG discussion indicated they did not have a strong preference for internal or external exams but needed assurance that standards would be maintained.

Q5: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE.

Several respondents suggested this proposal could incentivise more focus among BGE learners. Learners might work harder at this stage if they know it will lead to an achievement, award or qualification. Similarly, some felt it could enhance teachers' focus on BGE if learners are working towards an achievement, award or qualification. Another recurring theme was the opportunity to give every learner evidence of their skills, which could be especially beneficial for those likely to gain fewer academic qualifications.

The most common argument against the proposal, put forward by several respondents, was the pressure it could put on teachers to achieve attainment targets in BGE and to have results compared with other schools via league tables. Similarly, some referred to teachers' lack of time and resources to administer an achievement, award or qualification amidst an already busy curriculum.

Q6: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing a type of leaving certificate in the Senior Phase.

The general consensus was in favour of this proposal. Several respondents would welcome a leaving certificate that recognises a broader range of learners' achievements, skills and competencies than are evidenced through the current qualifications and assessment system. Respondents noted a leaving certificate would provide a more holistic record of learners' achievements. Another recurring theme, mentioned by several respondents, was that a leaving certificate would provide useful information for employers and universities about learners' skills, competencies and achievements. Similarly, several respondents felt it would help learners to identify achievements to include on their CVs and UCAS applications.

Several respondents argued that this proposal could put added pressure on time among school staff if they were expected to compile evidence for the certificate. Other recurring themes mentioned by several respondents included doubts over whether a leaving certificate would be of value to employers and further education

providers unless it provides information that is helpful to them - for example in making recruitment and admissions decisions - and is not available elsewhere.

Q7: How should Scotland's qualifications and assessment system make best use of digital technologies?

Several respondents proposed creating a digital platform to record learners' skills and achievements, possibly using existing resources like Glow and My World of Work. Enabling learners to submit coursework online was another idea put forward by several respondents. Some respondents highlighted a need for national guidance to promote consistency in the use of digital technologies across Scotland.

Advantages of using digital technologies were also noted; several highlighted the benefits for learners with additional support needs who may find handwritten exams challenging. While the consensus was largely in favour of using digital technologies, respondents identified several barriers that must be addressed. Most commonly, many respondents identified unequal access to digital devices as a barrier to using digital technologies in qualifications and assessment, particularly among learners from less affluent backgrounds.

Q8: How can we make sure that proposals for a future qualification system will uphold the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements?

Most commonly, many respondents highlighted flexible teaching and assessment approaches as a means to better satisfy different learning needs and styles among all learners. Suggestions included enabling learners to select different forms of assessment (for example, verbal or written, digital or paper-based) depending on their preferences. There was some disagreement about the importance of exams. Some respondents called for reduced focus on end of year exams and more on coursework or continuous assessment. However, a few felt externally assessed exams are more likely to uphold learners' rights by removing any potential for conscious or unconscious bias in marking.

Another suggestion made by several respondents was the need for more standardisation and consistency across schools and local authorities, regardless of their size, location and socio-economic profile. This mainly focused on consistent availability of subjects but also included standardisation in terms of resources and options for assessment.

Q9: Is there anything else in relation to the reform of qualifications and assessment which is not covered in this consultation which you would like to raise?

Some respondents discussed the approach that should be taken to establishing a vision for Scotland's qualifications and assessment system. However, opinion was split between those who felt there should be radical change now, and those who advocated a more gradual, incremental approach. A few called for more collaboration among schools, colleges and universities. Ideas included co-designing subjects' curricula to ensure they meet the needs of further education, more alignment between the evidence collected in both schools and colleges, and creating more flexible links between schools and colleges to assist learners interested in a vocational pathway such as foundation apprenticeships.

In Conclusion: Themes emerging from consultation in Phases One and Two. The consultation on the Vision and Principles revealed an emerging consensus. The vision of a future qualification and assessment system in Scotland is: An inclusive and highly regarded qualifications and assessment system that inspires learning, values the diverse achievements of every learner in Scotland and supports all learners into the next phase of their lives, socially, culturally and economically.

The Principles provide a framework for the design of any future system of qualifications and assessment. It should

- Recognise, value and promote the rights and achievements of every learner.
- Reflect the Scottish curriculum whilst being responsive to the changing needs of individual learners and of society, creating a positive and sustainable future for learners, their communities and the wider world.
- Develop and maintain an appropriate range of approaches to assessment including through digital mechanisms.
- Be clear, coherent, credible and easily understood as part of a lifelong learning journey.
- Be adaptable and subject to regular review using the vision and principles as a touchstone against which change can be tested
- Ensure that all groups* with a stake are involved in future decisions related to design, implementation and practice.

The first four bullet points will be used as the basis for consultation in Phase Three of this Review. These are the criteria which should inform the design and development of the future model.

The consultation in Phase Two offered insights into the parameters for the model.

The spread of views was greater in Phase Two than in the responses to the Vision and Principles. In this section, views that were held more commonly are reported.

- The future qualification system should include evidence on achievements in individual subjects but should go beyond those to include other aspects of Curriculum for Excellence.
- The future system should consider a wider range of ways of gathering evidence related to individual subjects/programmes including for example, project work, teacher/lecturer assessment, examinations, open book tasks, end of module tests, oral examinations, digital assessments, photographic or video evidence. There should be fewer examinations but an external element to an assessment was often an important feature of achievement status.
- The system has to be sufficiently flexible to be able to respond to the fact that if it is to be inclusive then what constitutes achievements for individual learners may be very different. In future, this may also mean allowing learners to choose different ways of demonstrating their achievements.
- Information on learners' skills should be gathered as part of qualifications
- The relationship between academic and vocational programmes should be better integrated and the language of 'academic' and 'vocational' reconsidered
- Learners should have the opportunity to gather evidence of achievements beyond the subject/programme curriculum. These should be broadly defined to allow them to reflect different learners' interests in and out of educational settings but all learners should have the right to opportunities that would allow them to demonstrate achievements.
- Manageable ways to share and to promote consistency of standards should be part of any qualification system to ensure that the system is fair and has credibility
- There should be a type of leaving certificate to provide a more holistic record of a learners' achievements. This would offer learners an evidence base, e.g., to construct a cv, and would provide better evidence to colleges, employers and universities and could become the basis of a lifelong learning profile
- Digital approaches to assessment are the future. A profile/leaving certificate should be digital although there were concerns about the capacity of current systems. Examinations should also, in future, be digital.
- Any proposals have to be possible and thus cannot simply be added to teachers' existing workload. Careful consideration will have to be given to the practical implications of proposals made.

It is interesting to note that many of the issues raised in response to this second phase of consultation mirror ideas reflected in the original intentions of CfE. The concern to reflect a broader range of learners' achievements, the desire to reduce the number of examinations taken by individual learners, the concern not to introduce high stakes assessment at too early a point in the learning process were all aspirations for CfE, e.g., as outlined in Building the Curriculum 3, (2008) which notes "There should be no early presentation for examinations unless in exceptional and individual circumstances".

A further area of commonality can be found in the original CfE desire to offer a wider range of approaches to gathering evidence, e.g., Building the Curriculum 5, (2011) notes - "Learners should be engaged in all aspects of assessment processes and be afforded an element of choice and personalization in showing that they have achieved the intended outcomes."

The evidence from Phases One and Two have now been used to inform the design of a model that will be the basis of consultation in Phase Three with communities across Scotland. However, given the previous experience of ideas in the original version of CfE not becoming part of practice, Phase Three consultation will investigate what practical actions should be recommended if ideas are to succeed in practice.

Phase Three – A Model for Change

Phase Three will take place during March 2023. This phase of the work is designed to test, through consultation, a possible model for qualifications and assessment, that builds on the evidence emerging from Phases One and Two of the Review process. Phase Three will also seek to identify any possible unintended consequences and to agree on potential mitigating actions.

Views will be sought on the draft model through the CCGs, allied discussion groups, via schools and colleges and a range of other meetings. This phase will also focus on the practical implications for change including phasing and the support needed for learners, parents, schools and colleges, employers and universities if change is to be successful.

The main areas currently under investigation in advance of Phase Three and as part of a potential new approach to qualifications and assessment include (please note that the terms used to describe each part of the proposed new qualification are working titles rather than agreed terms):

- **Subjects and Learning Programmes:** Individual subjects, courses and learning pathways. These already exist and are perceived to be the current focus of the current qualification system. However, in the new model, courses/ programmes would be progressive over two years. Additional ways of gathering evidence that are less susceptible to formulaic responses will be explored. There exists a strong perception of overemphasis on gathering evidence of achievements in subjects. While the study of individual subjects is a crucial part of education, in the new model other areas of CfE would be recognised as being equally important.
- **Learning in Context / Interdisciplinary studies:** The new model recognises the increasing importance in society of learning across different areas of the curriculum and proposes the introduction of an interdisciplinary element to the qualification. This would be a project-based approach where evidence is gathered based on achievements across knowledge, skills and competences in action. For some learners, this might focus on a global challenge, e.g., climate change, migration or social justice. The kinds of area learners have indicated are of real interest to them and that they see as being crucial for the future of society. For other learners, this might involve communication or independent travel. This would also recognise the growing importance of skills and competences for future learners. Currently, there are many different skills frameworks in play in Scotland. A single skills framework would be more helpful. Interdisciplinary studies would form a key element of an overarching qualification. However, although many schools and colleges are already involved in projects and programmes like this, the Review recognises that the timeline for the introduction of this part of the qualification profile will require careful consideration and particular forms of support.
- **Personal pathway:** Here learners have opportunities to select aspects of their experiences that reflect their interests, e.g., in drama, music, sport, film making

or photography; the contributions they make to society, e.g, supporting young children to read or in sport, or supporting members of their own community or taking a leadership role in a school or college activity; and the experiences they might have that would help inform their career aspirations, e.g., in employment or as entrepreneurs and enhance their understanding of the world of work.

This component would be subject to discussion with every learner. It would, however, have common characteristics. In their personal pathway, each learner would include evidence of social, cultural and economic activity. Again, this could form a key element of an overarching qualification.

In Phase Three The IRG and CCGs will continue to explore a range of key issues including:

- The creation of an overarching qualification or graduation certificate that would be designed to allow for the building of credits over time and would bring together different forms of learning.
- The balance between internal and external assessment within a new system, with examinations continuing to form part of the new approach, where appropriate.
- How better to integrate the offer of 'academic' and 'vocational' qualifications and the language that should be used to describe courses and programmes.
- The potential of a digital learning profile that would allow evidence to be effectively gathered
- What changes might be proposed to the wider education system to support future reform of Qualifications and Assessment

In addition, the IRG and CCGs will consider aspects of the consultation in Phase Two where there was no clear view, e.g., whether or not there should be an award at the end of Broad General Education.

Part 2 – A New Model for Qualifications and Assessment

Draft Qualifications and Assessment Model

Since the first meeting the IRG has been working towards the goal of identifying a new model for Qualifications and Assessment that meets the needs of Scotland's learners in a 21st century Scotland. Phase One and Phase Two have provided the grounding for this third and final phase. At the end of Phase Three, the Review will produce a series of recommendations for the Cabinet Secretary that are pragmatic and are presented in terms of short, medium and longer-term actions.

As noted earlier, we believe that change is essential to avoid learners in Scotland being left behind as other countries adopt new and creative approaches to assessment that are more reflective of the world in which we live. Our proposals will be designed to build on the original aims of CfE and will propose a model of change allowing learners greater freedom to demonstrate a full range of achievements whilst paying attention to teacher workload. We are acutely aware of the stress on young people of high-stakes examinations in schools and the fact that the “two term dash” to most examinations remains an unacceptable reality.

Building on the evidence we have received to date including consultation responses; we believe we are now in a strong position to propose the following as part of a possible new approach. (Please note that any terminology used below is for illustrative purposes only and will be updated on the basis responses and other feedback gathered as part of Phase Three of the Review).

- Significant reduction in external assessment, including examinations, across the senior phase.
- A better and more clearly defined integration of academic and vocational qualifications.
- A broadening of the evidence collected during the Senior Phase including school and college partnerships to include skills and other competencies (see model below). The qualifications could comprise of three elements – subject, personal pathways and learning in context.
- The development of enhanced digital infrastructure that will enable the use of digital assessments and will also support learners to gather and present their achievements consistently no matter the educational setting within which they are based. A greater focus on digital assessments will reflect learning itself and for many will link better with the reality of the world of work and further study. The creation of a digital profile will help learners reflect on their learning and will help build a culture of learner choice. This aspect of the proposal could be made easier if Scotland had a national digital infrastructure.

- A Senior Phase Leaving Certificate, including school and college partnerships - Phase Three engagement also builds on the Stobart Report of 2021 by suggesting the creation of a leaving certificate as a means of drawing together more aspects of learning into a single form. We believe this is essential as it will allow a range of forms of learning to be recognised, valued and articulated. This approach will help a learner articulate their own skills and achievements while also allowing the users of qualifications, employers and further and higher education establishments to more easily develop the sense of an individual.

Our aim is to offer an approach that provides a better outcome for all learners. By offering a wider range of ways for learners to demonstrate achievements, providing opportunities for learners to investigate global or local challenges in areas of interest to them, and by reducing the number of high stakes examinations that cause stress to so many. In future, perhaps, introducing a degree of choice in the form of assessment for a qualification.

These are some of the areas we will consider during the consultation in Phase Three. If the idea of a leaving type certificate has broad support then we will begin to consider each aspect of the proposal in greater detail and from there begin to draft the final report.

The final report and recommendations of the Independent Review on the Future of Qualifications and Assessment will be submitted to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills by the end of May 2023.

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Annexes

Annex 1 – [Terms of Reference](#)

Annex 2 – [Independent Review Group – Membership](#)

Terms of Reference

Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment

To note these are the original Terms of Reference as of June 2022 which include a commitment to conclude the Review by the end of March 2023. Following the Cabinet Secretary's agreement in December 2022 and at the request of Professor Louise Hayward the Review has been extended to the end of May 2023.

Introduction

This document sets out the remit for the Qualifications and Assessment Independent Review Group (IRG), which will be led by Professor Louise Hayward, Professor of Educational Assessment and Innovation at the University of Glasgow (the IRG Convener).

Background

This work stems in part, from the recent OECD reports into Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence - Into the Future (2021) found that whilst CfE "continues to be a bold and widely supported initiative, and its design offers the flexibility needed to improve student learning further...the structure, learning practices and assessment approaches in the senior phase also need adapting to be consistent with CfE's vision, and to allow for the smooth curriculum experience promised from 3 to 18." The subsequent report by Professor Gordon Stobart, Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective (2021) sought to provide insight into the perceived 'misalignment' between curriculum and assessment and to highlight opportunities for reform of assessments in the senior phase.

In addition to these recent OECD reports, following the cancellation, due to COVID-19, of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams in 2020 and 2021 there has been a renewed public debate in Scotland about assessment, particularly in the senior phase. Thus, in October 2021 the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced that Professor Louise Hayward of Glasgow University would lead work, consulting on the purpose and principles which should underpin any reform of national qualifications and assessment.

This work will take as its starting point, a consideration and analysis of the OECD reports; prior engagement, research and the numerous consultation responses received as part of Professor Ken Muir's work which relate to qualifications and assessment specifically; early engagement by Professor Hayward with colleagues from the Scottish Youth Parliament and Children's Parliament and relevant prior research and surveys of students, teachers and parents & carers on this subject.

Scope

The Convener, supported by the IRG and Collaborative Community Groups, will provide a report and recommendations to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, advising on the purpose and principles which should underpin any reform of national qualifications and assessment in the 'senior phase'. This will predominately cover S4-S6 in school and ages 15-18 out with school, however it is also recognised that there may be implications for some adult learners who study courses which fall within the remit. The focus of this work will be school and college qualifications accessible in the senior phase. The review will not consider or make recommendations on the content of individual courses.

It is anticipated that the IRG will explore issues such as:

- the purposes and uses of a qualification/exams system, including recognition of learning, accreditation, selection and accountability
- consider the approaches to assessment in vocational and technical subjects and lessons that could be learned from these approaches
- fairness, equity and the impact of different approaches to assessment for qualifications
- from ideas to practice – the process of change and learning from our past
- wider National and International approaches to the future of assessment and qualifications

The conclusions that the Convener and IRG reach will be made independently of the Scottish Government and all other institutions.

The Convener will invite membership to the IRG from individuals who come from a variety of backgrounds and who have a range of skills, expertise and knowledge.

Collaborative Community Groups

A key responsibility of IRG members will be to facilitate engagement. Each IRG member will bring together individuals from their community to form a Collaborative Community Group (CCG). IRG members will be expected to gather perspectives and views from individuals and groups which reflect the diverse make-up of all of Scotland's communities. They will also be expected to think creatively about how best to engage their respective communities and consequently the operation of individual CCGs is expected to vary. IRG members and CCG will be supported by the independent Review secretariat within Scottish Government.

Evidence and insights gleaned from the CCGs will be brought back to the monthly IRG meetings and will form a fundamental and core part of the overall evidence gathered.

Membership of IRG and CCG

Membership of the IRG and CCG will ensure that all interested groups with a stake in the future of qualifications have the opportunity to feed into the review.

Membership will include, but is not limited to:

- those most directly concerned (users, students, parents and carers) ensuring that there are individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds from all of these groups
- those immediately responsible for delivering courses leading to qualifications – teachers, lecturers, school and college leaders and training providers including those representing the Gaelic Medium Education Sector
- those who use these qualifications as young people transition from higher education, further education, employers, and external agencies (e.g. Skills Development Scotland)
- those responsible for providing such qualifications: e.g. SQA, other awarding bodies and other regulatory bodies
- those responsible for local policy in relation to qualifications, e.g. local education authorities and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
- researchers in fields essential to the work of the group, e.g. curriculum, qualifications and assessment, equality and social justice, accountability, national and international assessment systems, sustainable change
- representation from all parts of the country, in both urban and rural settings.

Activities

- The Convener and IRG will undertake the following activities:
- develop and then collectively agree through a process of co-design a set of overarching principles for assessment. These principles will guide and inform the review process itself
- establish CCG that ensure all interested groups with a stake in the future of qualifications have the opportunity to feed into the review
- review relevant existing evidence and research
- commission national and international evidence to inform deliberations, as appropriate
- consider its work in the wider context of other relevant strategic reports including for example the work conducted by Professor Muir into the replacement of SQA and the reform of Education Scotland and the recommendations of the Scottish Funding Council Review for the tertiary sector
- work in conjunction with the forthcoming national discussion on education and ensure relevant findings from the discussion are taken into account in preparing a final report
- consider and take cognisance of the history and development of qualifications and assessment in Scotland to date
- produce practical recommendations that are forward looking, have a broad consensus of support and are in alignment with the values of Scottish society
- provide advice on the implementation of future change and potential timeframes

Outcomes and approach

The IRG will:

- demonstrate through its working practices a commitment to placing learners at the centre
- work at all times in an open, transparent participative and inclusive way; and seek to embody and promote ways of working that reflect these principles
- establish CCGs which operate in a non-hierarchical way and facilitate widespread and in-depth meaningful engagement with individuals and groups across Scotland, in particular with those most affected namely learners, parents and carers, young carers and care-experienced children and young people
- seek to build consensus and agreement to a shared future vision
- use a range of analytical approaches to generate evidence from policy, practice and research and from that draw evidence based conclusions
- publish relevant material on the Scottish Government website in a timely manner

The Convener will:

- work at all times in an open, transparent, participative and inclusive way; and seek to embody and promote ways of working that reflect these principles
- convene a meeting of the IRG on a monthly basis
- meet the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills regularly during the lifespan of the group to update her on progress
- ensure IRG members are supported to fulfil their responsibilities as detailed above
- provide the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills with an interim report
- produce a final report which is accessible and user friendly

Timescales

The Convener will begin this work in Spring 2022 and it will conclude by the end of March 2023.

Secretariat support required by the Convener, the IRG and CCG will be provided through the Education Reform Directorate in Scottish Government. The Secretariat will work independently of the Scottish Government in support of the Review.

Sponsor arrangements

The Curriculum and Qualifications Division in the Education Reform Directorate will be the Convener's sponsor Division within the Scottish Government. The named sponsor for this work will be the Deputy Director for Curriculum

Contact

[Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment](#)

Membership of the Independent Review Group

Note that almost all IRG members lead an associated Collaborative Community Group (CCG). IRG members in this role do not represent organisations but serve to link with a community in addition the Review is working directly with a group of employers (public and third-sector), the Grant-aided special schools and the secure units.

Those for whom qualifications matter most

Learners

- Beinn Grant (Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament)
- Ruby Cardie (Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament) from February 2023
- Zainab Adeleye (Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament) until January 2023

Parents/Carers

- Cheryl Burnett (NPFS)
- Barrie Sheppard (NPFS)
- Eileen Prior (Connect)

Those who design, develop and offer qualifications

Teachers and lecturers

- Andrea Bradley (General Secretary, EIS Union)
- Peter Bain (Headteacher)
- Andrew Findlater (Principal Teacher)

Design and development

- Douglas Hutchison (Local government)
- Gill Stewart / Margaret Farragher – shared role (SQA)
- Aileen Ponton (National qualifications alignment) until December 2022
- Pauline Radcliffe (National qualifications alignment) from December 2022

Informing the process: Research

- Professor Chris Chapman (University of Glasgow) : Change process
- Professor Mark Priestley (University of Stirling) and Dr Joseph Smith - shared role Curriculum
- Professor Jo-Anne Baird (Oxford University) Qualifications and Assessment
- Dr Edward Sosu (Strathclyde University) Equity

Informing the process: Policy

- Professor Ken Muir (University of the West of Scotland)
- Professor Gordon Stobart (University of Oxford)
- Professor Graham Donaldson (University of Glasgow)

Those who use qualifications

- Tracy Black (Scottish Confederation of British Industry)
- Professor Ken Thomson (Forth Valley College)
- Professor Jonathan Powles (University of the West of Scotland)



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