

Review of the Future of Qualifications and Assessment: Consultation on Options For Change

October 2022

1. Review of the future of Qualifications and Assessment: Consultation on Options for Change.

1.1 Why is there a need for an Independent Review?

Recognising the need to look to the future, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced in October 2021 the intention to reform qualifications and assessments. This reform process will seek to ensure that all learners' achievements are fairly recognised to afford every learner an enhanced and fair opportunity to demonstrate the breadth, depth and relevance of their learning. The review covers English Medium and Gaelic Medium Education.

This was influenced by:

- recommendations in the [OECD's independent review of Scotland's school curriculum](#)
- the COVID-19 pandemic and a renewed debate around assessment following the cancellation of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams in 2020 and 2021
- [Professor Gordon Stobart's OECD paper](#) setting out possible options for Scotland's future approach to assessment and qualifications
- Professor Ken Muir's Report (2022) – [Putting learners at the centre](#)
- Angela Morgan's Report (2020) [Support for learning: all our children and all their potential](#)

The Review's [Terms of Reference](#) are available here.

The Review is independent from the Scottish Government, local authorities and other public bodies. Emerita Professor Louise Hayward will provide recommendations to the Cabinet Secretary in March 2023.

1.2 Who is involved in the Review?

We have designed the Review to provide opportunities to all those who are interested in the future of Qualifications and Assessment. We want to ensure that our recommendations make the most of the opportunities open to us to transform the way we approach qualifications and assessments. To do this we need to engage and listen to as many people as possible. This consultation is part of that process. It will promote extensive engagement with the public alongside continued widespread engagement with learners, schools, and colleges.

The Review is being led by Professor Hayward supported by an Independent Review Group (IRG) comprising of:

- those for whom qualifications matter most (learners and parents/carers),
- designers, developers and those who offer qualifications (extended profession and policy and

- those who use qualifications (colleges, employers, universities, voluntary sectors).

You can see the [members of the Independent Review Group](#) which meets monthly.

The Independent Review Group works with 13 Collaborative Community Groups (CCGs). These CCGs act as a link to a wide range of communities and will ensure an inclusive and participatory approach which recognises and embraces the diversity of Scotland's learners and communities. These groups specifically seek to involve people whose voices are seldom heard in policy discussions.

1.3 What is the Review doing?

The Review will progress through three phases. We are currently in Phase Two.

Phase One: Engagement on Vision and Principles

The first phase invited feedback on a draft Vision and Principles statement. These draft statements were first developed with colleagues from the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children's Parliament. Phase One received 260 responses from schools and colleges alongside detailed comments from Collaborative Community Groups.

The feedback received during Phase One is being analysed by an independent researcher. The Review has however been able to develop the draft Vision and Principles and the current version follows below. This will be developed further in the coming months before being finalised at the end of the year.

Following an analysis of views expressed in relation to the Vision it has been redrafted and is currently as follows.

Qualifications and awards in Scotland should:

- reflect the broad curriculum
- recognise every learner's achievements, and
- provide evidence to inform the next steps in their learning journey.

Following an analysis of views expressed in relation to the Principles have been redrafted and are currently as follows.

Scotland's qualifications system should:

- reflect the aspirations of the curriculum and be responsive to the changing needs of individual learners and Scotland locally and as part of global society.
- recognise the achievements of every learner.

- be clear, coherent and understood by all, as part of a lifelong learning journey.
- be inclusive both in design and development.
- support flexible approaches to assessment.

We are now in Phase Two of the process. This phase seeks to consult on proposals for potential Options on the future of Qualifications and Assessment.

The Review is:

- exploring different Options for the future of Qualifications and Assessment
- continuing to work closely with our IRG and CCG members and encouraging responses from every school and college in Scotland and
- asking for views on different ways that the Vision and Principles might be put into practice

The evidence from responses to this phase will be independently analysed and used to identify a preferred proposal.

Phase Three. In January 2023, the third phase of the Review will begin and we will seek views primarily through the CCGs and schools and colleges on the preferred proposal for the future of Qualifications and Assessment. In this phase the focus will be concerned with practical implications.

Following completion of the three phases we will produce a final report and recommendations which will be submitted to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in March 2023.

1.4 What is the Relationship between the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment and the National Discussion?

Arising from recommendations in the Muir Report (2022), *Putting Learners at the Centre*, the National Discussion is focused on gathering views from the public on a future vision for Scottish Education. Our Review, on the future of Qualification and Assessment, is focussed on the review of qualifications and assessment in the senior phase. Whilst there are close links and regular communication with colleagues in the National Discussion our Review is independent of Scottish Government. The National Discussion is being jointly led by Scottish Government and COSLA. The Independent Review will also report after the National Discussion allowing time to consider the findings from that piece of work before reporting to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills by the end of March 2023. You can find out more information about the [National Discussion](#) here.

1.5 Responding to this Consultation

We are inviting responses to this consultation by 16 December 2022. It is important to note that in responding there is no need to provide an answer to every question in

this document. It may be that some areas of the consultation are of more interest to you or your organisation than others and the Review is grateful for any views you may wish to share.

Please respond to this consultation using the Scottish Government's consultation hub, Citizen Space (<http://consult.gov.scot>). Access and respond to this consultation online at <https://consult.gov.scot/education-reform/professor-haywards-independentreview/> You can save and return to your responses while the consultation is still open. Please ensure that consultation responses are submitted before the closing date of 16 December.

If you are unable to respond using our consultation hub, please complete the Respondent Information Form to:
Secretariat: Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment
Scottish Government
2B North
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh

1.6 Next steps in the process

Where respondents have given permission for their response to be made public, and after we have checked that they contain no potentially defamatory material, responses will be made available to the public at <http://consult.gov.scot>. If you use the consultation hub to respond, you will receive a copy of your response via email.

Following the closing date, all responses will be analysed and considered along with any other available evidence to help us. Responses will be published where we have been given permission to do so. An analysis report will also be made available.

1.7 Comments and complaints

If you have any comments about how this consultation exercise has been conducted, please send them to the contact address above or email qualificationsreform@gov.scot

1.8 Scottish Government consultation process

This is a consultation on behalf of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment that is being hosted by the Scottish Government. Consultation is an essential part of the policymaking process. It gives the Review an important opportunity to consider your opinion and expertise on a proposed area of work.

You can find all our consultations online: <http://consult.gov.scot>. Each consultation details the issues under consideration, as well as a way for you to give us your views, either online, by email or by post.

Responses will be analysed and used as part of the decision making process, along with a range of other available information and evidence. We will publish a report of

this analysis for every consultation. While details of particular circumstances described in a response to a consultation exercise may usefully to inform the policy process, consultation exercises cannot address individual concerns and comments, which should be directed to the relevant public body.

Considering Options: what information should be gathered on learners' progress and achievements. (For the purposes of its overall package of work and this consultation the Review takes a broad definition of 'learners'. A new approach to qualifications and assessment must benefit individuals no matter who they are or where their learning takes place)

2. Consultation Questions

2.1 Topic: Curriculum for Excellence - Four Capacities

Background: The 3 – 18 curriculum in Scotland is underpinned by the [Curriculum for Excellence \(CfE\)](#). CfE currently sets out four areas important for every learner. These four areas are often called the four capacities. They are that: Everyone should become a 'Successful Learner', 'Confident Individual', 'Effective Contributor' and a 'Responsible Citizen' and should be able to do what is set out in the more detailed exemplification of each of the capacities.

Successful Learners with:

- enthusiasm and motivation for learning
- determination to reach high standards of achievement
- openness to new thinking and ideas

and able to:

- use literacy, communication and numeracy skills
- use technology for learning
- think creatively and independently
- learn independently and as part of a group
- make reasoned evaluations
- link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations

Confident Individuals with:

- self-respect
- a sense of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
- secure values and beliefs

and able to:

- relate to others and manage themselves
- pursue a healthy and active lifestyle
- be self-aware

develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world live as independently as they can assess risk and take informed decisions achieve success in different areas of activity

Effective Contributors with:

an enterprising attitude
resilience self-reliance

and able to:

communicate in different ways and in different settings
make informed choices and decisions
work in partnership and in teams
take the initiative and lead
apply critical thinking in new contexts
create and develop
problem solving

Responsible Citizens with:

respect for others
commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life

and able to:

develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it understand different beliefs and cultures make informed choices and decisions
evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues develop informed, ethical views of complex issues

Whilst most courses in the Senior Phase have been designed to support the realisation of the four CfE capacities, in Phase one of the Review we have heard from many that qualifications taught in the senior phase of Scotland's schools and colleges 'focus too much' on 'only one' of the four capacities namely 'successful learners. This view was also shared with Professor Ken Muir and is discussed in his 2021 report [*Placing Learners at the Centre*](#)'.

Question 1:

- a) Should information be gathered across all four capacities? Yes/No/Unsure
- b) Please consider each of the capacities in turn. What kinds of information should be gathered on learners' progress and achievements in each capacity?

2.2 Topic: Out of school and college achievements or awards

Background: In Phase One of the Review, we have heard the view that learners should be able to evidence awards and achievements obtained outside school and college.

Question 2: What, if any, information on learners' achievements obtained outside school and college should be gathered? Please explain your response.

2.3 Topic: Skills and Competences

Background: During Phase One and through Professor Ken Muir's 2021 consultation we have heard the view that Senior Phase qualifications ought to focus more on developing learners' skills and competencies.

There are many different definitions of skills and competencies.

Skills: Skills are sometimes referred to as 'core skills', 'meta skills', or 'soft skills'. In this Review when talking about skills - young people, learners, parents/cares, colleges, employers and universities have told us that learners need to be able:

- to work together as part of a team
- be creative
- problem solve
- have resilience
- maintain their wellbeing
- develop critical learning skills
- to communicate effectively

Competencies: A competence is another term which can have different meanings. Academic competencies like written and verbal communication, attention to detail and active listening are soft skills essential for almost every job. These skills benefit students and ensure success in college and the workplace. A competence is more than knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to put different skills into practice in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competence that may include an individual's knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating. Interdisciplinary learning offers learners one kind of opportunity to bring together knowledge and skills to demonstrate competences.'

Question 3:

- a) Should information be gathered on learners' skills and competencies as part of their [senior phase](#)? Y/N/Unsure
- b) If you have views on how this might best be done please provide them here.

3. Considering how we gather evidence on achievements, award and qualifications

3.1 Topic: Exams and other forms of assessment

Background: The qualifications available for learners to undertake in the senior phase provide a variety of learning and assessment experiences including different learner pathways and have been designed specifically to support the aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE).

The majority of [senior phase](#) qualifications are internally assessed and provide flexible approaches to assessment including opportunities for interdisciplinary learning for example, National 1 to National 4 Courses (SCQF 1 to 4), Awards (SCQF 1-7), Skills for Work Courses (SCQF 3 to 6), National Certificates (SCQF 2 – 6), National Progression Awards (SCQF 2 – 6) and the Scottish Baccalaureate (SCQF 7). National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses (SCQF 5 – 7) are largely externally assessed and pre-COVID had been designed to have a balance of coursework and examinations. This was intended to provide opportunities for depth, breadth and personalisation and choice in learning as appropriate to the subject area.

However, regarding national qualifications, we have heard many calls for there to be a ‘better balance’ between exams and other forms of assessment. We have heard the view that often subject based senior phase qualifications rely too heavily on end of year exams. In some countries teacher assessment counts for a significant proportion of a learner's grade. [Professor Gordon Stobart's 2021 report](#) includes discussion of how other countries approach a balance between external and internal assessment. Professor Stobart also noted that in comparative terms, Scottish uppersecondary school students are ‘more frequently’ examined than those in other jurisdictions, i.e., in S4, S5 and S6.

Question 4: 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.

4. Considering how evidence should best be presented

4.1 Topic: Recognising Achievement at the end of the Broad General Education

(BGE)

Background: In other jurisdictions, learning culminates in a certificate of achievement. We have heard views that it would be helpful to have the learning of all young people recognised when they complete the [BGE](#) phase (this is usually at the end of s3). Some people have suggested that this should be a digital profile where a learner is able to show the skills, experiences, learning and qualifications they have accumulated to date, before they go into the senior phase. For most

learners, the BGE award would lead into the senior phase although could constitute a leaving certificate if an individual leaves school or college in S4.

Question 5: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE.

4.2 Topic: Recognising Achievement in the Senior Phase

Background: We have also received suggestions that there should be a leaving certificate available as part of the Senior Phase. This could potentially include a broader range of evidence of achievements than subject based qualifications. For example, a leaving certificate could include achievements, in individual curriculum areas, evidence of skills and competence development, contributions to communities and wider achievements.

Question 6: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing a type of leaving certificate in the Senior Phase.

5. Technology and Assessment

5.1 Topic: The Potential of Technology

Background: Scotland has learned a lot from the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, including how technology can be used to support learning. However, we are also mindful that we cannot assume that everyone has equal access to technology or has the skills they need to use it effectively.

Some countries make much greater use of technology in assessment and qualifications. For example, some have a system whereby learners' achievements in their senior phase are assessed online. Others use technology to give learners different styles and types of assessment e.g., on-line simulations. Some countries use digital profiles to gather and present information on learners achievements.

Question 7: How should Scotland's qualifications and assessment system make best use of digital technologies?

6. An Approach to Benefit all Learners

6.1 Topic: Equity

6.2 Background: One of the Review's proposed principles for the future of qualifications in Scotland is that it should benefit all learners. A future system of qualifications and assessment should fairly reward learners no matter their age, disability, gender identity, race, religion/belief, sex, sexual orientation or socioeconomic background.

Question 8: How can we make sure that proposals for a future qualification system will uphold the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements?

7. Have we missed anything?

Question 9: 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?

8. Next Steps

Thank you for your views. We will provide feedback on the responses we have received and the information will be used to inform phase three of this Review.



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