



EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS CONSULTATION - RESPONSE

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CULTURAL SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform elected members of the results of the consultation undertaken on the next generation of national qualifications in Scotland, and to seek approval for the draft response from West Lothian Council.

B. RECOMMENDATION

That the Education Executive approves the attached draft response to the Scottish Government consultation on the next generation of national qualifications in Scotland.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

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| I Council Values | Focusing on our Customers' Needs Being Honest, Open and Accountable Providing Equality of Opportunity Developing Employees Making Best Use of Resources Working in Partnership |
| II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment) | None in relation to the submission of a consultation response. |
| III Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property) | None arising from the submission of a consultation response. |
| IV Consultations | Set out in body of report. |

D. TERMS OF REPORT

In June, the Scottish Government launched a Consultation on the Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland. This will run until 31 October 2008. The consultation's proposals aim to ensure that National Qualifications fully reflect Curriculum for Excellence and prepare young people for the demands of the 21st century.

The proposals include:-

- Retaining Access, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications whilst updating the content of all qualifications in line with Curriculum for Excellence
- Replacing Standard Grades and Intermediates with a new qualification
- Introducing new literacy and numeracy awards
- Increasing flexibility to better meet the needs of young people (e.g. allowing study for Highers over 18 months or two years as well as one year; introducing the option of winter exams; encouraging the most able young people to bypass lower level qualifications and study for Highers from S4 onwards.)

A comprehensive programme of engagement with stakeholders has taken place to inform the proposed West Lothian response. This included discussion with Parental Council Representatives on 21 August 2008, where the proposals were considered in the context of the wider introduction of Curriculum for Excellence. A series of seven open meetings for all teaching staff to discuss the proposals were held across West Lothian in the weeks beginning 25 August and 1 September 2008. Approximately 25% of teachers in West Lothian took the opportunity to attend these meetings. The Teaching Unions will be consulted at the meeting of the LNCT on 19 September 2008, and Headteachers were consulted at meetings which took place on 25 September 2008 and 1 November 2008. The head boy and head girl of each Secondary School were consulted on the proposals at a meeting which took place on 25 September 2008. The Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel was invited to discuss the consultation on two occasions, with the consultation document being sent to all elected members along with an invitation to attend the PDSP.

Amongst the common themes to emerge from the consultation meetings were:-

- The desire to retain the option for early presentation when this best met the needs of individual pupils.
- The desire to retain 'safety net' qualifications where earlier examinations are bypassed, but subsequent examinations failed.
- The desire to ensure all pupils could undertake formal qualifications before reaching school leaving age.

The programme of engagement and involvement was recognised as very valuable by those who took part, and was an excellent opportunity for professional dialogue within the teaching profession.

E. CONCLUSION

Members are invited to approve the attached draft response, drawn up in light of an extensive programme of engagement and involvement.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

A Consultation on the Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/09084232/0>

Appendices/Attachments: Appendix 1 – Draft Consultation Response

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Date: 14 October 2008

APPENDIX A

A Consultation on the next generation of national qualifications in Scotland.

Q1 Do you welcome the intention to update all qualifications at Access, Higher and Advanced Higher in line with Curriculum for Excellence?

Yes.

Attention must be given to ensuring that it is not possible for pupils to leave school without a national qualification, particularly amongst the group requiring More Choices, More Chances.

Q2 Early consultation has identified the 'best' features of Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications as:

- the 'inclusive' approach to certification contained in Standard Grade; and
- the 'unit based' structure of Intermediate qualifications

Are there any other features in the present Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications which should be included in the new qualification at SCQF levels 4 and 5?

Each course must be judged on its own merits, as the strengths vary from subject to subject.

It is important that the new qualifications will integrate with existing qualifications.

As well as demonstrating an individual's ability, the new qualifications should recognise team and collaborative working, in the spirit of A Curriculum for Excellence.

Q3 One of the proposals is to grade units. Do you agree that units should be graded A - C rather than pass/fail?

No.

The grading of units would risk over assessing pupils.

The focus should be on the quality of the learning experience rather than on grade outcomes for individual units.

Q4 Do you want graded units to count towards the final award?

No.

The grading of units would risk over assessing pupils.

The focus should be on the quality of the learning experience rather than on grade outcomes for individual units.

Q5 Which option for introducing compensatory arrangements would you most support?

- **Extend the range of grading in course awards to grade E.**
- **Recognise unit passes only.**
- **Compensatory award at the level of the course studied with no grade awarded.**
- **Compensatory grade C award at the level of course below that studied.**
- **Compensatory grade A award at the level of course below that studied.**

Recognise unit passes only.

Q6 The proposed name for the new award is General (SCQF 4) and Advanced General (SCQF 5). Please indicate if you are content with this suggestion. If not please offer an alternative and explain your choice.

Yes

Frequent changes to the names of examinations causes confusion amongst parents, employers and the wider community about the equivalency and relative value of examinations. Clear communication will be essential.

Q7 Do you agree with the proposal to offer literacy and numeracy awards at a range of SCQF levels (3 to 5)? If not please offer an alternative.

Yes

It will be necessary to name SCQF level 3 qualifications.

Q8 National Qualifications at Access 3 (SCQF level 3) do not have an external examination. Do you agree that any new awards in literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 3 should have an external examination?

If no external award is introduced the credibility of the new awards may be questioned, and consistency would be difficult to maintain. If the new awards are intended to assure employers of basic standards, rigour is necessary. Parents may also question an increased reliance on internal assessments.

However, assessments should recognise the whole range of learners' achievements and progress. It should be an integral part of learning and teaching, and support the curriculum rather than leading it.

Collaborative working should be recognised (see answer to question 2.)

Q9 Should the weighting between the internal and external assessments for the literary and numeracy awards be equal? If not should more weight be attached to the internal or external assessment? Please explain.

Weighting should be equal.

A clear model of how broad skills which have to be delivered in a cross curricular way are assessed is necessary.

Assessment should recognise the whole range of learners' achievements and progress. It should be an integral part of learning and teaching, and support the curriculum rather than leading it.

Q10 When should young people be assessed for literacy and numeracy awards?

- **At the end of S3 as part of the summer diet of examinations.**
- **In the December of S4 as part of a winter diet of examinations.**
- **At the end of S4 as part of the summer diet of examinations.**

Option A - At the end of S3.

Young people should be assessed for literacy and numeracy awards when they are ready, based on the professional judgement of teaching staff. Some may be ready in S2. Literacy and numeracy awards should take place before the earliest school leaving date for all pupils, to ensure that they are universal.

There is also a case for completing these assessments by the end of S3, drawing this period of broad and general education to a close.

Q11 Do you agree with the proposal to allow the study of Highers and Advanced Highers over 12 months, 18 months and 2 years?

Yes.

This is already common practice in some schools.

It must remain possible for a Higher and Advanced Higher to be completed within 12 months to allow 6th year pupils to complete courses.

Early presentations for lower level qualifications in S3 allows a two year Higher Course explored in greater breadth and depth.

Modeling to show how schools can provide the range of options is necessary. Perhaps only large schools will be able to timetable the range of provision.

Q12 Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a winter diet of examinations?

Yes.

This could result in increased pressure on pupils, however, who could have to undertake two sets of exams in one year, along with two (or more sets of prelims, unless they are restricted to choosing the winter or summer diet. If they are restricted, flexibility is not increased greatly.

The proposal would have staffing and timetabling implications and these require to be spelt out clearly (see answer to question 11).

Q13 If you agree with the proposal to introduce a winter diet of examinations, what subjects and levels of qualifications might first be offered?

Core subjects such as English and mathematics and those which are to form the Baccalaureate.

Q14 Would you agree with changes to the system which allowed the most able students to bypass qualifications at lower levels and begin study for Highers from S4 onwards?

Yes.

It would be necessary to introduce 'safety net' compensatory awards.

At present many pupils find that sitting qualifications at a lower level is useful in gaining experience of studying, and revising for and sitting exams, an indicator of future potential, and a motivator towards future success.

In the Council-wide consultation, opinion on this question was divided.

Q15 Do you have any other ideas for increasing flexibility within the senior phase (S4 to S6)?

Treat S1-3 as a proper stage with a diet of examinations/qualifications at the end that would recognise basic achievement in a broad range of subject areas, including literacy and numeracy. This would increase the flexibility available in S4-6 as the need for all to obtain basic certificates would be reduced.

A balance between breadth, coherence, personalization and choice will have to be maintained.

In the Council-wide consultation, there was a view in some quarters that there should be no formal examinations in S1-3 in the true spirit of A Curriculum for Excellence.

Q16 It is intended that planning for the new curriculum should commence in 2008/09, with approaches based on the new curriculum introduced from school year 2009/10. This suggests that the new and revised qualifications and any increased flexibilities would be required from 2012/13 onwards to ensure smooth progression between the curriculum and qualifications. Is this indicative timeline realistic? Please comment on any implications to be considered.

No.

The formulation of new courses is a major task that should not be rushed. The inclusion of literacy and numeracy and health and well-being in all courses also requires time.

CPD will be required to support all school staff in delivering the new courses. Failure to plan effectively for high quality CPD for all school staff will compromise the new qualifications and A Curriculum for Excellence.

Q17 Any Other Comments

The proposed extension of general education into S3 will not meet the needs of all pupils. Early presentation should be retained where it meets the needs of pupils due to its demonstrable impact on increasing motivation, stay on rates and attainment.

The proposed Baccalaureate may not meet the needs of most pupils. It may increase specialisation at the expense of breadth to an unacceptable degree. It may result in a two tiered educational system and reinforce the divide between vocational and academic education, against the principles of A Curriculum for Excellence.

More detailed guidance on the structures within schools that would be necessary to support a broad curriculum at S1-3, and the new examination framework from S4-6 is necessary so that resource implications can be assessed.

A much clearer message about the value of Vocational Qualifications is required in order to avoid a two tier system.

This response was prepared following consultation with teaching staff (approximately 25% took part in meetings), headteachers, the teaching unions, parental representatives, pupil representatives and elected members.