

Submission to Professor Hayward's Independent Review of Qualifications & Assessment

Commission on School Reform

Please consider each of the capacities in turn. What kinds of information should be gathered on learners' progress and achievements in each capacity?

The term 'capacities' is an unnecessary piece of jargon. The original Curriculum for Excellence paper in 2004 set out four overall objectives for school education. There is merit in having objectives of this kind.

Insufficient attention was given at the time to the question of how these objectives might be promoted and measured. For example, what kind of experiences does a young person require in order to become a responsible citizen? This is as important as the acquisition of relevant knowledge. Furthermore, it is not clear that school is better placed than, say, community organisations to provide such experiences. In other words, both parts of the question require the curriculum to be clarified before sensible answers can be given to the assessment implications. There would be considerable merit in reform of CfE but this should take place before consideration of different approaches to assessment.

This question also raises issues of validity and reliability as well as the capacity of teachers to carry out the assessments implied by the gathering of information across all four capacities.

At what level, individual, class, year group or school, would such information be collected? What instruments will be used to collect it? Will the information be quantitative or qualitative? Will it be set in the context of specified curricular areas, e.g. maths? Who will own the information and will it be shared with parents? To what purposes will the information be put and what action will be expected to flow from it?

At an individual level, what rights would a young person and his/her parents/carers have to challenge the data?

An alternative would be that the information collected focus on what a school is doing to promote each of the four capacities (and their sub-components) and how effective and inclusive it thinks its actions are being. Instruments, presumably surveys of some kind, could be produced nationally to support schools in doing this so that information can be gathered to promote school improvement.

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

The question does not indicate what use is to be made of the information gathered. For example, it could be useful in providing a fuller picture of the activities in which learners have been engaged, and potentially used to try and address inequality in provision.

If the information is being collected to highlight and recognise non-academic achievement on a collective basis, the Scottish Government needs to consider that a learner's achievements outside of school are influenced significantly by the facilities available in their community and their cost.

Consultation would need to be held with business and FE/HE to help them to understand the nature of the achievements to be recognised and ascertain what uses they might be put to. Evaluation would then need to be carried out of the inequality of access to such programmes. For example, some pupils may be able to include a Duke of Edinburgh award because their school enables them to take part, while others will have no such opportunity. Some pupils will gain awards due to private tuition, while others cannot afford such opportunities.

How can the data take account of the inequality of ability to participate? There is a real risk that such assessments will have the effect of making the attainment gap appear greater than at present.

It is worth remembering that achievements outside of school used to be recorded in individuals' 'Record of Achievement'. If the Scottish Government is to considering bringing back a similar system, evaluation of the failings of the previous system needs to be carried out.

It is important to remember that there are also existing opportunities for young people to describe their extra-curricular achievements through personal statements and job application forms.

Finally, it is unclear from the question who would be responsible for collating the data. We would be concerned about the additional administrative tasks that would fall to teachers if this data was the responsibility of the school.

Should information be gathered on learners' skills and competencies as part of their senior phase?

Presumably the information is to be gathered for the purpose of assessment and possibly certification. The same considerations regarding quality and reliability as mentioned in response to the previous question will apply here too.

Skills and competences are best displayed in relevant contexts, e.g. well-designed inter and intra disciplinary studies, the conduct of practical activities, the presentation and interpretation of data drawn from practical activities and contexts defined by the knowledge associated with a subject. Activities undertaken in such contexts, including day-to-day classroom activities, allow conclusions to be drawn about the skills and competences of learners. Teachers will require to become skilled in the design of a range of activities which will allow young people to develop skills and competences and then provide relevant contexts for them to display these.

The relevant skills and competences will vary from one area of the curriculum to another and from subject to subject. The means of gathering information about them will need to be determined in the appropriate curriculum context rather than on a more general level.

Furthermore, there is good reason to question many of the labels currently used to describe skills and competences. Is 'problem solving' in maths similar to 'problem solving' in history? What does

'creativity' mean in widely varying areas of the curriculum? Is it possible to bring any meaningful level of objectivity to the assessment of inter-personal skills?

Overall, the risks involved in this kind of assessment outweigh the potential advantages.

The dangers suggest that the task should not be attempted.

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.

It is not just a matter of the balance between external examination and internal assessment. There is an array of assessment instruments which are available for use in the assessment of knowledge, understanding and their application. The review needs to detail these and present their pros and cons and set out the uses to which they can be put. This becomes, as it were, the palette which those responsible for the design of assessments can draw on to fulfil that function.

There is also no single answer to this question, rather a decision should be made within each subject area. Maths and hard sciences are more easily assessed by traditional examination than are art and music. In each case, the aim must be to use a mixture of approaches which, taken together, will give a reasonable assessment of the extent to which the pupil has met the aims of the course.

There are also important principles that should be applied to assessment procedures. Very important among these is *fairness*; a requirement that the nature of the assessment and the circumstances under which it is conducted should not advantage or disadvantage different groups of learners. Any approach which makes possible assistance from parents or tutors, or can be assisted by the use of expensive IT equipment benefits children from more affluent families at the expense of the already disadvantaged. One of the ironies of the current debate is that people who would describe themselves as progressive tend to give uncritical support to the use of coursework and oppose written examinations which historically in Scotland have provided a means of advancement for groups such as girls, Catholics and children from low income families who traditionally suffered from discrimination and disadvantage.

There are other important principles which should also be taken into account, such as immunity from parental involvement.

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

What would this certificate achieve that is not covered by National awards? Over-assessment is already seen as a problem in the senior phase. This suggestion potentially adds important assessment in S3 to examinations in S4, 5 and 6. It could make sense in the context of wider reforms that reduced the assessment burden at later stages but no such proposals are put forward.

This question could only be answered in a context in which the overall shape of assessment in the senior phase had been defined. The notion of an award at the end of the BGE depends on clarity about when the BGE comes to an end. In those schools following official guidance about National 4 and 5 courses, it ends at the close of S3 but, in those schools where some significant part of National courses is undertaken in S3, it ends in S2 or at some ill-defined intermediate point. There is already concern about an excess of high-stakes assessment in the senior phase. Adding a further important assessment at the end of S3 while retaining those in S4, 5 and 6 would make no sense. At the same time, it is impossible to reach a view on whether it is possible to remove an examination

diet from the later years without consideration of broader questions. Will consideration be given to raising the compulsory education/training age to 18? How will pupils gain some experience of formal examinations at a sufficiently formative stage to enable them to tackle later exams with confidence? Is the current pattern of Highers and Advanced Highers appropriate or is some more radical reform of qualifications necessary? The consultation paper does not raise these issues but they are fundamental. Much more is at stake than the relatively trivial matter of whether there should be some kind of undefined award or qualification at the end of BGE.

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

In what sense do awards at the end of courses in S4-6 not constitute a leaving certificate? It is not clear what the purpose of an additional leavers' certificate would be. Is it to include an evaluation of other aspects of the young person's development, such as (to use CfE terminology) personal confidence or responsible citizenship? Would such an award provide learners with anything meaningful, or be of use to businesses, colleges and universities in terms of recruitment?

How will the reliability of measurement of much more subjective qualities be guaranteed?

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

There is obviously a strong case for using digital technologies to improve both the reliability and cost-effectiveness of the system. However, poorly designed, inappropriate assessments will not be transformed by being rendered digital.

Teacher and system capacity will be issues which will emerge as being of significance in this consideration as will the extent to which digital technologies are accessible to all pupils.

There are also issues around accessibility. Any growth in the dependence of learning on technology will widen social inequality unless strong safeguards are put in place, which would mean mainly generous subsidy of equipment and networks for people who can't afford these.

There are already inequalities in terms of access to a place to study, a lack of disturbance, time, broadband and parental support for any work towards assessment completed outside of school. State provision of devices does not solve those issues. The link between inequality and dependence on advanced technology was one of the most commonly found effects of the Covid-related closures in numerous countries.

There are opportunities to expand the use of technology in exams themselves and we would welcome work in this area.

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

The rhetoric of the consultation paper at this point consists of pious platitudes. It is right that all learners should have the chance to demonstrate their achievements but the achievements of some of the groups mentioned will not bear comparison with others.

Again it is important to recognise that there is not one answer, but to look at each subject course by course and consider which balance of assessment instruments is most appropriate.

It is also important to widen the involvement of those who use qualifications in recruitment. Business, colleges and university all rely on assessments to help gauge individuals. However, at present the system is designed entirely for university. A re-balancing of these sectors and their requirements is needed.

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?

This is a highly unsatisfactory questionnaire. Several of the questions appear to imply pre-conceived solutions which are not made clear. For instance, questions 2, 3, 5 and 6 seem to suggest a movement towards a system based on the assessment of a broader range of knowledge, skills and personal qualities, making use of information gleaned from a variety of sources but with a reduced dependence on traditional examinations. However, no such proposal is put forward. It is difficult to avoid the feeling that the consultation serves an agenda which is not openly revealed.