

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday September 20th, 2023, Session: 6

Location: TG.40-CR1 The Burns Room

Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment

Introduction

Thank you for taking time to read the report, of the Independent Review Group, ‘It’s Our Future’’. There are five key ideas we would like to draw to your attention.

1 The Report offers a longer-term direction of travel for qualifications and assessment in Scotland.

‘It’s Our Future’ recognises that the radical changes underway in society require changes in the approach Scotland should take to qualifications and assessment. All learners need to be supported appropriately as they move beyond school into employment, further or higher education or to work in the voluntary sector. This matters for every learner. It also matters for Scotland. The potential for the country to be successful, socially, culturally, and economically is inextricably linked to the success and progress of its learners. This matters for all our futures.

There has been consistent evidence across several Reviews from learners and teachers, that the experience of many learners in the senior phase of Scottish Education is not as we would wish it to be (OECD, 2021, Stobart, 2021, Muir, 2022, National Discussion 2023, Withers, 2023). The findings from this Review offer an opportunity to

- develop qualifications and assessment that are more consistent with Scotland’s curriculum.
- align Scotland with the direction of educational travel globally.
- offer all learners better experiences and outcomes in the senior phase.
- support teachers to focus on learning and teaching.

‘Any review of qualifications and assessment that seeks to make a positive difference to the lives of learners has to begin by asking bigger questions. What

does it mean to be an educated citizen in Scotland in the mid to late 21st century? What would it mean to be qualified for that? What knowledge, skills and capacities will learners need to thrive? Only then can you begin to think about the kinds of qualifications that will support learners in the next stage of their lives, whether that is in education, employment or in the voluntary sector.'

Foreword

2 This is not the Hayward Report.

The danger of having a single name associated with a report is that it can be perceived to be the view of a single person. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The proposals for the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland provided in *'It's Our Future'* emerge from a process of extensive consultation and engagement. This process included all those who have a stake in the future success of any qualification and assessment system. Ideas were debated, different perspectives considered, and positions agreed. No proposal will ever have unanimous support, but the recommendations contained in *"It's Our Future"* command significant support from across communities.

The Independent Review Group (IRG) included members from a wide range of communities.

- Young People, Adult Learners and, as appropriate, their parents and carers.
- Those involved in the design, development and those who offer qualifications, including teachers and headteachers, national agencies and local and national policy communities.
- Those who use qualifications, colleges, employers (international/public sector/smes) and universities.

Members did not represent organisations but acted as links to their community. Each IRG member led and sought views from a community, collaborative group that included a range of perspectives. There was a specific request to include 'seldom heard voices'.

In addition, five groups, including national and international experts, offered advice on key issues: curriculum, equity, policy coherence, qualifications and assessment and the process of change.

'It's Our Future' commands support from across communities. No significant proposal for change will ever have universal support but this report was developed with people and their commitment to the ideas within it is exemplified in the quotations at the beginning of the report (pp 7-12). Some examples are offered in Appendix A.

Beyond the IRG and CCGs, different approaches to consultation were used to engage as many people as possible. For full details see PP -

3. The Vision is Crucial and Should Remain Crucial.

The process began with the development of a shared vision for the future of qualifications and assessment.

'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 why of change is just as important as the what, the how and when. Too many innovations lose the connection between why change is needed and what and how change should be taken forward. It is when a sense of purpose is lost that problems arise.

The vision should serve as the basis of the system design and a means of monitoring its implementation.

The Three Areas of The Scottish Diploma of Achievement are designed to serve the vision to

- More closely match the aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence
- Guarantee educational and assessment experiences for every learner that will support them more effectively in the next phase of their lives. Colleges, Employers and Universities all use a wide range of approaches to assessment.

- Maintain examinations as a key part of the system but reduce the number of examination diets from three to two. The Stobart Report identified Scotland as a country with the most examined young people in the world.

4 The Process of Change should Be Carefully and Co-constructively Planned. The pace of putting ideas into practice should depend on the level of resource available.

There are 26 recommendations clustered into three areas:

Create the Conditions

- place learners' interests at the heart of every decision during the process.
- develop an implementation strategy for the three phases, including a communications plan to raise awareness of the SDA across all IRG communities. This should include consideration of the digital infrastructure requirements and the opportunities and challenges afforded by AI.
- commission an independent longitudinal evaluation of the design, implementation and early impact of SDA.
- build collaborative networks where every organisation has a clear understanding of the roles each will play in the design and development of the SDA.
- review approaches to data gathering to ensure that they are consistent with the vision and the SDA and
- invest in professional learning to support implementation.

Create the Scottish Diploma of Achievement

- design and develop different parts of the Diploma with collaborative networks of educational settings.
- review and revise National Qualifications.
- put system-wide professional learning in place to support the Diploma Into practice
- implement national moderation plan and build system capacity to put it Into practice and.
- develop and trial e-portfolio and digital infrastructure

Embed the Scottish Diploma of Achievement

- first cohort of learners are awarded the SDA.
- ensure that all educators are confident and competent in supporting recognition of learners' achievement to be recognised through SDA.
- review and refine systems and processes based on early findings from independent evaluation and.
- monitor system-wide confidence in SDA and amend strategy as appropriate.

5 There are no ideas contained in this report that are not already in practice in at least one country. Many of the Ideas are in practice in some schools and colleges in Scotland. *'It's Our Future'* is both principled and practical. It seeks to make provision available to every learner.

Appendix A: Examples of Support Across Communities

Young People and Parents/Carers

Ruby Cardie MYSP, CCG, Young People.

“I felt as if our views were genuinely listened to and am glad that our response was well reflected in the results of the consultation, which included responses from learners within schools and colleges - including my own - up and down the country.”

Beinn Grant, MYSP, CCG, Young People.

“Together, along with our community collaborative groups, we have spent a year working on the proposed models for change and the new Scottish Diploma of Achievement; a model which I truly believe will keep the UNCRC at its heart as it supports the young people of the future on their own learner journeys. It’s vital, however, that opportunities for widespread collaboration and youth involvement like this aren’t a one-off chance but rather the new norm for reforms in Scotland.”

NPFS & Connect, Cheryl Burnett and Patrick McGlinchey, CCG Parents

"NPFS and Connect are grateful for the opportunity to contribute parent/carer perspectives to the Review and look forward to working toward implementing positive changes which will empower all learners to make the most of their learning journeys in the future."

The Profession

Andrea Bradley, EIS General Secretary, CCG, Teachers and Lecturers.

“At last, we have an opportunity, through the Scottish Diploma of Achievement, to better reflect the broader purposes of education in positively shaping people and lives, not simply measuring or counting learners’ achievements but fully recognising and valuing them. We need to grasp this opportunity with both hands.”

Andrew Findlater, DHT Charleston Academy, CCG Teachers.

“The Review of Senior Phase Qualifications and Assessment has been an ambitious, yet pragmatic process deeply rooted in what is best for the next generation of Scotland’s young people. Implementation plans have

been carefully considered to ensure the profession has appropriate support that leads to sustainable change”.

Peter Bain, Headteacher, Oban High, CCG School Leaders.

“This report has brought together an orchestra of evidence and opinion, all highlighting that the narrow subject based, heavily exam dependent status quo is not in the interests of our learners, our employers, our society. We need learners who have been given time and support to attain a wealth of knowledge, skills and experiences, and who are ready to take their place in the workplace, in society (either directly or via FE/HE).”

Local and National Policy Communities

Douglas Hutchison, Executive Director of Education, Glasgow City Council, CCG Local Government

“The report strikes the right balance between much needed reform now while pointing over the horizon to the ongoing and more radical change we need. It is now up to all of us in the system to deliver a more inclusive way of accrediting young people’s learning with the right qualifications.”

Pauline Radcliffe, Chief Executive SCQF, CCG SCQF Partners.

“I’m delighted that this Review has clearly highlighted equity and inclusion as priorities in the implementation of curriculum and assessment reforms and the central role of the SCQF in promoting learning programmes that support young people’s full development potential”.

Users of Qualifications, Colleges, Employers and Universities

Ken Thomson, Principal Forth Valley College, CCG College Principals.

“The introduction of the SDA gives recognition of skills alongside academic achievement and provides an excellent career pathway for learners. Through developing and sharing the delivery of specialised subject areas in school college partnerships and with industry support, a position unique across the UK, we really are talking about a truly integrated educational system in Scotland to the benefit of all learners.”

Tracy Black, Director CBI in Scotland, CCG Employers.

“Businesses understand that qualifications and subjects studied are just one piece of the jigsaw when it comes to benchmarking a young person’s skills and achievements. Employers also want to see the candidate behind the grade.... The proposal of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement represents an important conduit for communicating these different skills to employers by providing a holistic representation of the skills, competencies and behaviours individuals have already demonstrated and can offer to business. This will ultimately help ensure that school leavers can transition into the workplace with full evidence of what they have achieved”.

Jonathan Powles, Professor, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching & Students), CCG Universities

“Universities are very supportive of the proposals to broaden the body of evidence that can be used that learners are ready for university study. As society changes, university study changes with it, and the university students of the future will need to master not only specialist subject knowledge, but also weave together that knowledge in increasingly uncertain, changeable and complex contexts. Above all they will have to master the art of learning itself, so as to be effective contributors to Scottish society, industry, our professions, culture and polity. The proposed Scottish Diploma of Achievement will provide an excellent foundation for learners as they complete the university degrees of the future.”