

Sue Webber MSP  
Convener,  
Education, Children and Young People  
Committee

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19 September 2024

Dear Convener,

### **Publication of the Scottish Government Response to the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment**

This afternoon I will publish the [Scottish Government response to the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment](#) setting out the Government's next steps on qualifications and assessment, ahead of making a statement to Parliament.

Alongside the response I will also publish a number of associated Impact Assessments: [Equalities](#), [Child Rights and Wellbeing](#), [Fairer Scotland Duty](#), [Consumer Duty](#) and [Islands Communities](#).

### **Background to the IRQA**

As Committee members are aware, Professor Louise Hayward led an Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment. The Review was initiated in response to recommendations in the [OECD's Independent Review of Scotland's school curriculum](#) (2021) and [Professor Gordon Stobart's OECD paper](#) setting out possible options for Scotland's future approach to assessment and qualifications (2021).

[The final report of the IRQA](#) was published in June 2023. The report contains a series of far-reaching recommendations related to qualifications and assessment, including removal of exams at National 5 and the introduction of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA) which in effect would act as a leaving certificate.

### **Overview of Scottish Government response**

In view of the importance of decisions around qualifications reform, I have taken the time necessary to very carefully consider the proposals, reflect how they could work in practice and undertake further stakeholder engagement.

The Scottish Government response sets out our intended approach to delivering a fair and credible qualifications and assessment system that enhances learning and teaching while supporting better outcomes for young people. Commitments made seek to achieve a balance between ambition and action that is deliverable given the resources available, and the post pandemic challenges being faced in our schools.

### **Assessment/Programmes of Learning**

I accept that the balance of assessment in the Senior Phase should now change so that there is less reliance on high stakes final exams, with internal and continuous assessment contributing to a greater percentage of a final grade, while being mindful of potential impacts on teacher workload. This will help more young people successfully evidence their learning and for many it will reduce the stress associated with exams. However the value of exams in applying a consistent and objective standard as part of an overall approach is well evidenced and, as such, I will not be removing them as a matter of course at National 5. That said written exams may not be appropriate for more practical national courses and the SQA is already consulting on whether they should remain in some practical subjects.

I am also supportive of a move towards greater digitisation of exams and a pilot of digital onscreen assessment across various subjects, including Computing Science will start next year. Work to rationalise the qualifications offer in the Senior Phase will also be taken forward as will further work to explore how National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher could be organised into 'modules', to allow pupils maximum flexibility to build credit as they go.

### **Inter-Disciplinary Learning (IDL)**

I recognise the desire, including from young people themselves, for IDL opportunities to be more consistently available across all secondary schools and the skills and benefits this form of learning can bring. However, I am clear that these benefits can only be realised if the IDL on offer is of high quality, and it is clear that there is more work to do to ensure this is consistently the case. Therefore, building on the existing IDL co-design group facilitated by Education Scotland, a refreshed working group, chaired by a senior secondary school teacher experienced in the delivery of IDL, will bring together relevant partners already active in this space. This group will lead a new phase of work with the objective of better determining the place of IDL in secondary schools while ensuring an equitable and high quality offer for all young people.

### **Personal Pathway/Wider Achievement**

Young people in Scotland undertake a wealth of activity that builds their skills and confidence, and this breadth of achievement should rightly be recognised and celebrated. We will explore how best to recognise wider achievement with a range of stakeholders including young people. In doing so, and before considering whether or not wider achievement could be included as part of any leaving certificate, we will need to work through significant concerns raised by a wide range of stakeholders, principally that such a step would entrench and exacerbate social inequity. We will also support the continued development of the digital profile now housed within [My](#)

[World of Work](#) which provides a platform for young people to capture wider achievements and plan learning by recording the totality of their skills, strengths, experiences and qualifications over time.

### **Leaving Certificate**

The development of a leaving certificate is a shared long-term goal for Scottish education. We understand the potential benefits of a leaving certificate as a means of recognising a broader range of a young person's achievements. However, we also know that more work needs to be done to determine the content of the leaving certificate and how it will operate.

### **Support for the teaching profession**

I recognise that teachers will require support and professional learning if the changes being proposed are to be implemented successfully and we will ensure teachers are directly involved in the process of change and are empowered to lead the improvements we all want to see. I agree that teachers require more time if they are to accept a greater responsibility for formal assessment and I remain fully committed to the delivery of our commitment to reduce class contact time by 90 minutes per week.

Taken together this suite of actions relating to qualifications is an integral part of our wider plans to improve the curriculum and develop a national skills framework. However, our ambition to improve Scottish education does not start and end with curriculum improvement and qualifications reform. A holistic and longer-term approach, which takes account of the changes in our schools' post pandemic, is required to drive the changes that will support better outcomes for our children and young people. I will set out an overarching improvement plan later this year as part of the National Improvement Framework. This will set out the short, medium and longer term improvement priorities for Scottish Education, with a clear focus excellence and equity.

I hope that this overview of the response is helpful, and I look forward to continuing to work constructively with the Committee to make improvements to our education system and improve outcomes for young people.

Yours sincerely,

**JENNY GILRUTH**