

Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment - Response to Phase 2

General observations

It is the opinion of Colleges Scotland that the questions in Phase 2 of the consultation appear disjointed from the Vision and Principles established from the Phase 1 Consultation. The Values and Principles refer to a qualifications system for Scotland which should recognise every learner's achievement as part of a lifelong learning journey. It seems, therefore, that the focus of Phase 2 is already very narrow, and there is a risk of a missed opportunity for the review to 'make the most of the opportunities open to us to transform the way we approach qualifications and assessments', as stated in the introduction to the consultation paper.

The potential missed opportunities include:

- To support the ambitions of NSET.
- To further strengthen School – College Partnerships
- To look at structural changes to allow for greater agility and responsiveness, and to support microcredentials.
- A system that recognises the skills gained by an individual and the application of that knowledge.
- To move away from teaching to assessment, to one of learning.
- Greater use of professional judgement, learning from the lessons during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To ensure a collaborative approach with the current Purpose and Principles workstream and the outputs that will emerge in due course from the Skills Delivery Landscape Review.

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?

Colleges Scotland shares the view, as highlighted by Professor Ken Muir in *Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education* that CfE, 'continues to offer a vision and a philosophy of education widely supported and worth pursuing.' In this context, it seems imperative that evidence is gathered across the four capacities and not simply focused on gathering evidence for being a 'successful learner.'

More broadly, however, the fundamental question of why we are gathering this information and for what purpose should be asked. The current approach to qualifications and assessment seems to be one of teaching to assessment, but the focus should be on learning. Success needs to be defined and should be measured in more than just one way, but focused on minimum standards of core themes.

Alternative approaches to assessment were developed by SQA (for AY 2019-20; 20-21; 21-22 AND 22-23) to provide flexibility for centres and learners, whilst maintaining the integrity of certification and public confidence. SQA worked with partners to design alternative approaches to assessment and Colleges, in particular, planned more innovative approaches to assessment, and sought opportunities to combine assessment where there was commonality or duplication across

units of study. Learning from the application of the approach by the College sector needs to be a central consideration to this consultation.

Question 2

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

Given that it is increasingly recognised that learning happens both formally and informally in many settings, the system must be adaptable. However, care needs to be taken to mitigate the risks around equity, diversity, participation and widening access, to ensure a fair approach is used and that the individual journey of each learner is valued and effective for them.

Question 3

a) Should information be gathered on learners' skills and competencies as part of their senior phase? Yes/No/Unsure

b) If you have views on how this might best be done, please provide them here.

The gathering of relevant information should go beyond the Senior Phase, and as set out in our previous responses should be reflective of the total achievement and ensure parity of learning and assessment styles. The qualifications and assessment system should lead to the development of skills - there is a challenge here that we are focused on knowledge and not the application of it. We should recognise student participation, achievements, and experiences throughout the academic year. Again, this is a narrowing of our understanding of the purpose of this independent review, which is about reform.

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.

This question around 'balance' of the existing approaches underlines our first broad point, that the opportunity is being missed to look at the structural changes that Scotland requires from its qualifications and assessment system e.g. use of microcredentials and agility of the qualifications system as two examples. Just focusing on the existing landscape (including the continued need to pass the exam), misses the importance of the opportunity for system change in the 'attainment driven' culture. We should be ensuring that the system is not just about learning and knowledge, but about skills gained and the application of the knowledge and skills.

Question 5 and 6

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

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

Whilst this allows some benefits, care would need to be taken in the design that this does not just focus on knowledge and also mitigates the risk of earlier de-motivation, ability to participate, and impact on confidence.

Question 7

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

A digital approach is one ‘tool in the toolbox’ and can be utilised if right for the individual. The pandemic highlighted huge challenges around digital poverty, both in the context of access to equipment and in connectivity, but also a safe learning environment. Care needs to be taken around the social aspects of any digital approach, which could exacerbate the impact on access to learning and gaining qualifications for those from more challenging or less supportive backgrounds.

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?

The system needs to recognise more and emphasise the importance of professional judgment, again drawing on experience from the lockdown and the aforementioned alternative certification model. The consultation document appears to have removed all mention of professional judgement. Certainly, colleges have mature and robust internal quality assurance systems which were externally endorsed by SQA in the application of the alternative certification model.

By ensuring we use the qualifications and assessment to support ‘education’, rather than a qualifications system will be important to ensure fairness for all learners.

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?

This review is one of a number of key consultations taking place in 2021/22/23 under a wider strategic review of educational reform. This consultation and review must link into the wider strategic discussions in order to maximise the opportunity for fundamental system change. This includes the Scottish Funding Council’s Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability, and the importance of a qualifications and assessment system that works across all of the educational landscape. The current narrow focus also misses the importance of ensuring any system going forward can support the aspirations of the Pillars set out in NSET.

As an overarching approach, the qualifications and assessment system must ensure a model that will deliver future requirements of learning throughout life and part-time study, along with the recognition of up skilling and reskilling. All of these will require shorter periods of study and so a system that can support micro-credentials and reskilling and upskilling will be required.

Colleges Scotland
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