

# Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment

March 2023

## Phase Three Consultation: A New Model of Qualifications and Assessment Scottish Diploma of Achievement

Thank you for taking part in this third and final phase of the Independent Review on Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland. This stage is final in that following consultation, a series of recommendations will be submitted to the Cabinet Secretary. However, the work on the Future of Qualifications and Assessment will continue long after this Review is completed. The partnerships developed during this review will remain crucial to ensure that the vision for the future of qualifications becomes a reality of every learner in Scotland.

### Background to Phase Three of the Review

This is third of Three Phases of the Review designed to inform our work on the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland. In Phase One of the Review, we consulted on the Draft Vision and Principles. In the Second Phase, based on the Vision and Principles, we sought to explore options for a possible new approach to qualifications and assessment.

In support of Phase Three we have developed a potential new model for qualifications and assessment in Scotland that reflects the consultation findings. We are now seeking your views on a possible model for change.

## Scottish Diploma of Achievement

### Introduction

In the first section of this paper, we set out the background to the Review. In the second section, drawing on the consultation findings from Phases One and Two of this Review, we offer a draft model which we invite views on. At the end of Section Two we invite any further suggestions you would wish to make.

## Section One: Background to the Review

### 1.1 Why is this Review taking place?

Society, both in Scotland and internationally, is changing and the pace of that change is ever increasing. Soral, (Deloitte2023) recently compared the coming changes as “The Industrial Revolution for Human Intellect”. Scotland cannot be left behind. Recent experience during the COVID-19 pandemic renewed concerns about Scotland’s current qualification and assessment system. These include concerns that:

- the current model is not sufficiently flexible
- the current system does not serve all learners equally, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- there are gaps between the current skill base and the skills required to help the economy to grow and broader society to thrive.

It is therefore appropriate that we now look ahead to design a qualification and assessment system that will recognise learners’ progression, achievements and provide a strong platform for every learner to make that transition successfully.

\*Soral, S (2023) [The Industrial Revolution for human intellect](#)

### 1.2 What problems exist in the current system

Many consider that, despite our best intentions, some aspects of our current system are not working as originally intended, (OECD, 2021) (OECD, 2021) (Muir, 2022)<sup>1</sup>. Participants in the Review have raised further issues. Most of the concerns raised relate to National Qualifications. Examples of problems cited include -

- There is a perceived overemphasis on gathering evidence of achievements only/mainly in subjects.
- Three years of separate qualifications and associated assessment in schools have led to what is commonly described as the ‘two term dash’ towards final exams and in turn this has a negative impact on learning and teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> Muir, K (2022) Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education Available at: [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot/putting-learners-at-the-centre-towards-a-future-vision-for-scottish-education)

OECD, Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence Into the Future (2021) Available at: [Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence : Into the Future | Implementing Education Policies | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/scotland-scottish-education/scotland-s-curriculum-for-excellence-into-the-future)

OECD, Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland A comparative perspective (2021) Available at: [Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland : A comparative perspective | OECD Education Working Papers | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/upper-secondary-education-student-assessment-in-scotland-a-comparative-perspective)

- In recent years, the range of ways used to gather evidence in National courses has been reduced, although SQA plan to reintroduce some previous aspects, e.g. project work, in National Qualifications.
- SQA offers a very wide range of courses, but the range of qualifications used, in particular in schools, is often limited.
- Persistent socio-economic inequalities in achievements were brought to the fore following the Covid-19 algorithmic grade moderation.
- Home Educators report problems in accessing SQA qualifications.
- Teaching and learning often focuses on preparation for the assessment/exam and learners, in particular, feel that often their learning experiences have little connection with real life issues.
- There is a washback effect resulting from the use of National Qualifications as a metric of quality for schools and more importantly individual learners.

This Review is seeking to address these issues.

### 1.3 A Vision for the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland

Phase One (developing a Vision and Principles for the Future of Qualifications and Assessment) and Phase Two (exploring options for what these Principles might look like in practice) were independently analysed and the model we present here takes into account our finding so far. The model is intended as an illustration of the direction of travel over time for Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland.

In Phase One, we consulted on the Vision and Principles and the latest draft of these is attached at Annex A. Please refer to the Vision and Principles when you consider the model and respond to the questions.

### 1.4 Areas of general consensus about the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland

In Phase Two of the Review, we consulted on three major issues which have helped inform the design of a possible future model for qualifications and assessment.

- a) What qualifications and assessment information should we gather?
- b) How should information be gathered, e.g., teacher assessment, examinations, oral reports, project work, open book examinations?
- c) How should information on qualifications be presented?

A number of themes were identified from the analysis of the consultation undertaken throughout Phase Two. Very few, if any, proposals that are subjected to widespread consultation, ever have universal support but issues identified in this section represent areas of general consensus. Importantly there is widespread agreement that there is a need for change and that the learner should be at the centre of every decision taken about their education.

There is also consensus:

- a) On the information qualifications and assessment should gather
  - Qualifications and Assessment should enable learners to demonstrate their progression and achievements that reflect the broader aspirations of CfE.
  - Learners should have opportunities to demonstrate their progression and achievements in areas they have studied in depth, subjects and technical professional courses.
  - Learners should be able to show how they can apply knowledge and demonstrated skills.
  - There should be opportunities for more personalised information, e.g., ways in which learners have contributed to communities and their interests and experiences in social, cultural or economic contexts.
- b) On how information for qualifications should be gathered
  - Many learners who take National Qualifications have three consecutive years of examinations in individual subjects. This is too much. For courses where there are external examination, no student should take examinations in the same subject on three occasions.
  - Evidence of learners' achievements in different areas should be gathered in different ways. Crucially, the ways in which evidence is gathered should be appropriate to the nature of the subject.
  - A wider range of assessment approaches should be introduced, building on existing practice in respect of some senior phase qualifications.
  - There should be a better balance between internal evidence and external examination as part of National Qualifications.
  - Amongst learners and parent /carers there is a desire for learners to have greater choice in the ways that their progression and achievements are demonstrated.

c) On how information on achievements for qualifications and assessment should be presented

- Building a digital profile of achievements should provide an evidence base enabling learners to make good decisions about the next stage of their lives whether continuing in education or transitioning to employment. (Although recognising that there are technical challenges to be overcome before this could happen in practice).

## Section Two: The Proposed Model

Building from the Vision and Principles and the areas of consensus outlined above, the following model is proposed.

Please note that any terminology and illustrations used in this section of the paper are in draft form and will be updated following Phase 3 of the Review.

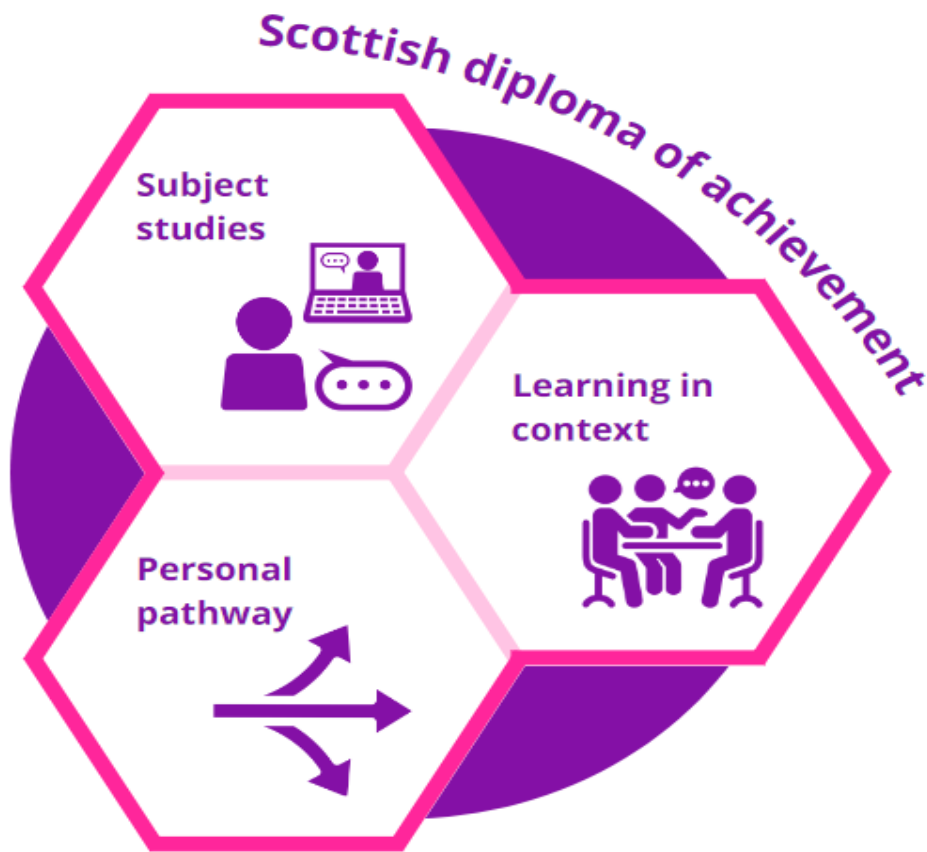
We now seek views on a model that seeks to respond to the issues described previously. For the purposes of the Phase Three we call it, the Scottish Diploma of Achievement. The Diploma is primarily intended to allow evidence of learner achievements to be gathered in a broader range of areas than is currently the case.

Our working assumption is that every learner will work towards a Diploma of Achievement and for the Diploma to be awarded a learner must demonstrate achievement in all three elements of the model that are set out below. All learners would leave education settings with a profile of their achievements in each of these areas.

Further work will have to be undertaken before a model like this could become practice and there would be a range of issues to consider before considering implementation.

For example we know that adding more to the workload of teachers and others is not sustainable and feel that decisions must be taken to identify what teachers stop doing to allow space for new practices to evolve. It is also important for us to reflect on what was learned from the development and implementation of CfE, what worked and what we should seek to avoid in terms of the current education reform agenda.

As outlined above the model should be read side by side with the Vision and Principles. All future decisions about how the model will become practice will be based on the Vision and Principles, i.e., what purposes future qualifications and assessment are intended to achieve.



The Diploma would include evidence from achievement in:

- **Study in Subjects, Programmes or Curricular Areas.** In secondary schools for most learners this would involve progress in individual subjects, for some learners it would reflect progress in curricular areas; in colleges it would include progress in programmes of study.
- **Learning in Context.** An interdisciplinary project-based approach where evidence is gathered on achievements between subjects and across knowledge, skills and competences in action.
- **A Personal Pathway.** Here learners have opportunities to select aspects of their experiences that reflect their interests, the contributions they make to society and their career aspirations.

This Model is intended to:

- d) begin to address problems identified in our current system;
- e) be consistent with the Vision and Principles agreed in Phase One consultation; and
- f) reflect the areas of consensus identified by respondents to Phase Two of the consultation.

## How does the proposed model do this?

### Currently

Qualifications mainly record achievements in individual subjects. This is not regarded as well aligned with the Curriculum for Excellence emphasis on the development of skills for learning, life and work. Skills are currently recognised on SQA certificates but this information is not widely recognised by learners, employers or providers of post-school education. Some learners have historically created a personal statement when applying to Further or Higher Education which can provide an opportunity to demonstrate skills that extend beyond the acquisition of traditional qualifications. However, the Personal statement is now being removed from the University Admissions process.

### The Proposed New Model

Learners would continue to demonstrate achievements in subjects. They would also have greater opportunities to demonstrate wider achievements beyond study in individual subjects. The proposed new model would reflect the broader curriculum as envisaged in CfE. It would include an interdisciplinary project where learning from different areas of the curriculum is brought together to tackle a significant issue. This would offer a higher profile for skills to be evidenced, e.g., collaboration, task planning, problem solving, group work, resilience and creativity. At present, in Scotland, there are a number of skills frameworks. This is currently under review. When published, the Skills' Review will inform the thinking of this aspect of this Review.

In addition, in the personal pathway, it is envisaged that learners would be able to demonstrate evidence of their wider achievements. Flexibility in allowing access to learning beyond the confines of traditional subjects will also provide greater opportunities for those learners who do not at present work towards the acquisition of national qualifications.



## Currently

Most learners take National Qualifications in subjects. They may be presented for external examinations in the same subject in S4, S5 and S6.

## The Proposed New Model

Learners would continue to study subjects as having the opportunity to study individual subjects in depth is an important part of every learner's educational experience. Learners would build evidence of their achievements as they progress. However, and in alignment with the original vision for Curriculum for Excellence, learners would only be presented for external examinations when they exit a subject. For example, if a learner at the beginning of S4 states an intention to study for a Higher in that subject, they would gather evidence of achievements when in S4 and in S5 but would take an external examination only in S5.

## Currently

Learners' experiences in National Qualifications are commonly reported to be dominated by an extended period of examination rehearsal. Learners also report teaching that is focused on examination technique where they are encouraged to learn in formulaic ways. In some subjects, the balance in ways of gathering evidence is perceived not to relate to the essential elements of the subject. This is an issue most commonly raised in subjects with a practical focus where learners may not always be able to demonstrate the necessary writing skills but are capable of undertake the essential practical tasks.

## The Proposed New Model

The model would include a more appropriate balance between evidence gathered from examinations and from assessments undertaken in schools and colleges. The change in balance is likely to differ in order to reflect the wide variety of subjects on offer. Each subject should include ways of gathering evidence that allow learners to demonstrate what is really important in that subject. This could include a broader range of assessment approaches, e.g., observation, open book tasks, additional project based work, oral presentations etc. Extending the range of approaches to gathering evidence will allow more learners to demonstrate their achievements in ways better suited to individual learners.

**Question 1** - Do the three areas described above offer learners the potential to gather and reflect a broader range of achievements important for their future progress? Is there anything you would add or delete?

Now, please look in detail at each of the three areas

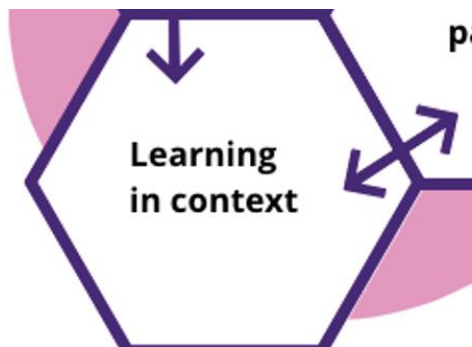


In the Subject/Programme/Curriculum Area component of the award, learners would include the evidence of their particular areas of study.

- g) For many learners, courses in the Senior Phase in secondary schools would be progressive over two years.
- h) Learners would accumulate credits when achievements are demonstrated. Students who choose to end their study of a particular subject at the end of the first year of the programme could leave with the credits they have accumulated converted into an award that recognises their achievements. Credits would therefore be accumulated throughout the course and programme providing learners with evidence of achievement should they not complete the course.
- i) In National Qualifications, most learners would accumulate credits throughout the two-year programme and take an external examination at the end of the second year.

- j) Learners could elect to demonstrate achievements by building assessment evidence over the duration of the course/programme (moderated internal assessment) or by a balance of internal and external assessment, e.g., an examination. Learner choice needs to be set within a context of a system that is fair and reliable.
- k) The balance of internal and external assessment would vary from subject to subject to reflect their differing purposes.
- l) Courses will include a broad range of approaches to assessment designed to provide learners with multiple ways to demonstrate their achievements.

**Question 2** - What are your views on the proposals for recognising achievements in subjects/curricular areas?



**Learning in Context:** An interdisciplinary project-based approach where evidence is gathered on learners' achievements across knowledge, skills and competences in action.

This part of the Scottish Diploma of Achievement offers learners opportunities to demonstrate their achievements as they use knowledge and skills to tackle a real world challenge. This element is designed to address a number of issues raised during the Review. Learners expressed a desire to engage in learning around matters of importance to them and to the future of society and colleges, employers and universities argue that key skills (or meta-skills) are crucial to a learner's future success in society and the workplace.

Interdisciplinary learning can take a variety of forms. For some learners, they may wish to explore a global challenge such as climate change, social justice or migration from an interdisciplinary perspective. Other learners might focus on a local community task or on independent living. We have seen and heard of a wide range of existing programmes in educational settings that are interdisciplinary and project based. These projects inspire and motivate learners and could form the starting point for developments that could inform this aspect of the qualification. There are also examples of this kind of approach in development within the wider SQA profile of courses. Learning in Context would allow learners to demonstrate their ability to collaborate, to problem solve, to manage time and resources in an area that would

inspire them to learn and, in a context, closer to many real-life challenges they will face beyond school. This aspect of the Diploma would be assessed against broadly defined criteria to encourage creative approaches to Learning in Context.

**Question 3** - What are your views on the proposals for recognising achievements in knowledge and skills in action?



The third part of the Scottish Diploma of Achievement is the Personal Pathway:

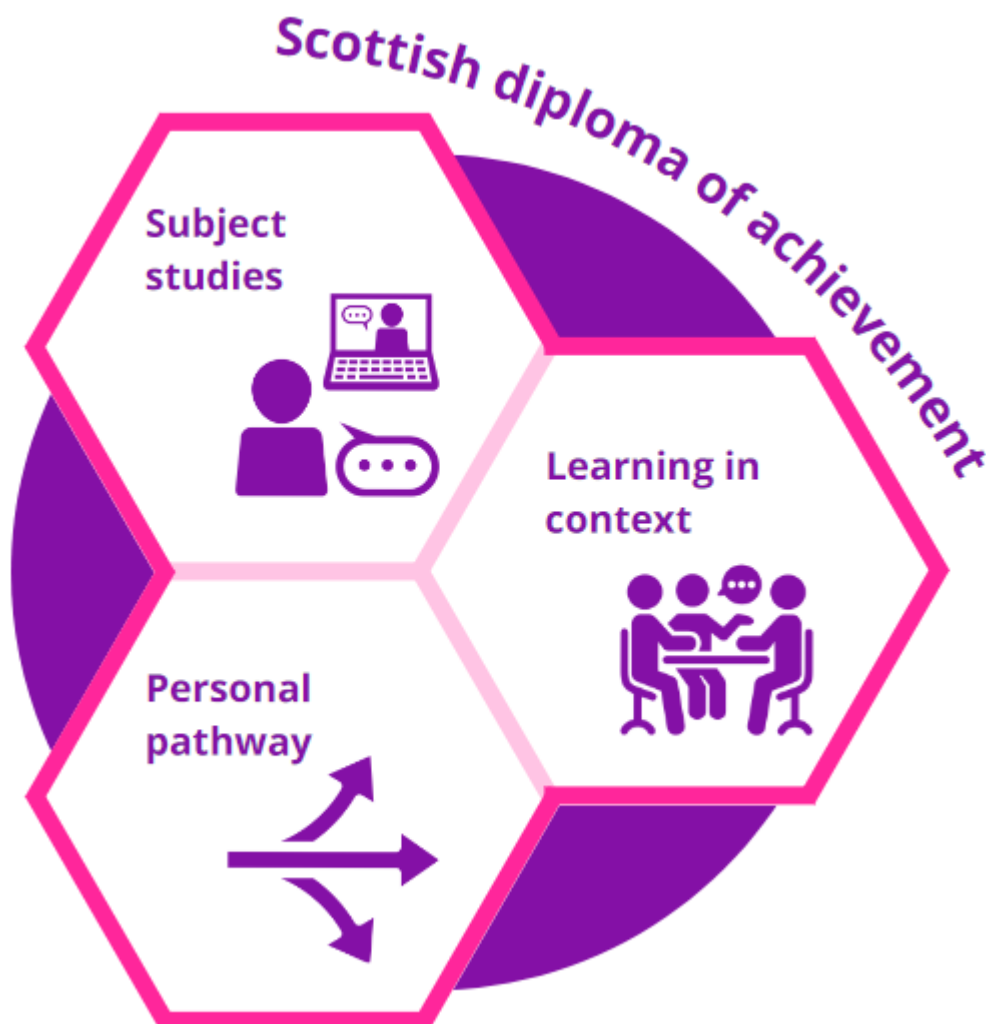
This offers learners opportunities to select aspects of their personal experiences that reflect their interests, the contributions they make to society and their career aspirations. The way in which this part of the learner profile develops would be subject to discussion with every learner by a member of staff within the education setting they attend also involving parents/carers. The Personal Pathway would have common characteristics and would be supported by a framework or profile that would help learners consider what achievements they would like to include.

Each learner would be able to include evidence of achievements in a range of areas.

- Social, e.g., contribution to school or to wider communities, personal responsibilities, volunteering.
- Cultural, e.g., engagement in cultural activities broadly defined, music, art, drama, Gaelic culture, sport, wider cultures.
- Economic, e.g., developing over time a profile of activities, part-time employment, careers including enterprise, voluntary work through, for some learners, to Foundation Apprenticeships. The Careers' Review is to be published shortly and this will inform thinking in the development of this area.

**Question 4** What are your views on the proposals designed to recognise achievements in respect of personal learning?

The Scottish Diploma of Achievement



The Scottish Diploma of Achievement would be awarded on completion of all three aspects.

It is intended that the SDA will serve a range of purposes providing:

- A record of every learner's progression and achievements.
- An evidence base from which they can draw on, post school and college education.
- A profile that they can carry with them into the next phase of their lives, adding to it as they build new skills and have further achievements they wish to be recognised.

Evidence would be gathered in a digital profile which the learner would have ownership of. Information within the profile would be jointly created by the learner, their educational setting and the national qualifications body.

**Question 5a)** - What are your views on the idea of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement for all learners in Scotland?

**Question 5b)** - If you support this idea, what actions should be taken to make this approach work in practice? What alternative would you propose that would be consistent with the vision and principles identified in Phase One of the Review?

**Question 6** - What changes to existing practice, if any, would you recommend to support the development of a new qualifications and assessment system?

### Parity of Esteem

We have heard a great deal of commentary on the importance of ensuring there is parity of esteem between what are known as academic and professional and technical subjects or programmes of study. Language is an important element of this narrative. Terms such as; “other qualifications and awards”, “wider achievement” and even the term “vocational” suggest (to some) that these are somehow ‘other’ or are for those who are unlikely to achieve well at NQ and this can play a part in undermining their value. Within the proposed model we would expect that all qualifications at the same SCQF Level would be subject to the same descriptor without distinguishing the type and believe this would be a positive step in acknowledging the value of all forms of learning undertaken as part of the senior phase and beyond.

**Question 7** – To promote parity of esteem across all qualifications, academic or technical and professional, should all qualifications at a particular SCQF level have the same name?

**Question 8** – Do you have any additional comments about the proposed approach to qualifications and assessment set out in this paper?

**Question 9** - Given we are now in the final phase of the Review we would be interested to receive any feedback on our approach to this important exercise.

Thank you for taking part in this final phase of the consultation for the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment.

## Draft 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 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.