

It's Our Future:

Report of the Independent Review
of Qualifications and Assessment



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Foreword

Any review of qualifications and assessment that seeks to make a positive difference to the lives of learners has to begin by asking bigger questions. What does it mean to be an educated citizen in Scotland in the mid to late 21st century? What would it mean to be qualified for that? What knowledge, skills and capacities will learners need to thrive? Only then can you begin to think about the kinds of qualifications that will support learners in the next stage of their lives, whether that is in education, employment or in the voluntary sector.

It is a sobering thought that young people entering Early Years just now may still be working at the end of this century. By then the world will be a very different place. We know that; but what is less certain is how quickly the world will change. Recent events have given us an insight however, into just how fast the pace of change may be. The opportunities offered by Artificial Intelligence technologies are almost overwhelming but so are the threats. The impact of Artificial Intelligence is one that learners of the future will live with and the skills they will need to cope must now be part of the future of education and of qualifications. What is certain is that societies will continue to change at pace and Scotland, will need a flexible, agile qualification system to support all learners into what will undoubtedly be a less certain future. The questions we are asking of our qualifications and assessment system are being asked by countries across the world.

The title of this report, It's Our Future, has its genesis in a statement made by a learner frustrated by feeling that learners had little say in decisions being taken about qualifications that would impact on them and affect their future and that of their friends. In recent years, qualifications and assessment in Scotland have been contentious. Traditionally, Scotland's qualification system has been highly regarded but there have been increasing concerns about the impact of three years of high stakes assessment on learners in the senior phase. In future, we need to be sure that every learner leaves education with a sense of achievement, linked to a positive future pathway. As a nation committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, -1989), that must be our goal. That is our best hope for a future society that is stable, happy and prosperous for all of us. It is all of our futures.

So, what do learners need for the future? The findings of the Independent Review suggest that learners need opportunities to study in depth subjects or Programmes of Learning. However, they and Scottish society will need more than that. Learners, schools, colleges, employers and universities told us that learners need opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills they need as they progress beyond school and college. The ability to work together, to use knowledge to tackle problems, to think creatively, to persevere are examples of the skills learners will need in life. In addition, qualifications should provide learners with opportunities to show who they are: what makes each person individual, their interests and wider achievements, the contributions they make to communities or to society more broadly; and how every learner might be supported to make good decisions about what they might do next. These are the achievements recognised in the Scottish Diploma of Achievement.

This is not the Hayward Review, although I have heard it called that; it is the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment carried out by the Independent Review Group. Membership of this Group was diverse, and each member worked closely with an extended Collaborative Community Group. I cannot thank them enough for their dedication and their support throughout the process. My thanks also go to schools and colleges across the country who responded to the three phases of the Review and to those who welcomed us as we visited and shared so many examples of exciting projects and experiences. I also thank the many organisations and individuals who offered their views through the public consultation. My thanks are also due to both Cabinet Secretaries with whom I have worked, the education spokespeople from across the political parties in Scotland and to the members of the Education, Children and Young People and Skills Committee. Most of all I would like to express my grateful thanks to members of the Secretariat who have worked so tirelessly through this major Independent Review. Every person involved has kept learners at the heart of discussions.

Thinking about the future of Qualifications and Assessment had not been an easy task. Twenty years ago, Curriculum for Excellence set out to bring qualifications and assessment into better alignment with the four capacities: successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. It succeeded only in part. The findings from the National Discussion (Campbell & Harris, 2023) suggest that the capacities are still relevant but that our qualification and assessment system does not yet align with the aspirations. This report from the Independent Review Group provides a unique opportunity to make things better. To give every learner in Scotland the best possible life chance and, to quote a member of Independent Review Group, Professor Graham Donaldson, to avoid qualifications being a drag anchor on innovation.

Qualifications and assessment are powerful. So often that power is reported to be negative. If their power can be harnessed as a force for good, the possibilities are exciting. This report is just the beginning. If we have the courage to take this chance, if we are prepared to work together to make it happen and to ensure that change is properly resourced, future generations of learners in Scotland will be grateful. For those of us who work in education, this is our chance to release the creative potential that exists within Scottish education.



Professor Louise Hayward on behalf of the Independent Review Group

From IRG members

Peter Bain, Headteacher, Oban High, CCG School Leaders.

“This report has brought together an orchestra of evidence and opinion, all highlighting that the narrow subject based, heavily exam dependent status quo is not in the interests of our learners, our employers, our society. We need learners who have been given time and support to attain a wealth of knowledge, skills and experiences, and who are ready to take their place in the workplace, in society (either directly or via FE/HE).”

“A Scottish Diploma of Achievement, ensuring the acquisition of both academic and professional subject knowledge through the Study element; learning in context through the Project element; and being able to demonstrate wider achievements no matter the environment through the Person element, will ensure our learners will better be prepared to take their place in society. However, to ensure the success of this SDA the IRG/CCG model should be maintained. It is an inclusive model, and has engendered a degree of trust across all those involved. The ultimate success of the SDA will depend on employers and universities seeking it as their principal requirement for interview or entry to courses and jobs.”

Jo-Anne Baird, Professor, University of Oxford, CCG, Qualifications and Assessment.

“Many learners, teachers and parents think the educational experiences of young people are dominated by exams. These reforms respond to the need for more diversity in the assessment system, to better fit the needs of the modern world.”

Tracy Black, Director CBI in Scotland, CCG Employers.

“Businesses understand that qualifications and subjects studied are just one piece of the jigsaw when it comes to benchmarking a young person’s skills and achievements. Employers also want to see the candidate behind the grade. The CBI’s 2022 Education and Skills survey highlights this: attitudes and aptitudes for work were the most prized skills in both graduates and school leavers, alongside core skills and relevant work experience. The proposal of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement represents an important conduit for communicating these different skills to employers by providing a holistic representation of the skills, competencies and behaviours individuals have already demonstrated and can offer to business. This will ultimately help ensure that school leavers can transition into the workplace with full evidence of what they have achieved”.

Andrea Bradley, EIS General Secretary, CCG, Teachers and Lecturers.

“The education that Scotland provides for its young people and adult learners has always been about much, much more than a set of qualifications but somehow we have allowed qualifications to become the instrument of measurement of how well educated individual learners are, and of how well our schools, colleges and our Education system is educating them. Not only does this miss out so much of what matters within a good education, it misses out many learners, all of whom matter too. At last, we have an opportunity, through the Scottish Diploma of Achievement, to

better reflect the broader purposes of education in positively shaping people and lives, not simply measuring or counting learners' achievements but fully recognising and valuing them. We need to grasp this opportunity with both hands."

Ruby Cardie MYSP, CCG, Young People.

"The future of qualifications and assessments must centre learners and our wider world, because not only do qualifications stick with us forever, but the skills gained from them do too. I am really grateful to have had the opportunity to represent learners with Beinn and Mo in the independent review of qualifications and assessments in Scotland. As young people, our contributions were taken really seriously by the independent review group due to our current, first-hand experience of Scottish qualifications and assessments. At the monthly meetings with the IRG, we advocated for a rights-based approach to learning in line with the UNCRC, which is gladly reflected in the review.

It was also important to hear the views of other young people. Before becoming a member of the IRG, I took part in the Scottish Youth Parliament's winter one-day event that focused on educational attainment and as part of this, I was consulted on the first stage of the review alongside other MSYPs. I felt as if our views were genuinely listened to and am glad that our response was well reflected in the results of the consultation, which included responses from learners within schools and colleges - including my own - up and down the country. I facilitated later consultations on stage two of the review, where we heard the views of young people on the Diploma. As part of the stage two consultations, we talked to the collaborative community group of young people and the Scottish Youth Parliament, in addition to hosting a young people's engagement evening that allowed a wider demographic of Scottish learners to be included in the review.

As members of the IRG, our views were not only heard but played an active role in the outcome of the review. This is the heartening result of the learner-centred process of the Independent Review on Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland."

Chris Chapman, Professor, University of Glasgow, CCG, Change Processes.

"The review of qualifications is a potential game changer for Scottish education. If the ideas and recommendations in the report can make their way through the system into schools and classrooms then all Scottish learners are likely to get a better education and have their achievements more appropriately recognised."

Graham Donaldson, Advisor, Author of Teaching Scotland's Future and Successful Futures (Wales) CCG Policy Alignment.

'This report addresses longstanding issues relating to the role of qualifications. Its potential will only be realised if we fully support necessary professional learning for teachers as they rise to the challenges of its realisation'

Andrew Findlater, DHT Charleston Academy, CCG Teachers.

"The Review of Senior Phase Qualifications and Assessment has been an ambitious

yet pragmatic process deeply rooted in what is best for the next generation of Scotland's young people. Implementation plans have been carefully considered to ensure the profession has appropriate support that leads to sustainable change."

Beinn Grant, MYSP, CCG ,Young People.

"I can't describe how incredibly grateful I am for the opportunity to have been involved in Prof. Louise Hayward's Independent Review Group on Qualification and Assessment as one of two representatives for Young People. Having been involved in the process from the start I know how challenging it has been to bring together people from every aspect in our society to co-design one collective vision for how Qualifications, and Scottish Education as a whole, should work.

Throughout the process Louise and other IRG members were actively seeking our input and making us feel heard. She consistently encouraged open dialogue, creating a space where we could freely express our ideas, concerns, and suggestions. Louise's genuine interest in our perspectives has been incredibly empowering and has reinforced my belief that Young People can and should be meaningfully involved in decision-making processes. Something that is unfortunately uncommon for Young People, like myself, to find in many reform and regulatory spaces.

I also want to acknowledge the Secretariat Team, my fellow MSYP Ruby Cardie, and our amazing SYP staff member Mo Whelton for their unwavering support, hard work and dedication. Together, along with our community collaborative groups, we have spent a year working on the proposed models for change and the new Scottish Diploma of Achievement; a model which I truly believe will keep the UNCRC at its heart as it supports the young people of the future on their own learner journeys. It's vital, however, that opportunities for widespread collaboration and youth involvement like this aren't a one off chance but rather the new norm for reforms in Scotland."

Douglas Hutchison, Executive Director of Education, Glasgow City Council, CCG Local Government

"Change in the education system is a challenge because we need to balance the needs of those in the current system with the pressing need for change. The report strikes the right balance between much needed reform now while pointing over the horizon to the ongoing and more radical change we need. It is now up to all of us in the system to deliver a more inclusive way of accrediting young people's learning with the right qualifications."

Ken Muir, Author of the Muir Report, CCG Policy Alignment

"Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education, elicited clear messages from practitioners and stakeholders about the need for cultural and mindset change, as well as structural change, in Scottish education. A critical driver in making these changes relates to the future of assessment and qualifications; how we can ensure they are responsive in the context of constant and significant change; and how certification recognises and values the wide and ongoing achievements of all learners. What is proposed in the Hayward report is a

major step towards ensuring Scotland has a modern assessment and qualifications system that delivers for all learners and is truly fit for the future.”

NPFS & Connect, Cheryl Burnett and Patrick McGlinchey, CCG Parents

"NPFS and Connect are grateful for the opportunity to contribute parent/carer perspectives to the Review and look forward to working toward implementing positive changes which will empower all learners to make the most of their learning journeys in the future"

Jonathan Powles, Professor, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching & Students), CCG Universities

“Universities Scotland L&T group met last week and remain very content with the direction of travel.

Universities are very supportive of the proposals to broaden the body of evidence that can be used that learners are ready for university study. As society changes, university study changes with it, and the university students of the future will need to master not only specialist subject knowledge, but also weave together that knowledge in increasingly uncertain, changeable and complex contexts. Above all they will have to master the art of learning itself, so as to be effective contributors to Scottish society, industry, our professions, culture and polity. The proposed Scottish Diploma of Achievement will provide an excellent foundation for learners as they complete the university degrees of the future.”

Mark Priestly, Professor, University of Stirling, CCG Curriculum, Pedagogy, Assessment and Qualifications.

“I very much welcome the directions in qualification reform signalled by the Hayward report. The move to a longer study period, personal development and an interdisciplinary project, alongside subject specialism, goes a long way towards establishing a qualifications system that rewards broad achievement while incorporating rigorous study. It is to be hoped that this renewed approach will address some of the endemic problems associated with current qualifications, including formulaic teaching and the two-term dash. I am confident that it provides the foundations for the development of the knowledge and skills necessary for navigating the complexities of modern society, including changing workplaces. One word of caution – we also need to address the culture where attainment is a high-stakes issue for schools, or we risk muting the positive effects of the proposed reforms.”

Pauline Radcliffe, Chief Executive SCQF, CCG SCQF Partners.

“As Scotland’s National Qualifications Framework the SCQF has, throughout its 22 years of its existence, supported learners and their guidance givers to plan and navigate their learning pathways, championing diversity of choice, quality and parity of esteem in the way in which education providers and employers recognise learning achievement, in whatever setting learning might take. I’m delighted that this Review has clearly highlighted equity and inclusion as priorities in the implementation of

curriculum and assessment reforms and the central role of the SCQF in promoting learning programmes that support young people's full development potential".

Joe Smith, Lecturer, University of Stirling, CCG Curriculum, Pedagogy, Assessment and Qualifications

"The current system of one-year qualifications distorts the curriculum in the senior phase. Such short courses lead to assessments which reward hoop-jumping and memorisation and give no time for students to develop deeper knowledge and a love of their subject.

These proposals promise to take knowledge seriously. By encouraging the study of subjects across two-years of the senior phase, we can develop appropriate courses with valid assessments. Teachers will have time to explore their subjects in more depth, rather than always teaching with one eye on the test.

The proposal for an interdisciplinary project is to be welcomed too. Combined with longer courses of subject study, the project is an opportunity to do interdisciplinarity in a rigorous way. No big problem can be tackled from a single disciplinary perspective, but we do need rigorous disciplinary knowledge to tackle them. The project allows students to see the disciplinary contributions of their subjects and will help students understand how the knowledge and expertise developed in their subject studies have real-world application."

Edward Sosu, Reader, University of Strathclyde, CCG Equity.

"Evidence of learner achievement should be based on experiences supported by the educational system rather than solely defined by a learner's family circumstances. This was a key focus throughout the review and exemplified by the call for Personal Pathways to be an entitled experience at school rather than activities undertaken outside school."

Gordon Stobart, Professor IoE, Author of the OECD Stobart Report, CCG Qualifications and Assessment.

"We live in a rapidly changing world. Education systems are having to adjust to this, and internationally we are seeing changes to the way students learn and what they learn. While Scotland has led the way in this with its Curriculum for Excellence, its historic assessment system has limited the changes in senior secondary education. Professor Heyward's Independent Review Group has sought to better align the Scottish examination system with these contemporary needs. It offers a powerful way forward for assessment in Scotland."

Ken Thomson, Principal Forth Valley College, CCG College Principals.

"It is really forward thinking to recognise vocational qualifications as professional and technical SCQF levelled qualifications alongside national qualifications giving all learners recognition of their learning and skills. A real bonus for their future opportunities."

“Scottish colleges have long since utilised continuous assessment through all levels of qualification to evidence the skills and competence of learners. The introduction of the SDA gives recognition of skills alongside academic achievement and provides an excellent career pathway for learners. Through developing and sharing the delivery of specialised subject areas in school college partnerships and with industry support, a position unique across the UK, we really are talking about a truly integrated educational system in Scotland to the benefit of all learners.”

Mo Whelton, SYP, CCG Young People.

'I was delighted to support our MSYPs throughout this journey in reviewing Scottish qualifications and assessments. I would like to thank Professor Hayward for putting young people's participation at the heart of this work and truly focusing on what is best for all learners when thinking of the future of Scottish education.’

1. Introduction

Qualifications and assessment matter. They are important to learners as they provide evidence of their progress through education. They impact positively or negatively on confidence and self-esteem. They matter as learners move beyond compulsory education, when the qualifications they achieve, and the letters or numbers associated with them, determine opportunities, which doors to the next stage of their lives open or close. They matter to parents and carers. They matter to teachers, schools, lecturers and colleges who care deeply about the learners with whom they work. They matter to employers, universities, colleges and the voluntary sector who use qualifications to make decisions about which learners to appoint to which job or to select for which courses. Thus, qualifications and the way in which they are assessed, matter to individuals, communities and wider Scottish society.

The title of this report, *It's Our Future*, has its genesis in a learner feeling frustrated that they had little say in decisions being taken about qualifications that impact them and affect their future and that of their friends. Making sure that all learners leave education with a clear idea of what they have achieved, linked to a positive future pathway, is our best hope of a future society that is stable, happy and prosperous. As a nation committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, -1989), that must be our goal.

In October 2021, the then, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Shirley-Anne Somerville, announced an Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment. The Independent Review was established for four main reasons.

- Society is changing very quickly, and Scotland should look to the future and consider whether our current qualifications and assessment system is fit for a potentially very different future.
- The international COVID-19 pandemic which highlighted dissatisfaction with Scotland's qualifications. Following the cancellation of examinations in 2020 and 2021, and the alternative approaches taken to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications, there was public concern about fairness and widespread dissatisfaction with results and perceptions of inequity.
- The evidence emerging from two OECD reports (OECD, 2021, Stobart, 2021) indicated a need for change in the Senior Phase.
- A longer-term dissatisfaction within Scotland about differences between the original intentions for Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) qualifications and learners' experiences of them.

This Independent Review is concerned with Senior Phase qualifications in schools, colleges and wider educational settings. The focus is predominately learners aged 15-18 in all educational settings, but the Review also considered possible implications for home educated learners and for adult learners who study courses which fall within the Review's remit.

When the Independent Review was commissioned, no-one could have anticipated what would happen during the review period. The Review began as a forward-looking investigation: how might qualifications and assessment evolve to ensure that

every learner in Scotland gets the best possible life chance? The Review recognised that learners now entering education would still be working at the end of the 21st century. Given the speed of societal change, qualifications and assessment should be fit for the future.

However, by the conclusion of the Independent Review, the anticipated level of change had been further accelerated by the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI will change society, but how the potential of these technologies can be used to improve rather than to damage societies is work in progress. The potential impact of AI makes this Independent Review even more important. Future qualifications and assessment will have to support learners, and Scottish society, in a world that will be very different from the one we currently inhabit. Equally, we must accept that the pace of change will increase and Scotland's approach to qualifications must be flexible and adaptable if it is to be able to respond.

The new approach to qualifications and assessment proposed in this report has been debated extensively by communities across Scotland (see Chapter Two). Extensive attempts have been made to stimulate discussions across communities and to try to include those whose voices have too often been missing from policy decision making. No proposal for change to qualifications and assessment will ever be universally supported, but the ideas contained in this report have been subject to extensive debate and the model proposed has been developed collaboratively. It is hoped education in Scotland will build from this process and, in addition, learn from the models developed in the National Discussion (2023) and the Career Review (2023) to build a more inclusive approach to the future design and development of policy and practice.

The independence of this Review is crucial. Advice on the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland has to be impartial, developed from evidence and debated openly. The ideas contained in this report, if accepted by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Jenny Gilruth MSP, are the first stage in a longer-term development process. The cross-community collaborations developed in this Review should continue and learners, teachers and lecturers across the country should be at the heart of the change process.

Too many previous innovations in Scotland have faltered because insufficient attention was paid to the implications of how ideas might be put into practice and to the manageability of the timescale over which they were put in place. At this time, ensuring that change is appropriately supported is particularly important. The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact that it had had on learners, teachers and families has been profound. It is remarkable that, even in such challenging times, there has been an almost unanimous call for qualifications and assessment to change.

1.1 The Current Context in Scotland

Scotland has a proud tradition of subject based study in secondary schools. Highly qualified teachers lead a wide range of subject options. Subject communities are

strong and some subjects in some areas have extensive and supportive group networks.

Education settings across Scotland offer a range of Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications from National 1 to National 5, Highers and Advanced Highers. Some independent schools offer English qualifications, such as GCSE and A Level. Increasingly, in partnership with colleges and employers, a range of vocational, technical and professional qualifications, are offered to learners, for example Foundation Apprenticeships, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, National Progression Awards and Personal Development Awards. School/college partnerships are more challenging in rural areas without easy access to a local college, although in some areas, college staff offer vocational, technical and professional courses in schools.

In addition, some learners have opportunities to engage with a wider array of experiences and awards in school and college and in communities which offer valuable learning experiences and development of skills, competencies, attitudes and dispositions. These include, for example: The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, The Prince's Trust, The John Muir Award, Young Enterprise Scotland Company Award (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 6), Award in STEM Leadership (SCQF levels 4,5,6 Scottish Schools Educational Research Centre (SSERC), The Caritas Award and Awards Scheme Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programmes. Not all awards are linked to the SCQF framework, but all offer valuable opportunities for learners.

There are many different options available supported by an Awards' Network of providers eager to work with schools and colleges to promote broader opportunities for every learner. Opportunities vary across the country and learners have a number of ways in which they can and should be supported to show what they have achieved. All learners are different; some prefer to learn in a school environment, some enjoy college, and some excel in community-based learning.

Based on these programmes, Scotland has sophisticated networks of pathways which learners can take to progress through the system from school to further and higher education and to employment. While there has been a considerable increase in the breadth of qualifications that young people take in schools most learners also take subject based national qualifications.

Qualifications are set within the SCQF which comprises qualifications across levels 1-12. The level of a qualification shows how difficult the learning is. However, not all qualifications at the same level are of the same value. Each qualification in the SCQF framework has a number of credit points. Credit points describe the amount of learning necessary to achieve a qualification or learning programme at an SCQF level. Therefore, different courses on the same SCQF level may be very different in the demands they make of a learner.

Read more about the [SCQF Interactive Framework](#) here.

1.2 Qualifications and the Economy

Qualifications have a major role to play in the economy. Most learners after school, college or university move into the workplace and workplaces are changing fast. The World Economic Forum (2020) called this “a defining moment”. They argue that society has the tools at its disposal to respond to the jobs of tomorrow; technological innovation, the means to reskill and upskill. However, they caution that the efforts to put in place the strategies to support people “lag behind the speed of the disruption” They call for a “reset” as society sits at the crossroads between work tasks performed by humans and those undertaken by machines and algorithms. The changes about to take place, they suggest, can lead to fairer, more just societies or to “lost generations of adults and youth who will be raised into growing inequality, discord and lost potential.”

Just now, there is a window of opportunity. Qualifications should help learners to be ready to respond to current economic needs and shape future economic requirements. There is a strong relationship between a qualified workforce and economic growth in a period of huge uncertainty. And there is a strong relationship between a prosperous society and one able to provide high quality public services to all of its citizens. The World Economic Forum (2020) identifies top skills and skill groups which employers see as rising in prominence. These include critical thinking and analysis, problem-solving, and skills in self-management, active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility. To be qualified for the future, these are skills that learners should have opportunities to develop, and qualifications should recognise their achievements in them.

In such a fast-changing landscape, any qualification and assessment system that is fit for the future will have to be sufficiently agile and flexible to be able to respond quickly to change. There is work to be done by businesses and The Government to identify future skills needs and The Government should work closely with businesses to consider possible implications. Countries around the world are thinking about how best to support learners for future change. For example, in Estonia, primary school age children study robotics. Qualifications and assessment systems that are well aligned to a relevant, empowering curriculum will help to ensure that learners in Scotland have high-quality options available to them.

1.3 A Changing Society

The current system of qualifications and assessment has served many learners well. However, future learners will move into a less predictable environment than learners from previous generations. Skills Development Scotland (SDS), (2022) describe the scale of anticipated change.

“The world is experiencing a historic transformation in how people work, where they work and even why they work. The skills we each need to enter and progress in work are changing too. As we face an unpredictable and rapidly evolving future, continuing to develop the right skills in response to this change will be critical for us

all. The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly impacted the economy, labour market and society and new economic challenges are emerging.” (SDS, 2022)

Scotland is not alone in facing these challenges. OECD (2020) argues that globalisation and rapid changes in technology are increasing the pace of social, economic and environmental challenges internationally. Many of the challenges, also have opportunities for human advancement but for that potential to be realised, “citizens must be equipped to handle them via a high quality and appropriately designed education.” (OECD, 2020)

Many other jurisdictions are considering changes to their qualifications and assessment system (see Chapter Three). Scotland’s system must keep pace with this change.

Since the publication of the SDS report (2022) that heralded a “historic transformation”, even greater changes are underway. Recent developments in AI have been described as “The Industrial Revolution for Human Intellect” (Soral, 2023). The speed of change is increasing. ChatGPT had 1 million users 5 days after its release. To put that in context, it took Netflix 3 ½ years to reach 1 million users, Twitter 2 years and Facebook 10 months (Ahmad, 2023).

By May 2023, Geoffrey Hinton, a leading figure in the creation of AI voiced concerns about what he perceived to be increasing risks emerging from the development of AI that could outperform humans. In an interview with the BBC (BBC News 2 May 2023), Hinton argued that AI, a digital system, was very different from human intelligence. Each individual AI Chatbot can learn separately but can share its knowledge with all other Chatbots. He compared it to being akin to having 10,000 people were when one person learned something that knowledge was immediately known by all 10,000 people. Still in its early stages, the impact of what AI might mean for future employment is already being seen. On 1 May, IBM’s CEO, Arvind Krishna, announced that they expect to stop employing people for roles that AI could undertake in the coming years.

The implications of AI for qualifications and assessment have been of particular interest to those who work in education. Reactions to the impact of AI on examinations and coursework have been varied. Schools Week (Booth, 2023) reported that in a statement to ASCL (Association of School and College Leaders) in England 10th March 2023, Dr Jo Saxton, the Chief Regulator at OFQUAL (The Office of Qualifications and Examinations) argued that AI bots like ChatGPT made invigilated examinations more important than ever and suggested that if she were running a centre, she would have students undertake coursework in examination conditions. On the other hand, the CEO of the International Baccalaureate (IB) proposed learning to live with AI, neither banning its use nor changing the nature of the IB programme which includes coursework. He argues:

“The IB believes that AI technology will become part of our everyday lives - like spell checkers, translation software and calculators. We, therefore, need to adapt and transform our educational programmes and assessment practices so that students can use these new AI tools ethically and effectively.”

The potential implications of AI on Scottish education will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four. However, it is beyond doubt that significant changes are already underway across society. No matter how effective our previous approach to qualifications and assessment may have been, it would represent a significant risk if we were to assume that what has served Scotland well in the past will continue to serve Scotland well in the future.

1.4 The Impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 on National Qualifications was a major driver for this Review. Hayward et al, (2023) report that when the pandemic struck in session 2019–2020 schools were closed, and it was not possible to run the national examinations, alternative ways of gathering evidence for qualifications had to be found quickly to limit potential harm to learners. The SQA asked teachers and lecturers, supported by national guidance and local authorities, to provide both estimated grades (A, B, C or D) and a rank order for learners taking National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. SQA moderated these estimates using an algorithm based on historical attainment data and examiner judgement. This process of moderation resulted in twenty-six percent of grade estimates being changed (Hayward et al, 2023)

The planned process for the award of qualifications included an appeal opportunity, where schools and colleges could provide evidence to challenge any downgraded decision. However, that did not happen. Consequently when learners received their provisional results, on 4 August 2020, there was a public outcry. The use of historical data was seen to have discriminated against learners in less advantaged areas. Responding to public concern, The Scottish Government directed SQA to reinstate teacher or lecturer estimates.

Following the problems with the 2020 qualifications, The Scottish Government commissioned an Independent Rapid Review (Priestley et al, 2020). Priestley's Review made a number of recommendations of interest to this Review including the need for greater transparency, enhanced collaboration and engagement (particularly with young people), a proportionate system for moderation and a move to a digital system.

The continuation of the pandemic throughout 2020–2021 resulted in the cancellation of examinations in 2021. The experience of the previous year led to the development of a different approach, the Alternative Certification Model (ACM). Teachers and lecturers were asked to provide evidence to inform grading judgements, for example student performance on classwork or assignments. The timetable for implementation of ACM was short. Teachers and learners were told about using ACM in February ahead of grading in May. Moderation was carried out by schools, colleges and local authorities. SQA sampled evidence as a further layer of quality assurance.

Teachers reported workload issues related to what were perceived to be intensive moderation processes and short implementation timelines. However, many, though not all, learners liked the approach. Many teachers indicated support for ACM but noted that a longer lead in time would have made it easier to adapt.

“Pupils that experienced the ACM model liked it. They would like 50/50 split for continuous assessment and a final exam, so that everything didn’t rely on your performance on one day.” – Kings Park Secondary School (Staff and Learners)

Coping with the crisis of a pandemic is not a model for change, but the qualifications’ model in Scotland, and indeed across the UK, was not sufficiently robust to deal with the impact of COVID-19. Other countries with different approaches to qualifications, for example, where learners were building credit over time and/or where a significant element of internal assessment contributed to the overall award, suffered far less disruption. In Scotland, the COVID-19 experience undermined confidence in the system of qualifications. Examinations that traditionally had been regarded as fair and equitable were perceived to discriminate against those who faced the greatest socio-economic challenges.

Although the extent to which the qualifications process during COVID-19 had been inequitable was disputed, the belief that the qualifications system had discriminated against learners from disadvantaged backgrounds persisted and undermined trust. In response to widespread concern about National Qualifications, a planned OECD Independent Review of CfE (OECD, 2021) was extended to include a particular focus on qualifications in the Senior Phase (Stobart, 2021).

1.5 The OECD Reports and the Case for Change

Two OECD reports on Scottish Education were published in 2021. The first report, *Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence - Into the Future* (2021) recognised Scotland as one of the first countries to design a curriculum that looked to the needs of learners and Scotland as a society in the 21st century. Nearly 20 years on:

“CfE continues to be a bold and widely supported initiative, and its design offers the flexibility needed to improve student learning further.” (OECD, 2021)

However, they suggested, work was needed to realise the potential of CfE in the Senior Phase:

“The structure, learning practices and assessment approaches in the Senior Phase also need adapting to be consistent with CfE’s Vision, and to allow for the smooth curriculum experience promised from 3 to 18.”

The second OECD Independent Review was undertaken by Professor Gordon Stobart, *Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective* (2021). He sought to understand the causes for the perceived ‘misalignment’ between curriculum and assessment in the Senior Phase and to identify where change could lead to improvement.

Achieving Highers has been a shorthand in Scotland for high attainment for more than a century, sometimes described as the ‘gold standard’ of educational achievement. Many people in Scotland, for example, parents and employers,

remember their own experiences in education and use those as a benchmark for current practices.

In cultures influenced by the traditions and values of UK curricula, qualifications are often seen as being synonymous with examinations (Stobart, 2021). National qualifications are commonly described as “the exams” even although before COVID-19, they included a range of approaches to assessment in addition to an external examination, for example, projects, essays, oral interaction, artefacts. In other jurisdictions, traditions are different. Some countries have very few formal examinations (see Chapter Three).

Building from these evidence sources, Stobart (2021) an internationally renowned assessment academic who has worked in research, policy and practice, made five recommendations for change to post-16 education in Scotland:

- explore the replacement of examinations at age 16 by a school graduation certificate;
- develop a more resilient upper-secondary assessment system;
- seek better alignment of assessment with curriculum and pedagogy through broadening the forms of assessment;
- systematically investigate students’ perceptions and views of assessment arrangements and;
- further develop the role of technical, vocational and professional qualifications in broadening the curriculum.

These recommendations helped form the Terms of Reference for this Review. The Review’s response to the Terms of Reference is presented in Chapter Six.

The range of purposes qualifications are asked to serve, the importance to individuals, institutions and wider society, and the fact that ideas about them are deeply embedded in the culture of a society, make qualifications notoriously difficult to change – in Scotland, across the UK and internationally. Very careful consideration has to be given to planning for change if and when change is necessary. (See Chapter Five).

“Assessment systems usually change gradually. The brake on any radical change may, in part, result from a social reluctance to change an established system. When a system has been in place for generations, parents, policy makers and teachers are familiar with it and value it – even when it may no longer be fit-for-purpose.” (Stobart, 2021, p30)n

1.6 Curriculum for Excellence and the Senior Phase in Schools and Colleges

The view of Scottish education that the OECD presented, was familiar to many who work in education. Qualifications and assessment in the Senior Phase have become very different from what had been envisaged in the early days of CfE. Building the

Curriculum 5: a framework for assessment (2011), provided the original national guidance on assessment and qualifications.

“The curriculum in the Senior Phase should be designed to meet the Principles of curriculum design and the entitlements set out for all learners in Building the Curriculum 3 and should include the four aspects of the curriculum (the ethos and life of the school as a community, curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities for personal achievement).” (p16)

The original intentions of CfE were clear. In Scottish schools and colleges, curriculum areas, subjects and programmes of study are the building blocks of education. They represent different ways of viewing the world and are an essential part of education in Scotland for all learners. CfE, as conceived, recognised the central role that subjects play in education but argued for more. The curriculum as experienced by every learner should include opportunities to study curriculum areas and subjects in depth but should also include engagement with the school as a community, opportunities to discover how learning connects across different areas of the curriculum and opportunities to individualise learning through personal achievement. What were described as “next generation qualifications” offered by SQA and other providers, should reflect the values and aspirations of CfE.

The original design of the new qualifications attempted to provide closer alignment between the curriculum and qualifications. The original National Qualifications were designed to gather evidence on what learners knew and understood and their skills and competences. Qualifications included a broad range of approaches to assessment. Ways of gathering evidence differed subject by subject: for example, art and design included a folio of work and physics a scientific project. Decisions about the nature of the qualification were taken by panels of subject specialists, based on what they perceived to be the best way to demonstrate learners’ achievements in the subject. Skills and competences were built into the programmes of study and recognised in the awards. However, SQA also had to revisit the design of CfE qualifications due to workload issues in schools.

The Priestley report (2020) following the COVID experience of 2019 reported a very different learner experiences in the Senior Phase from those originally envisaged by the developers of CfE qualifications. These findings have subsequently been supported by evidence emerging in the Review from learners, parents and employers. Many learners’ experiences of CfE were entirely subject-focused. They had little awareness of the skills being developed through their qualifications and few had opportunities to engage in learning across subjects. They reported many of their learning experiences in the Senior Phase as repetitive and formulaic. It seemed to them that it was less important to demonstrate what they knew or understood than to use specific terms in an answer or to follow a predetermined pattern of response, for example, make a statement, back it up with a quotation and write a sentence referring to the statement and quotation. Many learners reported high levels of stress.

Similar findings were also reported in the Muir Review (2022) and in the National Discussion (2023). Angela Morgan (2018) in her review *Support for Learning: All Our Children and All Their Potential* expressed concern about: “the narrative around

achievement’ and comments that ‘the system should be set up to recognise the particular achievements of children and young people which goes beyond SQA qualifications.’ (Morgan, 2018, p114)

Morgan (2018) reported that learners with Additional Support Needs (ASN) often found accessing alternative assessment arrangements difficult and that these factors combined to have a negative impact on their wellbeing and their educational experiences. Some learners suggested that the system for them was not sufficiently challenging.

“If I’m being honest I didn’t feel very challenged academically in high school”
Learner, SNAP – (Scottish Network for Able Pupils).

Headteachers reported that the evidence gathered to judge the quality of education in schools, accountability metrics, were driving behaviours in schools. Schools felt judged not by how well they were serving the needs of every learner but by how many learners achieved National 5 and Higher qualifications. Learners, it was reported, were at times advised to take qualifications that would be more valuable for school metrics than those best suited to their strengths. Learners constantly referred to being over-examined. Indeed, many teachers, learners and parents expressed concerns about the three consecutive years of examinations in the Senior Phase.

Teachers reported a sense of constant pressure to “*get through the curriculum*” in a series of “*two-term dashes*”. There was little satisfaction amongst some teachers and learners with qualifications as taught and learned in the Senior Phase, little sense of deep learning in schools and classrooms, only a sense of people in a system driven to find ever more efficient ways to predict and practise for examinations. All learning involves practice and making sure that learners understand how examinations work and how to perform well in them is important, but, taken to extreme, it will dominate learning and teaching, narrow the curriculum and demotivate learners. That is the current position in Scotland as reported by large numbers of learners, teachers and parents and carers.

The approaches taken to assessment in colleges and universities have changed radically in recent years. Examinations are part of the landscape, but many courses now are heavily weighted towards alternative ways to gather evidence of achievement, for example, essays, projects (individual and group), oral assessment, self and peer assessment, poster presentations. Employers, use a wider range of ways to gather evidence of employee learning such as; digital on-line responsive assessment, group tasks, augmented reality. In Early Years, in primary and in the early years of secondary education, a broad range of approaches to assessment are used to support learning and build progression. In some ways, it is upper secondary education in Scotland that is out of kilter.

1.7 Summary

There is a convincing case that the current system of qualifications and assessment in Scotland needs to change. Evidence to support this position includes:

- analysis of the future of society in Scotland in a global context where the pace of change will require a more flexible system of qualifications and assessment to allow the education system to be able to respond to fast changing circumstances;
- the recent experience of COVID-19, the significant challenges faced by the system in responding to the pandemic and questions of fairness that arose from results;
- national research and international reports on Scottish education emphasising the gaps between the aspirations of the curriculum in Scotland and learners' experiences particularly in National Qualifications. Other countries have recognised similar issues and have been implementing reforms to their qualifications systems;
- reviews and reports that question whether the current system serves all learners equitably and adequately recognises and values their wider achievements and;
- gaps identified by employers between the current skill base of learners exiting the Senior Phase and the skills required to help the economy to grow and broader society to thrive.

The Independent Review set out to explore how Scotland might best respond to these challenges. As part of the wider Reform process in Scotland, the Muir Report (2022) identified how the education system in Scotland should change to support learners and teachers more effectively. Entitled, "Putting Learners at the Centre", the report highlighted the need for Scottish Education to recognise what mattered most; learners and the quality of their educational experiences. All systems and structures should have the wellbeing of learners as their core concern in the context of the purposes articulated in Article 29 of the UNCRC, (1989). However, for that to happen, Muir (2022) argued that the education system in Scotland had to change. There is;

"the need for significant cultural and mindset change at all levels. This needs to be based around a shared Vision signed up to by all stakeholders which gives absolute primacy of focus on individual learners and their diverse needs." (Muir 2022, p14).

These themes became the starting point for this Independent Review: the need to identify a future qualification and assessment system that would serve learners and Scotland as a society well and be undertaken in a way that would signal a change in culture. That would mean putting learners at the centre and developing, amongst all stakeholders, a shared Vision for the future of qualifications and assessment.

[Recommendation 1: Change Qualifications and Assessment in the Senior Phase in Scotland. Change must be carefully planned and resourced.](#)

1.8 Outline of this report

- Chapter Two of this report describes the ways in which the Independent Review sought to involve all communities with a stake in the future of qualifications and assessment.

- Chapter Three looks beyond Scotland to consider how other countries are tackling the challenge of developing qualification and assessment systems that are fit for the future and how practice elsewhere might relate to the Scottish context.
- Chapter Four drawing on the wide range of sources of evidence described in previous Chapters, presents the Vision and Principles for the future qualifications and assessment in Scotland and proposes a new approach.
- Chapter Five sets out a route map for how the Scottish education system and Scottish society more generally might move from current practice to a new system. This part of the Report identifies the contributions that different communities can make to the realisation of the Review's Vision and Principles and identifies the resource implications of change.
- Chapter Six lists recommendations for the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland.

Not everyone will agree with everything in this report. However, what is recommended commands wide support within and beyond the Independent Review Group.

2. Changing the Culture of Education in Scotland: Methodology of the Review

2.1 The Integrity Model of Change

The Putting Learners at the Centre Report (Muir 2022) advocated for cultural change in Scottish education. First, in accordance with the UNCRC (1989), learners should be at the heart of decision making. Second, that Scotland's educational aspirations would be realised only if all communities were willing to work together. Professor Muir recognised that deep and meaningful change would be possible only when it was recognised that the success of any reform depends on the actions of all those who are connected to it. In an effort to follow the recommendations of Professor Muir, this Review has developed an engagement strategy designed to ensure meaningful opportunities for all interests to contribute to the work.

The approach to engagement underpinning this Review is based on the Integrity Model of Change (Hayward & Spencer, 2010) that pays attention to three overlapping and interacting areas:

Educational Integrity - the need to ensure that what is done will lead to better educational opportunities and better life chances for every learner, for example, is informed by policy, practice and research.

Personal and Professional Integrity - the importance of ensuring that everyone who has a role to play in making the innovation successful is involved in its design and development, recognising and valuing the crucial role that each will play.

Systemic Integrity - the need to ensure that the various parts of the system are aligned to support the reform. Learners, parents and carers, The Government, the national agencies, professional associations, local communities, teachers, education providers, colleges, employers and universities, all have to actively support the change process if the reform is to be successful.

► The Integrity Model of Change



Hayward & Spencer (2010), UNESCO (2020), OECD (2021), NEU, 2021)

Figure 1: The Integrity Model of Change

Any innovation that seeks to lead to change that is deep, meaningful and sustainable has to pay attention to a number of features. Often change focuses on what has to change and, of course, that is crucial. However, it is equally important to consider why the change is important, how it might be achieved and when it might happen, for example, what a pragmatic and manageable timeline would look like. In the context of this Review, the case has to be made that changing qualifications and assessment is important for both individual learners and for Scottish society as a whole.

Finally, for change to be sustainable, the Review has identified what needs to be different in the wider educational system to support the innovation in practice including in respect of data collection, inspection and Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

The design of the Independent Review sought to address each of the three dimensions of the change model.

2.1.1 Educational Integrity

First, to build Educational Integrity, the Independent Review began its work with a focus on learners. The first task of the Review was to develop a statement of a possible Vision and Principles for the future of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland. Colleagues from the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) and from the Children's Parliament worked with us to develop a draft statement of Vision and Principles as the starting point for the Review.

Three phases of engagement followed. The first phase of engagement sought views on the development of a shared Vision of what qualifications and assessment in Scotland should seek to achieve. Linked to the Vision, the Independent Review also sought views on proposed Principles. The draft Vision and Principles were discussed

by the IRG and the CCGs (described in the next section). A discussion pack, including video, a background paper and survey were sent via Local Authorities to every school in Scotland and directly to every college. Responses were independently analysed, and the findings used to revise the draft Vision and Principles.

The Vision and Principles were used to inform the design of the reformed qualifications and assessment system. In addition, it is proposed that they become the touchstone for the reform. To avoid the recurrence of previous problems with innovation in Scotland, where practice over time became different from the original reform intentions, the Vision and Principles should be used over time to monitor the relationship between ideas and enactment.

The second phase of engagement, using the Vision and Principles as the starting point, sought feedback on options that would help define the parameters of a possible new approach to qualifications and assessment in Scotland. This phase of engagement sought views on a range of issues including:

- whether or not evidence of learners' achievements should be gathered only for successful learners or more broadly to include achievements across the other three capacities of CfE, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens;
- the balance between assessment based in an education setting and external assessment;
- the use of technology to enable new approaches to assessment and qualifications and as a means of recording achievements and;
- whether or not there should be an award at the end of the Broad General Education (BGE).

Again, topics were discussed in detail in the IRG and in CCGs. A second discussion pack with a supporting video, background paper and PowerPoint presentation was sent directly to all schools and colleges. In response to problems arising from Phase One, where the distribution process to schools had worked better in some parts of the country than others, in Phase Two discussion packs were simultaneously sent to local authorities and directly to every school and college, to ensure that all practitioners had the opportunity to contribute to thinking about the future direction. As part of Phase Two the Review also issued a public consultation.

The responses to the second phase were again independently analysed and the findings used to develop the model that became the focus for discussion in Phase Three.

The third phase of the Review sought views on a model for future qualifications and assessment in Scotland. The Phase Three model was designed to be consistent with the Vision and Principles agreed in Phase One and with views expressed on the parameters established following Phase Two of consultation. Respondents in the third phase were asked to consider the extent to which the model was consistent with the agreed Vision and Principles and, crucially, to identify the practical steps that would be needed for this, or an adapted, model to be successful in practice.

During the three phases of the Review, members of the Review team visited schools and colleges across Scotland to engage directly with learners, teachers, lecturers, school leaders and college principals. In total 21 visits to schools and colleges were undertaken (see Appendix Six).

The findings from all three phases of the Review inform the recommendations in this report.

2.1.2 Personal and Professional Integrity: roles and responsibilities

Within the Integrity Model of Change, for the reform to have personal and professional integrity everyone who has a role to play in making the innovation successful should be involved in its design and development. This recognises and values the crucial role that each will play in making the innovation successful. The development of the IRG and CCGs, the engagement with schools and colleges and the public consultation were all intended to be vehicles to promote personal and professional integrity within the Independent Review.

IRG has been the core of this collaborative Independent Review. The IRG operates as a matrix model.

On one side of the matrix, three distinct groups of participants were involved in the Independent Review:

- those for whom qualifications matter most including individual learners and, as appropriate, parents or carers;
- those involved in the design, development and offering of qualifications- educational professionals, including teachers and lecturers, school and college leaders and local and national policy-makers and;
- those who use qualifications such as colleges, employers and universities.

On the other side of the matrix were research-based CCGs each focused on an aspect key to the Independent Review. The purpose of these groups was to ensure that the work of IRG is informed by leading-edge thinking. They included national and international researchers and leading educational thinkers. One group focused on Equity, the need to ensure that any proposals would pay attention to the implications for every learner. A second concentrated on Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications and how we might promote strong alignment between them. The third group advised on the evidence base for Qualifications and Assessment to make sure that the thinking of the Review was well informed. The fourth group considered Change Processes, advising on evidence to inform recommendations to support the process of change. The fifth group advised on Policy Alignment, given the number of reviews and reforms in Scotland, recently completed or in process, how we would ensure that the review of qualifications was well aligned with them.

All the groups and themes listed above are crucial to the success of a qualifications and assessment system that is both credible and practical.

Each member of the IRG linked with a broader group of members from their community. IRG members worked with 13 core CCGs and a number of allied discussion groups. For example, within IRG, there were three groups from professional practice. One focused on the Profession, whose CCG included teacher professional organisations and members who worked with learners from a wide range of communities and had specialist expertise in, for example, race, socio-economic disadvantage, carers, able pupils. A second also concentrated on engaging directly with classroom teachers, a third engaged with school leaders and a fourth with college principals.

The number of CCGs increased over the course of the Independent Review as interest grew in the topics and sub-topics under discussion. For example, in the original CCG plan, there was one CCG that brought together employers from national and global companies. During the course of the Review the employer community was extended to include allied discussion groups for public and third sector employers and one for small and medium employers (SMEs). A number of other allied CCG groups were created during the course of the Review.

Each CCG included a wide range of participants to promote an inclusive and participatory approach to the Independent Review. The aim was to have an Independent Review process that embraced the diversity of Scotland's learners and communities. There was a further feature of IRG that was different from the common pattern of committee membership. IRG members did not seek to represent their own organisations, but instead each acted as a facilitator to stimulate communication between IRG and their wider communities on how a future qualification and assessment system in Scotland might best support all learners in all educational settings.

A key responsibility of IRG members was to facilitate wider community engagement. Each IRG member brought together individuals from their extended community to form a CCG. Through their CCGs, IRG members debated issues and gathered views from individuals and groups to reflect the diverse make-up of their communities. This was a more straightforward process in some communities than in others (see Appendix Five). However, we believe that more than 400 people from a wide range of communities were engaged meaningfully in the three phases of consultation.

The relationship between IRG and CCGs was iterative. Ideas considered in IRG were discussed with CCG members and evidence and insights from the CCGs was brought back to the monthly IRG meetings to form part of the wider evidence gathering process. The three phases of the consultation process provided the structure for engagement with the CCGs.

2.1.3 Systemic Integrity

Systemic Integrity is the third part of the Integrity model that is crucial to the success of any process of reform. In Scotland, a wide range of organisations have to align to support the process of change in any innovation. The Government and all political parties, national agencies and organisations, HMIE, teacher and headteacher,

professional organisations, local policy communities, ITE, colleges, employers and universities, all have contributions to make to support the change process if the reform is to be successful.

In addition to the IRG and CCG meetings, we met with key individuals from groups and organisations across Scotland, as well as with strategic committees to explore the contributions that each might make to support the introduction and the longer-term change process to ensure attention was paid to systemic integrity. A list of meetings, events and visits can be found at (Appendix Six).

2.2 Evidence from the Review Process: Phase One – Consultation on the Vision and Principles

As previously discussed, the draft Vision and Principles developed in partnership with the SYP and the Children’s Parliament were discussed in IRG and CCG meetings and became the basis for Phase One of the engagement. Responses were received from CCGs, allied discussion groups and 221 responses were received from schools and colleges. Many of the responses from schools and colleges were based on group discussions with multiple teachers/lecturers and learners, and these responses were submitted on behalf of the group. The feedback from Phase One was independently analysed and the report is available [here](#).

In summary, the evidence from the Phase One consultation supported the fundamental ideas in the draft Vision and Principles statements. However, there was advice to simplify the language and to sharpen statements. The language of both the Vision and Principles was amended, and the number of Principles was reduced to sharpen the ideas. It was agreed that the Vision and Principles should be used as the basis for the design of future qualifications and assessment and as a touchstone to check the relationship between Vision and practice over time.

The redrafted Vision and Principles informed the second phase of the Independent Review, where options, consistent with them, were explored.

2.3 Evidence from the Review Process: Phase Two - Engagement on the Options for Change

Phase Two of the Independent Review began in October 2022 and closed in January 2023. There was also a public consultation. The consultation for this phase explored options to help define the parameters of a possible new approach to qualifications and assessment in Scotland.

IRG discussed the possible options in detail and held discussions with their CCGs. In addition to feedback from IRG, CCGs submitted detailed views and more than 700 responses were submitted from the public consultation. As with Phase One, the responses were independently analysed by the Lines Between, and their report of the analysis is available [here](#). In summary, the main issues raised were:

2.3.1 The Need for change

Discussions in the IRG, CCGs, other Convener led meetings the Independent Review has undertaken and in school/college visits suggested almost universal agreement on the need for change in qualifications and assessment and in how they are used in the Senior Phase. This finding was supported in the responses from almost all consultees responding to the broader public consultation including schools and colleges.

2.3.2 Types of evidence that reflect learner achievement

There was a broad agreement across communities that gathering evidence on learners' progress and performance in subjects or curricular areas should remain an important part of qualifications. However, across communities there was recognition of the need to go beyond individual subjects/curricular areas. For example, learners should have opportunities to demonstrate skills as they use knowledge from across subjects/curricular areas in real life contexts. Further, learners should have opportunities to have recognised broader evidence of their achievements socially, culturally and economically. Many learners held a strong view on this broader view of recognising their achievements.

“We need to think radically rather than retrospectively here. We need to look at the different subject areas and how best to demonstrate learning in each area and understand that this should look different for each subject. We need flexibility within our assessment system rather than working to a system of when the SQA design and set exams. We need to value all learning and we need to realise the digital opportunities available to enable us to assess learning.” – (CCG member, Teaching Profession)

Although there was a desire for a broader range of achievements to be recognised, the ways in which the four capacities were described were perceived to be problematic. A number of respondents suggested that the four contexts for learning as presented in the refreshed narrative for CfE would offer a better framework for qualifications and assessment. (The Scottish Government, 2019)

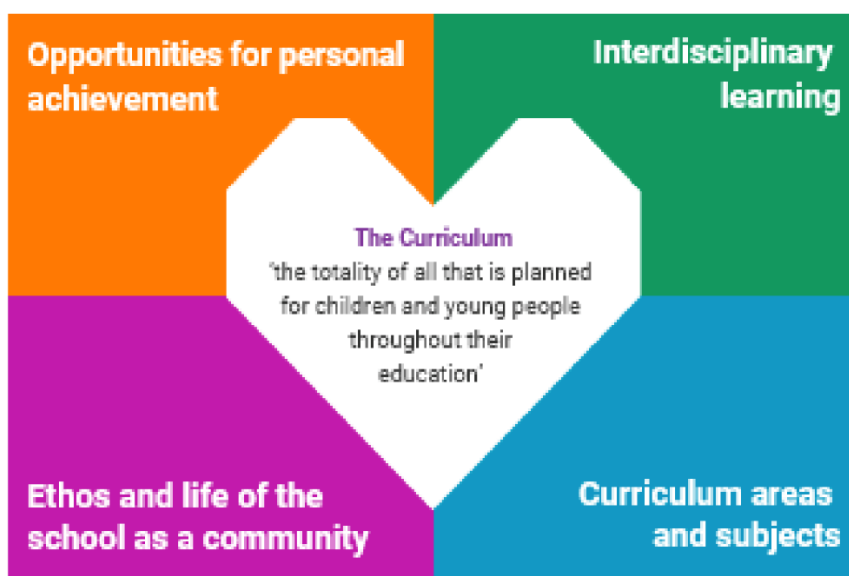


Figure 2: CfE Refreshed Narrative

There was also significant support for a broader range of approaches to qualifications. Learners in Scotland were perceived to be over-examined. Many of those taking National Qualifications, had high stakes examinations in three consecutive years, in S4, S5 and S6.

“Scotland may consider ‘de-cluttering’ the historical diets of examinations during upper-secondary years S4-S6, and reflect on when and why Scottish students should take examinations, and consider alternative ways to acknowledge the end of compulsory schooling.” (Stobart 2021, p 41)

“Do we actually need exams to gauge learning and progression? Assessment can do the same job and every does need assessed to demonstrate their knowledge.” – (BOCSH, Headteachers)

“Teachers’ attribute much of the pressure and workload placed upon themselves and on learners to the repeated “two-term dash” and the accompanying “examination rehearsal” which leaves little room for creativity, depth, breadth or enjoyment of learning in the Senior Phase.” – (EIS)

Although pre-COVID-19, almost all National Qualifications included a variety of coursework tasks, consultation responses focused on the significant amount of time spent on rehearsal for high stakes examinations, for example prelims, past papers, rehearsal of approaches to question responses. The idea of two-year learning programmes was attractive to many. However, they argued for an appropriate ‘safety net’, an exit point for learners who decided that they wanted to end their progress in a particular subject at the end of the first year.

Overall, CCGs supported a move towards progressive courses over two years, and the accumulation of course credits throughout the Senior Phase. More broadly, while there is support for a move away from the three separate single year cycles of examinations in S4, 5 and 6, the suggestion that learners would only be presented for external examinations when they exit a subject caused concern.

“This would appear to suggest that a pupil studying English through to S6, for example, would only be examined in that year. That would appear to introduce even higher risk to an already high-stakes system.” – (NASUWT)

2.3.3 Ways in Which Evidence Should Be Gathered and Assessed

There was broad agreement that evidence of learners’ achievements in different areas should be gathered and assessed in different ways. For example, in all subjects, approaches to evidence gathering should include a balance of internal and external assessment including examinations (graded or ungraded) and, as appropriate, projects, assignments, oral assessments, performances and practical work. Each subject should identify methods of assessment that would be best matched its. Alternatively, evidence of learning in wider contexts, for example being part of a school play, or playing in a band, or supporting younger children’s reading, or having a school leadership role should be gathered in very different ways perhaps involving learners in self-reflection or witness statements to verify their contribution. Fundamentally, the approaches to gathering evidence and the ways in which evidence is assessed should be appropriate to the nature of the activity.

“Most staff were in favour of the use of continuous assessment (with external verification sampling), exams at point of exit only (where relevant – i.e. not Practical Woodworking etc) and on greater use of digital technology and oral assessments. How much would be weighted towards continuous assessment is an important consideration – this must be available for all subjects as currently Maths relies purely on the external exam, and this isn’t helpful.” – (Kings Park Secondary School – Learners and Staff)

There was strong support for a wider range of assessment approaches to be introduced. For example, there was evidence that day to day practices in schools in relation to qualifications had become formulaic. It was reported that a great deal of learner time was spent on rote learning and examination rehearsal. In addition, commonly the content of courses and the full range of knowledge and skills relevant to deep learning in a subject area was narrowed to focus on what was assessed. It was the view of some that we spoke to that the qualifications system was driving all work in the Senior Phase, an unsatisfactory position in which the examining and awarding body was in effect determining the curriculum. Whilst it was recognised that neither rote learning nor examination rehearsal are intrinsically unhelpful, these elements have become dominant. It was suggested that an approach such as open book examinations, oral tests and structured observations of activities should be used more widely to broaden the opportunities for learners’ experiences to be better balanced.

There was further agreement about the need for a better balance between school-based evidence and external examination. However, what that better balance might look like was unclear. There were differing views about what school-based assessment might mean. For some, school-based assessment meant a series of shorter tests similar to end of module assessments. Those who argued for this model suggested that it reduces the stress of a single end of course examination. It

was noted that within the college system, continuous assessment and internal and external moderation was commonplace.

“Assessment should be a good balance of continuous internal assessment and external assessment.” – (Windsor Park School and Sensory Service)

Those who argued against it suggested that this approach led to a higher assessment burden and resulted only in a series of high stakes experiences. For others, school-based assessment meant gathering naturally occurring evidence as part of learning and teaching. A collection of such evidence would then be moderated to ensure comparability of standards within and across schools and colleges. While it should be noted some learners do prefer examinations, a significant number of people from across communities argued for different approaches to assessment being available to allow learners to have the best chance of demonstrating their achievements. For example, some learners thrived on the deadlines imposed by examinations whilst for others the stress of examinations limited their potential to demonstrate their achievements. For those learners, the less stressful environment of evidence gathered as part of learning and teaching was perceived to improve their performance. Learners often spoke of the stress of examinations and the negative impact it had on their ability to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding.

“We need to ensure fairness and consistency in any model of assessment and examination, while ensuring we provide the less able an opportunity for them to evidence their achievements. I think it is a good idea to move away for the rigid pass and fail system. I really like the idea of teacher / continuous assessment and less exams.” – (CCG member, Employers)

Although the idea of a greater emphasis on ongoing assessment was broadly welcomed, retaining confidence in the assessment system was recognised as being crucial. There was strong agreement that processes should be established to ensure comparability of standards and that this was a national issue, i.e., one where there should be a national plan. The approach to moderation should be proportionate and not overly bureaucratic. Some argued that additional internal assessment could present a potentially unhelpful increase in teacher workload pressures and that workload was an issue that could not be ignored. It would be important to identify what teachers should stop doing if new practices were to be adopted. Adding to existing workload was not an option.

“It would have to be collected in a fair, transparent, reliable, verified, and consistent manner.” – (University of St Andrews)

While information on learners’ out-of-school achievement would be valuable if dependable, it should not be collected by teachers as this would provide added pressure to an already heavy workload.

“It should not be for teachers to judge any intrinsic value of such activities. The role for teachers here is to make opportunities available to record out-of-school or in-school achievements based on what the learners see of value. Encouragement and

direction would be the contribution of teachers here.” – (CCG member, Teaching Profession)

Home educators highlighted issues noting it was very challenging for home educated learners to access qualifications and in particular the facilities needed to sit an examination. There was a plea to address this problem.

“I think when home educators are still paying taxes for local services then any reasonable support should be made available for home educated children seeking either practical subjects or qualifications. There should be attempts to offer a blended approach for young people who struggle to attend full time for good reasons.” (CCG member, Parents and Carers)

2.3.4 How Evidence Should Be Presented

Greater use of technology

There was broad agreement that technology must play an increasing part in qualifications and assessment. The design of new qualifications and assessment should assume the use of technology. However, the pace at which learners could benefit from the potential of technology, depended on how quickly the education system could address issues of access, dependability and flexibility of IT systems and the level of skill in the use of technology amongst professionals in learning, teaching and assessment. The different IT systems in local authorities are perceived to create levels of complexity that are not conducive to the creation of a coherent national system. It was argued that the system could learn lessons, both positive and negative, from the introduction and use of GLOW. The need for a system specifically designed for the delivery of qualifications was seen as a major priority. The idea of a technology-based profile of achievements was perceived to be the natural solution for future learners to present their achievements.

Some respondents argued that a technological solution was the only possible way to present evidence of learners’ progress and achievements. They referred to the reasons behind the failure of the previous National Record of Achievement (NRA). It had become a bureaucratic exercise largely because of its paper and folder-based approach.

“I agree that as much information as possible should be gathered however there should be a system in place to ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged by a lack of opportunity outside school or a lack of parental communication regarding out of school learning experiences.” – (Kibble)

While there was some support for creative thinking about the use of technology and its capacity as a time saver, school infrastructure was commonly perceived to be outdated. It was argued that technology would be a key strategy to re-engage learners for whom the existing largely paper and pencil system felt out of date. Some respondents noted a greater potential for cheating provided by a digital system.

“Exams should be digitally produced, and the pupils should type their answers. This would remove many issues like scanning exam scripts and trying to read pupils’ writing.” – (Individual, Public Consultation – Phase Two)

2.3.5 Leaving Certificate

Responses highlighted the value of a leaving certificate or graduation certificate as a useful way to recognise a broader range of achievements. This approach had the potential to include wider community achievements, and to give value to the achievements of learners, some of whom may not demonstrate what they are able to achieve in a school context. This approach was perceived to be more consistent with the aspirations of CfE and the cultural shift needed to achieve these.

A leaving certificate was recognised as being a way to offer a more complete picture of every learner. Offering information on a broader range of achievements was argued to be more consistent with the kinds of information learners wanted to offer and employers wanted to receive. Some respondents identified that this approach was consistent with existing practices in a number of high performing countries internationally.

“A leaving certificate is very common in many international and comparable education systems, and they are regularly used in our admissions process to assess wider skills and competencies. We welcome the consideration of a leaving certificate available as part of the Senior Phase, potentially include a broader range of evidence of achievements than subject-based qualifications.” – (University of St Andrews)

“We welcome the consideration of a leaving certificate available as part of the Senior Phase, potentially include a broader range of evidence of achievements than subject-based qualifications.” – (Children in Scotland)

However, concerns were expressed that the additional workload involved in gathering evidence would not be acknowledged and the time needed would not be made available for teachers. A few respondents suggested that there was a danger of repeating what was already on an SQA certificate (even if not always recognised) and how, if not properly designed, this approach could disadvantage the most vulnerable students who could not achieve all the requirements.

“This would be more information and data gathering that would land at a teacher’s desk at the expense of delivering high-quality lessons in class.” – (Individual, Phase Three Consultation)

2.3.6 Certification at BGE

Views varied as to the value of the introduction of a certificate at the end of the BGE. Some argued that this could bring greater focus and purpose to BGE. Others argued

that the gathering of information to support a certificate at this stage was a pointless exercise.

“I think this would definitely be advantageous as the jump from BGE and Senior Phase can seem daunting to pupils particularly our young people who may have gaps in their learning and have experienced negative experiences of education in the past. To have a sense of achievement at the end of the BGE phase could motivate pupils to achieve more in the Senior Phase. Less able pupils may not experience the success of attaining an award in the Senior Phase so this could boost confidence.” – (Kibble)

2.3.7 General Issues

In response to the open question, education professionals firstly raised the need to tackle a number of problems: unnecessary bureaucracy, outdated and inadequate technology, workload pressures, national agencies that were perceived to be unresponsive, the need to maintain the integrity and validity of the qualifications system and a degree of uncertainty in interpreting the CfE capacities.

Secondly, they emphasised the importance of system change to support any new approach to qualifications, for example, data and accountability measures (the most common response), inspection processes, relationships within and across national agencies, initial teacher education, continuing professional learning and professional standards (Priestly et al, 2023).

It was interesting to note how many of the issues raised in Phase Two of the consultation reflected ideas that were part of the original Vision for CfE. The concern to reflect a broader range of learners’ achievements, the desire to reduce the number of examinations taken by individual learners, the concern not to introduce high stakes assessment at too early a point in the learning process, for example., as outlined in [Building the Curriculum 3](#). A further area of commonality can be found in the original CfE desire to offer a wider range of approaches to gathering evidence, for example, [Building the Curriculum 5](#) notes – “Learners should be engaged in all aspects of assessment processes and be afforded an element of choice and personalisation in showing that they have achieved the intended outcomes.”

The evidence from the analysis of the Phase Two consultation, together with the revised Vision and Principles from Phase One, were used to design a model that became the basis for the third phase of consultation with communities across Scotland.

2.4 Evidence from the Review Process: Phase Three – A New Model for the Future of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland

Phase Three engagement took place from 3 March until 31 April. The initial timescales for the engagement were 3 March to 7 April, but this was extended following a request for more time from teachers' Professional Associations.

An independent contractor, Progressive Partnership, was commissioned to undertake an external analysis of Phase Three responses based on the original timescales. Following the extension, the contractors were able to extend their analysis of responses that were received up until 14 April. This totalled 365 responses via the School and College survey and detailed submissions from 17 CCGs and allied discussion groups. Responses received between 15 April and 31 April were analysed by the Independent Review Secretariat using the coding framework developed by Progressive Partnership. This comprised 120 responses of which 90 were received via the School and College Survey and 30 were received by email.

During Phase Three the Review invited views on a [Scottish Diploma of Achievement \(SDA\) and its three components](#). Views were sought via the CCGs and invited from every school and college in Scotland. Both respondent groups were asked the same questions. CCG views were elicited through meetings facilitated by the link IRG member and views from schools and colleges sought through an online survey, the "School and College Survey". This survey was emailed to every secondary and primary school and college in the country along with [supporting documentation](#). The School and College Survey and supporting documentation was also sent to independent schools, to the Grant Aided Special Schools (GASS) and to units providing secure care to young people aged under 18 in Scotland.

Views of Respondents Overall, there were varied views on the Diploma. In general, the responses from the CCGs tended to be more positive than the responses received through the School and College Survey. There are a number of possible explanations for these differences, including:

- **The profile of the CCGs differed to the School and College Survey.** Most of the responses received via the School and College Survey were received from school communities, rather than colleges, and the majority of these were from secondary school teachers. The CCG responses comprised a far broader range of stakeholders and whilst this included teacher groups it also included learners, parents and carers, universities, Directors of Education, College Quality Managers, employers, researchers and policy professionals. [See the full list of CCG membership](#) (Appendix Four).
- **The method of engagement was different.** A deliberative consultative process was adopted with the CCGs, which meant they had greater access to information about the Review via their IRG link member, opportunities to ask questions and time to reflect during and between each of the three phases. The School and College Survey was not always accompanied by a group discussion and while it was suggested by the Review that educational settings discuss the proposals before responding, it was left up to each setting to determine if/how to do this. The act of discussing as a group prior to

completion may have resulted in more nuanced responses, with those completing the online survey only potentially either coming cold to the proposals or feeling that they could be more direct.

- **Nearly all who participated in the CCG discussions participated in all three phases of the Review:** there were many more responses to the Phase Three School and College Survey than the [Phase One survey](#), which indicates that some respondents to the Phase Three School and College Survey did not participate in all three phases.

2.4.1 The Scottish Diploma of Achievement

While many respondents were positive about the objectives underpinning the Diploma and its three components, there was also concern about how the model would work in practice. There were concerns voiced in respect of equality, particularly in relation to the Personal Pathway component.

“The Diploma as suggested, we feel, reflects many of the original aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence; aspirations which in some ways have not been attained over the course of the last 20 years. In that respect, the opportunity to achieve these aspirations through the introduction of a diploma is laudable. However, we feel that there are real concerns over practicalities, and over the kind of culture change necessary to allow such a development to be successful”. – (Cults Academy)

“Equity is an issue again. Less affluent young people will not get as many opportunities.” – (Kyle Academy, Extended Leadership Team)

In general, the CCGs welcomed the overall Diploma proposal. The Learner CCG was particularly enthusiastic.

Many of the respondents in the School and College Survey also welcomed the proposals for the Diploma. The main reasons given, include:

- would showcase the full range of learners’ achievements;
- would provide a more rounded picture of learners’ achievements and would therefore be beneficial to future employers and universities;
- achievements and certification would align with the learner’s aspirations and next steps in their education/employment and;
- would offer opportunities to reflect the attainments of all learners, not just the most academic.

2.4.2 Subject Studies

In general CCGs, and those responding via the School and College Survey sought further detail around the mechanics of the Programmes of Study component and how it would work in practice. There were some concerns in respect of equality in

relation to teacher assessment and the possibility of teacher bias. This was particularly evident in, although not limited to the CCG concerned with Equity.

“Increased diversity in the education workforce - and among professionals who are involved in designing, developing and grading qualifications and instruments of assessment - is a way of avoiding bias in assessment, given the useful diversity in perspectives and lived experience which this brings with it. It remains the view of the DiTPEW group that the diversity of staff not only in the teaching profession but also in the national agencies with strategic responsibility for assessment and qualifications should be promoted.” – (AREP - Diversity in the Teaching Profession and Education Workforce sub-group)

In the main, CCGs agreed with the proposals set out in the Programmes of Study including the suggestion to reduce the amount of external assessment in the Senior Phase. Overall, CCGs supported a move towards progressive courses over two years, and the accumulation of course credits throughout the Senior Phase.

There were differing views among respondents in the School and College Survey in respect of the proposals on the Programmes of Study. Although many responses were positive, a greater proportion had reservations. Overall, teachers responding via the School and College Survey tended to be critical of proposals under Programmes of Study, whereas learners responding via the survey tended to be positive. Interestingly, teachers involved through the CCGs were largely positive, albeit they did raise concerns around potential workload and resourcing. The Learners CCG was very positive.

Teacher workload was a key theme of responses received through the School and College Survey. Teachers were concerned about the impact of increased workload in moving towards more continuous assessment as well as the additional support and training required to ensure the profession was prepared for such a change.

We like the idea of there being the opportunity for diversity in approach to assessment. Concern about the implication in school especially surrounding the workload implications of the accrual of evidence. Consistency a concern – will there be exemplification and clear criteria to support teacher judgement? Assessment needs to remain robust. Workload concern. Important to retain formal tests for some subjects. Will there be a narrowing of curriculum for example if a subject pathway doesn't go beyond level 5? Or are they going to change the curricular areas? Is the two years S4/5 or S5/6? – (Garnock Community Campus)

Retention and recruitment of teachers and teaching support staff was also acknowledged as a contributing factor to teacher workload issues with one respondent noting that this would need to be addressed as part of wider changes in order for any new system to be implemented effectively.

The issues raised in consultation had a number of implications for the recommendations from this Review (see Chapter Six)

- More detail on the mechanics of the Programmes of Study should be provided without allowing the detail to become prescription.

- There was support for a reduction in external assessment, the option of progressive courses over two years and credit accumulation.
- There would be a need for a national approach to moderation, to build confidence in standards across the country to allow the advantages of classroom assessment to be realised whilst ensuring that no learner would be disadvantaged.
- Professional learning about bias should be an essential component of moderation and should draw on the expertise of the increasingly diverse teaching population.
- There should be specific reference to resource implications including workload.

2.4.3 Project Learning

In general respondents were positive about the objectives underpinning the Project Learning component but were concerned about how the model would work in practice and further detail was sought. There were some concerns in respect of equality.

The CCG discussions on the Project Learning component were positive overall, with learners especially enthusiastic. The key benefits identified included:

- learners would develop skills for future careers; prepare for employment, university and for adult life;
- learners would have opportunities to explore (new) areas of interest and;
- learners could connect and transfer learning and skills into other areas of study and demonstrate what they had learned in an applied setting.

All the CCGs supported the component in principle, but they all indicated concern around its practical implementation and sought further information. Concerns were also raised around how best to assess this component with many of the respondents indicating that some form of assessment, verification or endorsement would be required.

Some respondents through the School and College Survey, in particular learners and colleges, were very positive about this element of the model, with respondents mentioning the key benefits from undertaking project work around a topic of personal interest as motivating learners, developing skills in a range of disciplines, and encouraging innovation and creativity. Other respondents via the School and College Survey, while typically welcoming the proposals, felt that more detail was required, especially in relation to implementation and assessment. This was particularly the case for teachers. Some respondents, largely teachers, noted that past experiences of interdisciplinary learning (IDL) in schools have not always been successful.

“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.” – (Colleges Scotland)

Many respondents both in the CCG discussions and the School and College Survey commented that the proposal demands additional skills from secondary teachers who have often been trained to teach a single subject, and that support for new teachers through initial ITE and ongoing support for all teaching staff through continuing professional development (CPD) would be essential.

“There has to be appropriate training and time for staff to ensure they understand the nature of the changes and prepare for these changes.” – (Shetland Islands Council Children's Services Directorate)

There were concerns about equality across all respondent groups. Respondents wondered whether some educational settings would be better placed to offer opportunities to their learners than others; schools in urban areas were seen to be at an advantage as were schools in more affluent areas. Concerns were also raised about how this element might be more challenging to complete for learners with ASN.

“Focusing on skills and competencies could disadvantage learners with ASN in areas such as communication however (it) could absolutely flourish in practical areas and IT. It definitely needs recognised especially for home educated children with ASN.” - Parent / Carer

The issues raised in consultation had a number of implications for the recommendations from this Review (see Chapter Six)

- support for the proposal across a wide range of communities, in particular learners;
- need for further detail as part of recommendations in particular on proposals for assessment;
- important to understand why previous attempts to introduce project work across subjects had been difficult and to learn from those experiences;
- important to build in time and support for staff and in ITE to develop this strand of the SDA and;
- a need to ensure that opportunities were equitable across the country and for all learners

2.4.4 Personal Pathway

Overall, respondents generally supported the principle of the Personal Pathway but indicated concerns around how it would be implemented and delivered in practice. Significant concerns were raised in respect of equality across all respondent groups.

“I do understand the concerns around equity, but I suppose I think about it, young people with greater access to opportunities through school or out of school will still have that access, whether a light is shown on it by the use of a diploma or not. When learners come to write their personal statements or job applications or complete CVs, they'll be able to bring that richness of opportunities. Rather than shy away from that, does this challenge us as a system to create greater equity of

access of opportunities for young people in a better engagement with young people to help them understand how their role, perhaps as a young carer or in undertaking activities out of school. We are allowing them to acknowledge the kind of skills that are going to be really significant in their future, and could actually maybe be richer than somebody who's got access to lots of clubs and activities.” – (CCG member - Public & Third Sector Employers)

“Teachers were worried that the finances of individual families would overly influence outcomes, and that some pupils would be able to secure the relevant badges of attainment while others would have fewer opportunities to accrue the needed cultural capital.” – (NASUWT)

The CCGs largely welcomed the Personal Pathway stating that:

- it would promote achievement beyond academic subjects;
- could be particularly valuable for learners for whom academic learning was not an area of strength;
- could give learners the opportunity to broaden their learning, reflect on that experience and to evidence it and;
- would give a rounded and holistic picture of a learner.

“The EIS welcomes an inclusive approach to recognising young people’s achievements, including those achieved outside a formal educational setting. For many learners, such achievements can be among their most valued and transformational accomplishments. Such an approach would have the potential to have real utility for learners in further understanding their own learning to inform future choices; and could correlate well with other elements of the SDA.”– (EIS)

Users of qualifications (employers, universities, colleges) were particularly positive about it noting that it, offered a way to learn more about the learner, and possibly an opportunity to distinguish between several applicants with the ‘same’ subject qualifications.

“Again, welcome this and often when interviewing young people for their first role when they talk about their leisure pursuits, sporting achievements, clubs and volunteering this is when they are much more passionate and speak with real feeling about the subject.” (CCG member, Employers)

Many of the responses received via the Schools and College Survey were positive for similar reasons. It would:

- encourage learners to recognise the skills they are developing in everyday life;
- encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning via participation in extracurricular activities;
- enable learners to contribute more to the community and volunteer in different organisations, and they can be recognised for their achievements;
- allow learners to fully consider what they want to do when they leave education;

- provide an opportunity to reflect on achievements, but from a wider perspective than just their grades and;
- offer an opportunity to appreciate and celebrate different cultural literacies.

There was a broad agreement amongst all respondent groups that the Personal Pathway component should be validated but not graded. However, there were significant concerns about equality amongst all respondent groups with many commenting that the component could exacerbate existing inequality since learners from affluent/socially advantaged backgrounds may have greater access to extracurricular activities and opportunities. Almost all the respondents highlighted equalities issues, noting for example that learners in disadvantaged areas and rural areas lack access to the same opportunities as city learners from affluent families.

“If they take part in any clubs, for lots of young people it can be a challenge engaging with clubs, meeting new people etc so if they are actively involved in clubs it should be recognised. Taking part in any sponsorship activities and volunteering out with school. It would also be good to recognise work placements and the achievements within them.” – (Kibble)

Many respondents thought measures should be put in place so that those from disadvantaged backgrounds could benefit from the opportunities offered by the Personal Pathway. However, many felt addressing systemic inequalities would be challenging and very resource intensive, with some concluding that on balance it might not be successful.

It is worth noting that since the public consultation was issued, and in response to feedback during Phase Three of the Review, the proposed Personal Pathway Component in the Diploma has been amended. The focus of the Personal Pathway component is not on the number of experiences the learner has undertaken but on what an individual has learned through an experience i.e., the reflection.

The issues raised in consultation had a number of implications for the recommendations from this Review (see Chapter Six)

- Support in principle for the Personal Pathway. Identified as a positive way to offer a more rounded, personalised picture of a learner and to offer all learners wider opportunities to demonstrate achievements.
- Concerns about equity must be addressed. The proposal did not create the inequity but it did highlight its existence.
- Personal Pathway should be validated but not graded.
- The focus of the Personal Pathway should not be on the number of experiences but on what an individual has learned, for example, their ability to reflect on what they have learned.

2.4.5 Parity of esteem

Parity of esteem across qualifications is a longstanding aspiration of Scottish education. Respondents were asked: 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?

Many CCG responses were supportive of this proposal although some stressed that language changes can only go so far in changing attitudes and perceptions of the relative merits of academic and technical, vocational and professional courses.

“The name of an individual course matters less than the integrity and professional level of that course. For example, it is understood that Level 6 Games Design is not as hard as Level 6 Computing; that Level 6 Photography is not as challenging as Level 6 Art. Teachers are looking for parity between courses at the same level. They are also keen to ensure pupils at all levels are able to attain and that schools are not trying to force pupils to sit in a class which is academically rigorous when that is not for them”. – (NASUWT)

Just over two-fifths of the respondents in the School and College Survey simply replied ‘yes’ in response to this question. Some felt that qualifications differ in terms of level, rigour and degree of challenge. Others felt that the name should also reflect the type of achievement and whether the qualification is academic, technical or professional.

“No. The title of the qualification should relate to the knowledge, skills and assessment approaches within it. Highers have credibility due to the connection with a robust and credible assessment approach. Employers and education/training providers will want to understand what the learner has demonstrated they can do and the title of the qualification relates to this. Whilst the same name/title would be more inclusive, there is positive work underway in most schools relating to parity of esteem within the SCQF framework. This can be achieved whilst still recognising different qualifications contain different demands.” – (Mearns Castle High School)

“Overwhelmingly positive response to this. Many schools are now SCQF Ambassadors as they believe this is really important. Definitely support same name for the same level.” – (Eastwood High School)

2.4.6 Reflections on the process

The Review was designed to engage all those with an interest in qualifications and assessment from the earliest stages of the design. The Review process included an extensive range of communities, including learners throughout the process. Having the range of communities within IRG was very positive. All IRG members were given the opportunity to see the issue of qualifications through the eyes of different groups, learners, parents, teachers and lecturers, schools and colleges, local and national policy makers, national organisations, employers and universities. The thematic groups brought different evidence to discussions. The IRG recognised that there were bound to be tensions and openly discussed the issues, with the aim of reaching a design that best meets the needs of Scotland. It is testament to the commitment of all those in the IRG, that despite the highly challenging nature of the conversations and the often-competing views, people stuck with the process and worked through problems.

Having two members of the SYP in the IRG who have recent experience of the Senior Phase ensured the IRG kept a clear focus on learners being at the centre of the Review.

Perhaps most importantly, members of IRG knew the communities with whom they worked and how best to engage with them. They were able to tailor communication from the Review to the specific needs of their community and they had contacts within it that made the Review process more effective and better targeted. The quality of feedback received was rich because of their involvement.

The model embodies collaborative working. However, there are areas where further work needs to be done if education in Scotland is to draw on the creativity and expertise of all those involved in the process. First, despite the wide range of approaches the Review adopted to engage with classroom teachers and to bring resources to their attention, we are aware that not all had the opportunity to contribute. The engagement of all teachers in policy development remains an issue for the sector. It will be crucial that this is addressed if reform of qualifications and assessment further to this Review, is to be successful in practice.

Parental engagement is another area where our collective practice needs to improve. The IRG members who organised the parental CCG could not have been more pro-active. Supported by a grant from Scottish Government, they adapted materials, constructed surveys, held meetings and thought creatively about how best to involve parents. In addition, some, but not all, schools involved parents in their consultation process. Despite this we retain the sense that not all parents have had the chance to engage with the Review. This is another area where a good start has been made but there remains much to do.

Recommendation 2: Continue the process of cultural change

Scotland should retain the structure of the Independent Review Group and allied Collaborative Community Groups as a key method of engagement, as the country introduces and develops new approaches to qualifications and assessment. It should also build on this Review's attempts to involve every school and college in the country, learn from where it worked well and how that learning should influence future consultations.

3. Reform in Scotland and International Comparisons

3.1 Overview

In Chapter One, we explained why this Review was commissioned. In the previous Chapter we described how we undertook the Review and what we learned through the three phases of engagement.

In the first part of this Chapter, we look at what we might learn from our experience of CfE reform. In the second part of this Chapter, we discuss some of the approaches to qualifications and assessment in other jurisdictions.

Reform in Scotland

3.2 Learning from education reform: Curriculum for Excellence and the Senior Phase in Schools and Colleges.

The mirror that the OECD Independent Reviews (OECD, 2021, Stobart, 2021) held up to the Senior Phase experience in Scotland was familiar to many who work in education. Qualifications and assessment in the Senior Phase had become very different from what had been envisaged in the early days of CfE. Building the [Curriculum 5a framework for assessment](#) (2011), provided the original national guidance on assessment and qualifications.

“The curriculum in the Senior Phase should be designed to meet the Principles of curriculum design and the entitlements set out for all learners in Building the Curriculum 3 and should include the four aspects of the curriculum (the ethos and life of the school as a community, curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities for personal achievement).” (p16).

CfE, at its outset, was regarded as a leader in the field for countries seeking to design curricula fit for the 21st century (OECD, 2021). However, it was not without critics (Priestley & Humes, 2010), and it began to be enacted in practice, gaps began to emerge between the original intentions and what was happening in schools and classrooms. Many of the ideas that have emerged about the future of qualifications and assessment during this Review are very similar to those that were proposed in the early days of CfE. As part of the Review, we asked a number of people who had been involved in the original development of CfE why they believed this had happened. Several reasons were suggested:

- Insufficient attention had been paid in CfE planning to what would happen after the publication of the documentation.
- The original plan for CfE had been to continue to involve schools and teachers in developing ideas over time but the financial climate changed and

the kinds of collaborative development that had been intended were no longer possible.

- The intention to leave the curriculum as open as possible to allow teachers to design programmes to meet the needs of their own students led to requests for clarity. Responding to requests led to the generation of vast quantities of guidance (over 20,000 pages) Too much guidance is as bad as too little.
- Teachers felt that all of the responsibility for putting CfE into practice was theirs. When they asked for support, more guidance was developed. What teachers wanted was practical support, for example, examples of classroom materials for them to adapt to meet the needs of their learners, time to develop ideas and practices working with colleagues in school, opportunities to explore practice across schools.
- The introduction of the qualifications in the Senior Phase later in the implementation process was well intentioned. This decision was intended to provide the space for schools to think about the curriculum before assessment and qualifications. In reality it had resulted in many secondary schools paying little attention to CfE, arguing that they had to wait to see what the qualifications looked like before thinking about teaching and learning. This, it was argued, had led to the position where CfE was seen by some as the Early Years and primary curriculum.
- The task of building shared national standards was underestimated and moderation processes became too bureaucratic.
- The opportunities for those beyond schools and colleges to understand CfE were variable. Parents and employers, in particular, were unsure of what to expect of CfE and what really mattered in qualifications.
- The decision to have an external component to N5 but not to N4 was well intentioned. However, in the Scottish context where examinations have been such a strong part of the education system over time, the decision had led to a perception amongst many parents that N5 was the qualification they wanted their children to achieve. This led to many young people taking courses that did not meet their needs.

There are lessons to be learned from that experience for this Review. These include:

- There has to be a plan for moving beyond the ideas in this document.
- Careful consideration has to be given to the nature of professional learning.
- Resources developed collaboratively with teachers should be available for teachers to adapt to reflect the needs of their learners.
- Resource implications have to be acknowledged.
- Roles and responsibilities, nationally and locally, have to be agreed and linked clearly to supporting teachers and learners.
- The importance of teachers developing and sharing standards should be recognised as an issue of equity - teachers must have a shared understanding to be able to give learners accurate feedback.
- Practices should focus on learning and actions should be agreed to ensure that they do not become bureaucratic. (Priestley et al, 2023)

CfE recognised the central role that subjects play in education but argued for more than knowledge of subjects. The intentions of CfE state that the curriculum as

experienced by every learner should include opportunities to study curriculum areas and subjects in depth but should also include engagement with the school as a community, opportunities to discover how learning connects across different areas of the curriculum and opportunities to personalise learning through personal achievement. What were described in the document as ‘next generation qualifications’ as offered by SQA and other providers were intended to reflect the values and aspirations of CfE.

The nature of CfE as outlined above is such that formal qualifications were unlikely to be able to meet all of the CfE requirements. However, the original design of the new qualifications provided a closer alignment between CfE and qualifications than the current qualifications. The original National Qualifications were designed to gather evidence on what learners knew and understood and their skills and competences. Qualifications included a broad range of approaches to assessment. Ways of gathering evidence differed subject by subject, for example, art and design included a folio of work and physics a scientific project. Decisions were taken by panels of subject specialists, based on what they perceived to be the best way to demonstrate learners’ achievements in the subject. Skills and competences were built into the programmes of study and recognised in the awards.

However, the Priestley report (2020) following the COVID-19 experience of 2019, reported a very different learner experience in the Senior Phase from that envisaged by the developers of CfE qualifications. These findings have subsequently been supported by evidence emerging in this Independent Review from learners, parents and carers and employers. Section 1.11 above describes some of Priestley’s key findings and concerns referred to be Morgan (2018) and Muir (2022), including the prevalence of “two term dashes”, repetitive and formulaic learning experiences, lack of challenge for some learners, limited development of broader skills, little or no cross-subject learning and stress and negative impact on wellbeing caused by the intense focus on examinations. These findings have subsequently been supported by evidence emerging in this Review from learners, parents and carers and employers.

Many learners spoken to as part of this Review reported high levels of stress caused by the overt focus on examinations.

“Instead of one exam, the SQA should give smaller assessments throughout the year which is less stress. Assess on units instead of the whole topics together.” – CCG member – (CCG member, Intercultural Youth Scotland)

“I find exams really hard mentally so I think a good balance between coursework and exams would definitely benefit more people as I know there are people who prefer exams too!” – (CCG member, Scottish Youth Parliament)

Similar findings were also reported in the Muir Review (2022) and in the National Discussion (2023). Angela Morgan (2018) in her review of Support for Learning: All our Children and All their Potential also expressed concern about “the narrative around achievement and attainment.”

Angela Morgan further reported that learners with additional support needs often found accessing alternative assessment arrangements difficult and that these factors

combined to have a negative impact on the wellbeing and educational experiences of young people.

“Many MSYPs shared their experiences of technology as learners with additional support needs and felt that the use of laptops was extremely helpful.” – (CCG member, Scottish Youth Parliament)

“As a parent of a child with dyslexia, using digital technology would put her more on an equal ground.” – (Individual, Phase Two consultation)

During the Review many Headteachers reported that the evidence gathered to judge the quality of education in schools, accountability metrics, was driving behaviours in schools. Schools felt judged not by how well they were serving the needs of every learner but by how many learners achieved National 5 and Higher qualifications. Learners, it was suggested, were at times advised to take qualifications that would be more valuable for school metrics than qualifications best suited to their strengths. Learners constantly referred to being over-examined. Teachers reported a sense of constant pressure to “get through the curriculum” in a series of “two term dashes”. There was little satisfaction amongst teachers or learners with qualifications as taught and learned in the Senior Phase, little sense of deep learning in schools and classrooms, only a sense of people in a system driven to find ever more efficient ways to predict and practise for examinations. All learning involves practice and making sure that learners understand how examinations work and how to perform well in them is important, but, taken to extreme, it will dominate learning and teaching, narrow the curriculum and risked demotivating a high percentage of learners.

3.3 Learning from International and UK Contexts

In addition to reflecting on our own history and previous attempts at reform in CfE, the Review looked beyond Scotland. Our research involved a rapid desk-based literature review of a small number of existing comparative studies. This was followed by a series of informal meetings with individuals with experience of education systems in other jurisdictions. Our objective in this was to expand our understanding of what qualifications and assessment practices might be possible, i.e., approaches that were already in practice in other high achieving countries and might, therefore be possible in Scotland, if the circumstances are conducive.

We were aware that assessment systems are products of a country’s culture, history, traditions and economic system and for these reasons what works in one country may not in another. As Stobart (2021) states, “*student assessment systems are essentially a social, rather than scientific, process which reflects the history and culture within which they occur.*” We were, therefore, not seeking to identify a system that could be imported into Scotland.

The Review looked at several existing international comparative reviews of education systems, including Gordon Stobart’s Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland (2021), SQA’s ‘Comparative study of organisational structures in high performing jurisdictions and how they support successful,

assessment, curriculum, and qualifications’ (2023). Sharon O’Donnell’s report for the National Council for Curriculum Ireland ‘Upper Secondary Education in Nine Jurisdictions (2018) and Geoff Masters’ Review of High Performing Countries (2022).

Stobart’s report looked at nine systems which he indicated shared resemblances with Scotland’s. These included: England, Hong Kong, China, Ireland, Wales. Stobart also looked at France, New Zealand, Norway, Ontario and Queensland, which he noted had “instructive differences” to Scotland. The SQA report looked at practice in 11 jurisdictions: Norway, Finland, British Columbia, Wales, Ireland, England, New South Wales, New Zealand, France, Iceland and Singapore. (SQA, 2022). O’Donnell’s (2018) looked at the following nine jurisdictions: England, Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Ontario, Queensland and Sweden.

Informal meetings were also held with individuals with experience in the following jurisdictions: Canada, Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, Queensland, Singapore and Wales.

It is important to note the limitations of this aspect of the Review. The purpose was to provide a flavour of practices taking place beyond Scotland. Some of the key messages arising are summarised below.

3.4 The role of external assessment in upper secondary

“In comparative terms, Scottish upper-secondary school students are more frequently examined than those in other jurisdictions. This is a consequence of the tradition of offering three suites of examinations (National 5; Highers; Advanced Highers) during secondary years S4, S5, and S6.” (Stobart, 2021) He notes further that “This is examination loading not found in other jurisdictions.” (Stobart, 2021)

In this quotation, Stobart points to the frequency of external examinations in Scotland but also to the reliance on external examinations rather than other forms of assessment such as teacher led and internal assessment methods.

At present, the role of teachers in National Qualifications in Scotland is largely confined to assessment of SQA specified coursework, which is assessed by them, submitted to SQA and then subject to moderation. Further, although coursework is a feature of most NQ courses in the Senior Phase, in some subjects its weighting is relatively small, compared to the weighting of the external examination (Stobart, 2021).

The role of teachers in upper secondary in Scotland can be contrasted with the role of teachers in lower secondary and in primary schools, where they are entrusted to make on-going assessments of their pupils’ progression and achievements. Scotland’s upper secondary school approach to teacher assessment can also be contrasted with that in many other jurisdictions including Norway, Sweden, Ontario, New Zealand and Queensland where teacher assessment in its different forms, plays a much more central role in qualifications and assessment.

In Norway for example 80% of a student's award is based on in-school assessment (Stobart, 2021) and "teachers are seen as the key experts not only in instructing but also in assessing their students" (OECD, 2011). Students only undertake external examination in Norwegian, other subjects are subject to examination in an examination lottery, whereby approximately 20% of learners sit each subject examination. No student takes more than two examinations.

Sweden also has a system of teacher assessment, which can be used as a basis for entry into university (O'Donnell 2018) Stobart calls these systems "high-trust" systems, where teachers have a great deal of autonomy in deciding the ways in which evidence can be collected. Evidence from assessment approaches such as portfolios, coursework, teacher observation is used to form a composite grade.

3.5 Leaving certificates and subject based qualifications

"Scotland, unlike many jurisdictions, does not provide a school leaving certificate but issues subject-based qualifications. Students who have had limited success in their examinations may therefore have little to show for their school achievements." (Stobart, 2021)

As Stobart indicates, many assessment systems internationally have a senior secondary curriculum which brings together a number of components into a final diploma. These systems sometimes also have a certification process for students who fail to meet the requirements of the national qualification.

These awards are packaged differently, and decisions are taken as to the number of components, their focus and the relative weightings (for example, examinations, social contributions, practical projects, orals). Often, they will allow learners to combine flexibly traditional academic subjects and technical, vocational and professional subjects.

For example, in New Zealand the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is the main secondary school qualification. The NCEA is a credit-based system, where learners earn credits towards the achievement of their certificate. Credits can be earned through traditional academic as well technical, vocational and professional subjects. Learners can also continue to accumulate credits after they have left school through structured workplace learning" (O'Donnell, 2018).

In Ontario, students must obtain 30 credits to achieve a Secondary School Diploma. The Ontario Secondary School Certificate is available to students who earn a minimum of 14 credits and students who leave school before fulfilling the requirements for a Diploma or Certificate may be granted a Certificate of Accomplishment. Students have the flexibility to choose from vocational and academic study and can gain credits in skills training centres (O'Donnell, 2018).

3.6 The importance of skills in upper secondary assessment

Masters (2022) from the Australian Council of Educational Research, undertook a three year study of five learning systems in locations identified in international surveys as ‘high performing’. The study identified a number of common themes across the five jurisdictions one of which was an increased emphasis on skills and the need for a skills framework whether that be the OECD’s (21st century skills), the UNESCO’s (transversal skills) or the EU’s (general competences). Although the terms of these frameworks may differ, the underlying concepts are very similar. Each puts greater emphasis on supporting students’ use of knowledge and skills, for example, applying knowledge in different contexts, creative thinking, problem solving, team building, being entrepreneurial. These are similar to the types of skills referred to in the Withers’ Review (2023). Withers also proposes a single skills framework (Recommendation nine).

In Norway, changes to their curriculum have included building competences and attributes such as critical thinking and creativity. In Wales, *Curriculum for Wales* which launched in 2020 set out key goals for every learner with a focus on developing skills and experiences (Stobart, 2021).

Alongside each of these curriculum reforms, there have been changes in assessment approaches. Stobart reflects that translating these ambitions for greater focus on skills and attributes has been challenging in practice.

“Many jurisdictions around the world found challenges in how to translate these aspirations into their upper-secondary school assessment policies. The new curriculum intentions are often hard to align with historic assessment practices that are embedded in that society.” (Stobart, 2021).

Project work in upper secondary assessment

In a number of jurisdictions including Finland and Sweden and in Baccalaureate systems, upper secondary assessment includes an element of project work. There are different rationales for the inclusion of a project element, but common reasons included a desire to give learners an opportunity to apply learning in real life contexts and to develop skills necessary for the ‘real world’ as well as showing preparedness for work or further study. The interest in Project Learning is also evident in Scotland where the Review’s proposals (see Chapter Five) have been broadly welcomed.

In Finland, what they refer to as ‘project-based learning’ has been mandatory for schools since 2016. (Symeonidis, & Fohanna, 2016) Learners from the age of seven are required each year to undertake a “phenomenon-based” project on a holistic topic such as energy, climate change, migration. Learners explore the topics through a range of practical ‘real-life’ scenarios and through a range of disciplines. This approach can be contrasted with traditional approaches to learning and teaching, centred on discrete subjects like geography, history and mathematics.

A second example, with a different focus, is the Extended Essay in the International Baccalaureate (IB). The IB states that the aim of the Extended Essay is for learners to gain skills in:

- formulating an appropriate research question;
- engaging in a personal exploration of the topic;
- communicating ideas and;
- developing an argument.

(International Baccalaureate, 2022)

An example of an optional project approach can be found in England, where the Level 3 Extended Project Qualification offers learners the opportunity to undertake a stand-alone project on a topic of their choice. Learners have flexibility in terms of the final output: some learners choose to write a dissertation, others create an artefact (for example, a poster, blog post or video) or performance. The Extended Project Qualification is taken by around 40,000 learners in England each year and is teacher assessed. (AQA, 2023)

Each of these examples offers extensive learner choice within a common framework where criteria are defined but can be met in a wide range of ways.

3.7 Flexible pathways in upper secondary

Many countries offer flexible pathways in terms of combining academic and vocational programmes. O'Donnell states that examples of this practice can be seen in Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Ontario and Queensland. (O'Donnell, 2018)

“The credit-based systems in Finland, New Zealand, Ontario and Queensland allow students the flexibility to combine academic and vocational study and so successfully complete upper secondary education. In England, students can combine the study of academic and vocational qualifications in the same upper secondary study programme. In Ireland, students following a Leaving Certificate programme, can combine vocational/ technical and academic subjects; some complete the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme as a result.” (O'Donnell, 2018)

3.8 Learning through public engagement

A number of jurisdictions also include an element of student service. For example, in Ontario, since 1999 learners wishing to obtain a high school diploma must complete at least 40 hours of community service. The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board states that the purpose of the community involvement is to promote community values by:

- helping students understand how they can make a positive difference in their environment;
- having students contribute to their community;
- increasing student awareness of community needs;
- discovering the role students can play in making their communities better places in which to live and work;

- developing a positive self-image and a greater sense of identity in the community and;
- providing a possibility for exploring career opportunities.

(Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 2023)

The history of ‘service learning’ is well established in the United States (Kraft, 1996). It is also a feature of the International Baccalaureate. The Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS) is a mandatory element of the IB diploma where students must complete a project related to these three concepts.

3.9 Lessons in reform

Scotland is far from alone in considering changes to its qualification and assessment system. Masters (2022) argues that ‘nations around the world recognise the urgency of transforming school education’. Like Scotland, other nations realise that successful societies in future will be those which have actively prepared for change.

“To ensure that a much larger proportion of the population achieves the levels of knowledge, skill and competence required for effective engagement in modern societies and workplaces. In today’s knowledge-based economies, the levels once attained by a relatively small percentage of the population must now be attained by almost all” – (Masters 2022, p2)

Masters (2022) sought to understand what actions were being taken by countries explicitly seeking to build world class education system. The five jurisdictions he studied were: British Columbia, Estonia, Finland, Hong Kong and South Korea. It was interesting to note that even although these countries are identified currently as high performing, they are all in the process of re-designing their school learning systems. Their rationale for change is very similar to the rationale for change that underpins this Review. They identify two main challenges;

- the need to prepare learners more effectively for future life and work and;
- to ensure that every learner “learns successfully, achieves high standards and leaves school well prepared for the future” (p4)

Masters (2022) identified a number of common themes across the five jurisdictions. First, he states that each recognised that their curricula, including pedagogy and assessment have to change. They recognise that learners will need to approach knowledge, skills and attributes differently if they are to thrive in the uncertainties of the future. For example, learners will need to be able to judge the quality of information online; they will have to understand how to differentiate between more or less dependable evidence. More broadly, they will need the skills to tackle major challenges to our existing ways of life, for example; climate change and the protection of the environment, the role of science in society and how to protect democratic institutions and processes.

Masters (2022) also notes that, although all five jurisdictions are sometimes described as high equity, the picture is more complicated. They may be more

effective than most in reducing the number of learners who perform at low levels of achievement, but the achievements of 10-15% of their learners remain below the minimally acceptable OECD level with an additional 20% achieving only that minimal level. In all five nations or states, there remains a strong relationship between learner achievements and socioeconomic circumstances. The relationship between poverty and achievement is an international challenge. In these high achieving contexts, the gap between the most advanced 10% of 15-year-olds and the least advanced is four to five years, one third of their lifetime.

Changes in the curricula of these countries are being paralleled by changes in approaches to qualifications and assessment. According to Masters (2022), they recognise that traditional ways of assessing students' learning may be appropriate if the aim is to have learners demonstrate what they know and are able to do in individual subject areas. However, competencies and attributes such as critical thinking, problem solving, or resilience will require different approaches to assessment. Competences and attributes are progressive, and learners will make progress during school and beyond. Assessing competences and attributes has to take a progressive, developmental approach. In all five jurisdictions, changes to assessment are being undertaken in parallel with the jurisdictions' more traditional assessment approaches.

Masters (2022) states that each of the five jurisdictions is also aware of the potential washback effect of assessment processes and how these can undermine curricular reform, particularly when assessment is used for purposes of selection. He cites South Korea as an example of a country where the impact of washback is particularly strong. In South Korea, entry to university is highly selective. This has a washback effect on what happens in classrooms, as the examination becomes the driver for what is taught and learned rather than the broad curriculum. To avoid this effect, some jurisdictions have removed end of school examinations and use only teacher assessment, others have integrated other assessment approaches. For example, Estonia has introduced a creative cross-curricular project and Hong Kong has developed a student learning profile, where students summarise their achievements beyond formal courses. All five jurisdictions have introduced more student-centred approaches to learning and teaching.

Whilst recognising the importance of subjects as the building blocks of most curricula internationally, countries also acknowledge the importance of having learners transfer and apply their knowledge into other areas or disciplines. Some identify the motivational impact on learners of having them use and apply the knowledge, skills, capacities and values they have been developing in individual subject areas to tackle a global challenge.

The five countries examined by Masters (2022) are changing qualifications and assessment in different ways, but they are all changing.

3.10 Summary

Many of the issues being explored in a Scottish context are also reflected in developments underway in a number of other jurisdictions. The importance of having

a qualifications and assessment system that provides learners with the maximum opportunity to demonstrate their achievements is a common theme across a number of jurisdictions, including Scotland. A further theme being considered is the importance of learner choice, both in learner pathways and choice within tasks. The awareness of the increasing importance of skills and using knowledge in context also resonates with thinking in Scotland. Finally, the CAS example from the IB and the Ontario service model are consistent with the desire in Scotland to reflect the wider community-orientated aspirations of CfE.

Recommendation 3: Work in partnership with countries with similar aspirations to Scotland to develop Qualifications and Assessment.

Learn from experience within Scotland but also be outward looking. Seek to learn with other nations with similar educational aspirations to build a Qualifications and Assessment system that will remain fit for the future.

4. The Scottish Diploma of Achievement

4.1 Introduction

Evidence emerging from this Review presents a convincing case to change the current system of qualifications and assessment in Scotland. The first phase of engagement led to a shared view of what is desirable: a Vision for the future of qualifications. The review of CfE helped us to identify what actions this Review should take to avoid the mistakes of the past. The engagement with countries internationally helped us to identify what is possible: what practices already exist in practice elsewhere. The evidence from the second and third phases of engagement shaped the structure of the proposed new approach to qualifications and assessment, the Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA), and identified what would be necessary to make it work in practice; what is practical.

In this Chapter, we make recommendations for the SDA and in the next Chapter we consider practical implications.

4.2 The Vision and Principles: the Future of Qualifications and Assessment

The Vision

The proposed Vision for the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland is for:

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.

It is a system which will recognise the achievements of all learners, including those who are highly able and those who have severe and complex learning difficulties. Qualifications should be highly regarded by learners; they are their qualifications. Colleges, employers, universities, and the voluntary sector should also hold them in high regard. The SDA will offer a better base for selecting candidates.

The SDA is designed to inspire learning. It will offer learners a wide and flexible range of opportunities to build knowledge and to develop skills in areas of interest and significance to them (through Programmes of Study). It will allow learners to apply their knowledge and skills to support their progress beyond school or college; in life, learning and employment (through the Project Learning). It will recognise, value and promote learners' individual achievements (through the Personal Pathway). The SDA will help learners to grow socially, culturally and economically. Having a qualification system where every learner thrives will help to create a more equitable and prosperous society in Scotland, a society that will work for all of us, regardless of the personal characteristics of learners gaining the qualifications.

“We need a framework for neuro-divergent young people. If we want to value the full range of achievement we need to value the learner. One learner told us: “As an autistic person I would have loved this – I’m a bit sad I’m not getting to go through this system. It’s not about giving concessions and exceptions but embracing everyone.” – (CCG member, Learners)

The Principles

In addition to the Vision statement, the Review sought views on Principles that should be used to inform the design of the qualification and assessment system. To promote good alignment between the Vision and Principles and practice over time, the Principles offer a structure for reviewing policy and practice. If practice is reviewed on a regular basis against the Vision and Principles, any problems emerging can be identified at an early stage and appropriate action taken allowing the system to learn from its own practice.

The Principles are:

Scotland's qualifications and assessment system should:

1. Recognise, value and promote the rights and 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, employers, universities and the voluntary sector.

While all parts of the Vision and Principles statement are important, we would like to draw attention to Principles 1 and 2. Principle 1 is a commitment that the achievements of every learner should be *‘recognised, valued and promoted’*. We believe the Diploma, with its three constituent parts, provides a flexible platform for all learners to present their achievements. All means all: learners who are neurodivergent or have ASN including, those who are highly able those who combine school experience with college learning, those who are home educated, and those whose achievements come through employment. The inclusive nature of the Diploma is explored further in the next Chapter and in Appendix One which

details learner journeys based on a range of common interactions with the Senior Phase in Scotland.

The findings of The Scottish Government's recently completed National Discussion are consistent with the Vision and Principles offered in this Review. Their findings suggest that learners expect greater personalisation in their experience of the Senior Phase and wider education system. The National Discussion and our own work also make clear that there is an expectation that *“that learning should be recognised in a variety of ways that accommodate different learning pathways and options that learners choose.”*

The National Discussion (2023) also argues that:

“Educating Our Future requires a Scottish education system that is proactive, flexible, integrated, and upholds the rights of all children and young people. A future Scottish Education system will offer high-quality teaching and learning, different learner pathways, alternative routes to success and a range of appropriate assessments that reflect the unique talents of each learner, supports their ambitions, and meets the needs of a changing world.” (National Discussion, 2023)

The sense of responsiveness to the needs of individual learners is core to the recommendations of this Review and our second Principle reinforces the findings of both the National Discussion and *Putting Learners At The Centre* (Muir 2022) by stating that Scotland's system of qualifications and assessment must “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.” We believe the Diploma has the potential to take forward this aspiration.

[Recommendation 4: Adopt the Vision and Principles proposed in this Review into policy and practice. Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland should be aligned with the Vision and Principles.](#)

These should be used as the basis for regular review to ensure that ideas and practices remain aligned.

4.3 The Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA)

The Diploma has been designed to reflect more of what we value in learning and what will be of greater value to learners as they move forward in their lifelong learning journey. It offers learners the opportunity to have a broader range of achievements recognised, all crucial for their future successful progression.



Figure 3: The Scottish Diploma of Achievement

Programmes of Learning

In-depth study of individual areas of the curriculum, subjects and vocational, technical and professional qualifications, will remain a fundamental part of qualifications. However, the new approach to qualifications should go further to improve alignment with CfE.

Project Learning

Learners should have opportunities to demonstrate how they can use knowledge from across subjects/technical and professional areas to tackle challenges. These kinds of experience are closer to those learners will have beyond school or college, for example being able to work as part of a team, to investigate, to solve problems and to look for creative solutions.

Personal Pathway

Learners are individuals and should have opportunities to demonstrate their individuality- the courses they choose, the projects they undertake, their interests, their contributions and aptitudes. Together, these combine to help learners make good decisions about what they might do next. This wider, more personalised information will provide colleges, employers and universities with a better evidence base to inform their decisions about which students or employees are likely to be best suited to which course or job.

4.4 Why these three areas?

Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment should be a coherent whole (Wyse et al, 2016). The curriculum identifies what matters. In the context of the Senior Phase, Priestley (2019) argues that when planning for learning, the first question should not be “What subjects should we teach?” but rather “What is important, what matters?”. After curriculum, what matters is pedagogy, the approaches to learning and teaching used to engage learners with the curriculum and to promote their learning. From there, assessment seeks to discern the progress learners are making in what matters, and how that evidence might be used to inform their further progress in learning. Qualifications represent the formal recognition of that learning for many, though not all, learners.

What matters should be the focus for learning and teaching, for assessment and for qualifications. The crucial question for qualifications is not what can we most easily measure. The question for programmes of study posed previously, should become the question for qualifications: what knowledge, skills and attributes should an educated person have to be able to thrive in a modern, complex democratic society?’

Currently, the curriculum in Scotland is defined as

“the totality of all that is planned for children and young people from early learning and childcare, through school and beyond. That totality can be planned for and experienced by learners across four contexts:

- Opportunities for Personal Achievement
- Interdisciplinary Learning
- Ethos and Life of the School as a Community
- Curriculum Areas and Subjects”

(Education Scotland, 2023)

The evidence from Phase Two of the Review suggested that across communities, qualifications and assessment should relate more closely to the CfE curriculum and to the contexts for learning. The SDA reflects this desire to extend the breath of qualifications and assessment to reflect the Scottish curriculum.

Programmes of Learning

- Curriculum Areas and Subjects
- Vocational, Technical and Professional courses

Project Learning

- Interdisciplinary Learning

Personal Pathway

- Opportunities for Personal Achievement
- Ethos and Life of the School as a Community

The three areas of the SDA, Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and Personal Pathway bring together the knowledge, skills and attributes that citizens need in a modern, complex democratic society.

In Appendix One we have exemplified what the SDA could look like in practice. We have purposely provided a wide, though not exhaustive, range of examples. These examples were developed in partnership with educational settings and key stakeholders.

[Recommendation 5: Adopt the Scottish Diploma of Achievement \(the Diploma\) as the new approach to qualifications and assessment. The Scottish Diploma of Achievement should contain three elements: Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and the Personal Pathway](#)

[Recommendation 6: Use the Scottish Diploma of Achievement as a graduation certificate for all Senior Phase educational settings](#)

The following criteria should be used as a starting point for further development of the Diploma:

- All learners must be offered the chance to experience learning in all elements of the Diploma. This should be viewed as an entitlement.
- The overall Diploma should not be graded. It should be awarded when achievements are recognised in each element, Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and the Personal Pathway.
- Within the Diploma, courses within Programmes of Learning if currently graded will continue to be graded. Project Learning will not be graded but projects will be linked to the different levels of the SCQF framework with different credits. The Personal Pathway will not be graded.
- The Diploma will be awarded at point of exit and will include achievements gathered to that stage. It will include, qualifications, awards, credit accumulated and learner reflections on their personal learning through the Personal Pathway.
- The three elements of the Diploma should not be weighted. All elements are important as evidence of breadth of achievement.
- The Diploma, and the evidence within it, will move with the learner to be built on in college, employment, university and the voluntary sector.
- If a learner does not show evidence of learning in all three elements, the Diploma will not be awarded. They will leave with a record of what they have achieved. It will be possible to undertake learning at a later stage to allow for the award to be made.
- All elements of the Diploma should be accessible to Gaelic Medium Learners.
- All learners should have a digital profile to allow them to record achievements in Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and Personal Pathway. The profile will be owned by the learner. The Qualifications Body will regulate the information about achievements in Programmes of Learning and Project Learning. The Personal Pathway will be entirely in the control of the learner.
- The digital profile must be fully accessible for all learners and available in Gaelic and other minority languages.

It is important that issues of data ownership and security are considered carefully and learners must retain ownership of their Personal Pathway and its contents. The Review commends the initial work by Education Scotland in this area and would recommend that, if the concept of the Diploma is adopted, work in digital profiling and in digital security should be accelerated.

While this was not examined in detail as part of this Review, we believe there may be opportunities to rationalise the landscape of digital tools/profiles across the education sector and it would be worth considering how a new profile would relate to existing systems including Glow and My World of Work. It would also be useful to consider wider developments taking place beyond Scotland in profiling, particularly approaches that have been subject to trials in schools and colleges, for example, the work of Rethinking Assessment.

4.5 Programmes of Learning

As is currently the case, the Diploma will require learners to study in depth defined Programmes of Learning including National Qualifications (levels 1 to 7), National Certificates, Foundation Apprenticeships, National Progression and Skills for Work Awards. Most of a learner's time in the Senior Phase will be focused on building and then deepening their knowledge, understanding and skills in these areas. Learning in general courses (subjects) and/or in technical and professional (vocational) programmes in college, remains crucial. These are the fundamental building blocks of education in Scotland.

Studying Programmes of Learning is a crucial element of the SDA and will depend on the expertise of subject-based educators and vocational, technical and professional experts in educational settings. The existing links between schools, colleges and community learning have brought a richness to the offer for learners through a broad range of experiences. It is likely that the offer to learners will continue to expand as opportunities for in-depth study on-line expand.

Online courses are already part of the education landscape in Scotland. Universities, nationally and internationally, have a wide range of courses available online that offer challenging opportunities for learners with particular interests and aptitudes. Courses such as these allow learners to progress at their own pace and are likely to become an increasingly important part of the future landscape. In addition, e-Sgoil or an alternative virtual campus (for example, Highland Virtual Campus) allows learners to undertake SQA awards. Approaches such as this may be of particular interest to schools and colleges where the curriculum offer is more restricted because of difficulties in location or in teacher recruitment.

Schools and colleges should be creative as they seek to ensure that all learners have access to a broad and balanced offer.

The current approach to qualifications in schools in Scotland in the Senior Phase has attracted strong criticism. A key issue in Scottish education is what is known as the "two-term dash". (Priestley et al., (2020) reported that;

“Young people would like to see achievement captured throughout the year, rather than the ‘two term’ dash towards examinations (in particular for Higher).” (p39)

The idea of a “two term dash” was a consistent theme throughout the Review. It was used to illustrate concern for a system of learning and teaching that in years four to six of secondary school focused less on quality and depth of learning but was almost entirely driven by preparation for examinations.

Examinations are one approach to gathering evidence. For some purposes, examinations work well, but as with all methods of assessment, they have limitations. The evidence from recent investigations (Stobart, 2021) and Priestley et al,(2020) suggests that in Scotland, to increase validity, i.e., the relationship between what is important in the curriculum and what is part of the qualification, the balance between coursework and external examinations should be reconsidered. For example, Stobart (2021) argues that Scotland has too many examinations, for many learners, three sets of external assessment in three years.

Before COVID-19, most SQA National Qualifications included a mix of assessment methods. Qualifications were designed to assess all four capacities. However, the perception is that now the focus is on one capacity, Successful Learners.

A second issue raised consistently throughout the Review was that of progression. The relationship between National 4, National 5 and Higher in subjects across the curriculum was perceived to be problematic. There were also concerns about SQA course specifications being the main source of curriculum guidance in national qualifications in the Senior Phase.

Recommendation 7: Include the Programmes of Learning element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. All learners should be offered a broad range of courses including academic, vocational, professional and technical courses. It is an entitlement.

The Review recommends that the learning, teaching and assessment of Programmes of Learning can be strengthened by adopting the following actions. These actions should be undertaken collaboratively by teachers, including subject specialists, and learners, local authorities/Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs), national agencies and academics:

- **Review Course Specifications** to ensure that there is a strong relationship between what matters in the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and qualifications
- **Improve progression between Broad General Education and the Senior Phase and within the Senior Phase.** Curriculum for Excellence should provide progressive experiences for learners. Throughout the Review concerns were expressed about the extent to which there was clear progression within subjects. The articulation between BGE and Senior Phase was perceived to lack

coherence as was the relationship between National levels 4 and 5 and between National 5 and Higher in a number of subject areas.

- **Broaden the range of assessment methods for National Qualifications in the Senior Phase.** The range of approaches to assessment should reflect what matters in the curriculum. The decision about which approaches to assessment to select should be based on how best to gather evidence of a learner's achievements in what is important in each programme of learning. More classroom-based assessment offers better opportunities to improve validity. Including a variety of approaches to assessment in a qualification also recognises that learners respond differently to different approaches. For example, some learners will be able to demonstrate greater achievement if asked to describe what they know or have done in an oral examination than if asked to write a response. For other learners, the opposite is true. Self and peer assessment, where learners have to think about their own and other's learning can help to deepen learners' understanding of progression and how they can become autonomous self-regulating learners who know how to improve their performance and how to support others. It can give teachers evidence of how deeply a learner understands the focus of study. The range of methods used will differ for each programme of learning and should be a matter for subject groups that include classroom teachers. We note that a mixture of approaches to assessment was present across programmes pre COVID-19. Digital opportunities to broaden the range of approaches to assessment should be pursued as a matter of urgency

"The practice of placing a strong emphasis on teacher-based assessment has a range of advantages. Teachers have multiple opportunities to observe students over time and performing a variety of tasks, including team work, oral performance and extended projects, and in this sense their observations have higher validity than a one off examination would have." (OECD, 2020)

"High school examinations are essentially an out-of-date 19th and 20th century technology operating in a 21st century environment of teaching and learning. Digital technology is transforming our capacities for self-assessment, peer assessment, shared assessment and continuous assessment. Assessment and examinations can now be more continuous, rather than episodic. They can provide capacities for continuous self-assessment and self-directed progression in learning. They can enable transparent sharing of assessments with pupils, parents and professional colleagues that will lead to timely teacher assistance and intervention." (ICEA, 2020)

- **Reduce the number of examinations in the Senior Phase.** Examinations are one important way of gathering evidence however the current system has too many examination points. We propose that there will be no external examination at SCQF levels 1- 5. Assessment will be internal only. External examinations, alongside internal assessment, will remain part of National Qualifications at SCQF level 6 Higher and SCQF level 7 Advanced Higher We believe this will result in a reduction in pressure on learners and staff in education settings and will promote opportunities for greater depth in learning. This will open up a range of possibilities, for example, SCQF Level 6 Higher courses will be progressive across 2 years. If a learner decides to end their study of a course in S4, they will leave with the credit they have accumulated. If they have earned sufficient credit

to be awarded a level 4 or 5 award, their coursework will be externally validated, and the award made. A learner will not be deemed to have exited if study continues in fifth and sixth year.

- **Retain examinations where they are an important part of the assessment methodology. Review existing examinations to reduce susceptibility to question prediction and over-rehearsal.** This may involve a reconsideration of the kinds of questions asked, the range of options available in examination papers and the assessment methods used. However, these actions alone will not change the current culture around examinations. For the culture to change, there will also have to be changes in pedagogy in schools and classrooms, but the actions proposed will help and will act as a stimulus for change.
- **Increase flexibility by modularising courses in Programmes of Learning.** Programmes of Learning should be organised into modules to allow learners maximum flexibility to build credit as they progress through courses. It should be possible for modules from different types of award to be combined. For example, modules at National 5 should also be able to contribute towards a National Certificate at Level 5. Wherever possible, evidence of achievement should come from normally occurring assessment tasks as part of learning and teaching rather than from the introduction of additional summative assessment tasks. We recognise that further work will be required to move towards a modularised approach.
- **Create more time for learning and teaching.** The removal of external assessment in S4 will create more time for learning and teaching across S4 and S5. For example, credit will be accumulated across a two-year period for learners taking courses at SCQF level 6 Higher. Be vigilant to make sure that the time released is used for learning and teaching. Bureaucracy is created, it is not a naturally occurring state.

The sixth year of school offers opportunities to extend and to deepen the range of activities undertaken in the SDA. Learners in sixth year will be able to continue to undertake a range of programmes consistent with their individual progression. For some learners this may include a broader range of National courses or other achievement awards. For other learners, courses may be at SCQF levels 6 or 7 or contribute to Foundation Apprenticeships or National Progression Awards. Education settings should continue to work with learners to explore future options to identify their future learning pathway. The system should be flexible. For example, if a learner wishes to undertake a one year Chemistry - SCQF level 6 - Higher in sixth year, this should remain possible. In addition, the other two elements of the Diploma, Project Learning and Personal Pathway offer significant new opportunities for learners in S6 to extend and deepen their profile of activities. For example, the Project is linked to the SCQF framework. This framework could allow learners to undertake a project at or beyond level 7, offering a level of challenge beyond that traditionally offered in schools.

4.6 The Personal Pathway

One of the key Principles of the Review is to value a broader range of achievement beyond acquisition of subject or technical, vocational and professional qualifications. This element of the Diploma allows a more personalised picture of a learner to emerge. This is a crucial part of building personalisation and choice into the Senior Phase.

One of the strongest themes to emerge in the Review from learners was a desire to personalise qualifications. The Personal Pathway provides a way to encourage and celebrate the interests, learning, skills and achievements of every learner. The opportunity for an individual to reflect on their learning is a key skill for all learners. Wider learning opportunities to include a degree of learner choice, can make a significant contribution to other forms of learning, for example, improving motivation, building strong relationships. The potential for wider learning opportunities to enhance a learner's commitment to education more generally should not be underestimated.

[Recommendation 8: Include the Personal Pathway element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners. This is an issue of equity. It must be flexible for all learners, recognising the importance of personal choice and should focus on what learners have learned about themselves.](#)

The Personal Pathway should encourage and celebrate the interests, competences and achievements of every learner

The Personal Pathway offers learners opportunities to personalise their profile, to select aspects of their experiences that reflect their interests, the contributions they make to society and their career aspirations for employment.

The Personal Pathway should be owned by the learner and promote personalisation and choice. It is the learner who decides what information is contained within the Personal Pathway.

Within this part of the Diploma, learners may reflect on what they have learned from

- Contributions they have made to the school or college as a community or to communities beyond their education setting.
- Cultural activities they have taken part in or led, for example, music, art, drama, Gaelic culture, sport, wider cultural activities, for example, language learning.
- Strategies they have developed to promote their own well-being and how they support the well-being of others.
- Activities they have taken part in to support them in decisions about what they may wish to do post school or college, for example, their exploration of

possible careers, enterprise activities they have undertaken or approaches to entrepreneurship they have explored.

- Activities or achievements of which they are particularly proud.

The Personal Pathway should aim to include social, cultural, economic and well-being aspects. In many cases learner experiences will integrate a number of these aspects.

- The focus in the Personal Pathway is not on gathering experiences, but on what an individual has learned through experience.

Personalisation and choice are likely to become an increasing feature of education in the future. Learners' experiences in education will become increasingly flexible and personalised. Teachers will be asked to mentor learners, to help to guide them through a complex learning environment. Through the Personal Pathway, learners will be supported to reflect on their learning across all three elements of the Diploma and on what they are learning about themselves.

Appropriate professional learning opportunities in coaching and mentoring will be necessary for those who would wish to take on these new roles, for example. teachers, lecturers, parents/carers, youth workers, schools, colleges and other settings that provide education and may be in the positions of supporting a learner on this pathway. This should include action in ITE.

Dedicated resources should be made available to support this aspect of the development and system leadership will be required for it to become embedded in Scottish education. This should include a digital platform that will allow a learner to gather evidence of achievement.

To ensure that the importance of this area of work is recognised, is well co-ordinated and has status, a promoted post should be established for those leading this work in schools and colleges.

To support the development of their Personal Pathway, learners should have supported opportunities to self-reflect on the skills and attributes they have developed. These discussions should take place across an academic year and throughout the Senior Phase

Schools and colleges already offer a wide range of experiences for learners beyond courses. Having this as part of the SDA, recognises the importance of this part of the curriculum for learners and builds it as an aspect of education to which every learner is entitled. Learners should be supported to self-reflect on the skills and attributes they have developed. This will be essential in preparing for transition to employment, volunteering or to further or higher education. Learners should have opportunities for reflective personal discussion across an academic year and throughout the Senior Phase.

The Personal Pathway will not be graded but evidence contained within it will be subject to authentication processes.

4.7 The Importance of Equity in the Personal Pathway

Although there was a great deal of support for the idea of a Personal Pathway and a recognition of the importance of introducing a more personalised aspect to qualifications, significant concerns were raised about how the Personal Pathway might be made equitable. The IRG and CCGs spent considerable time debating issues of equity. We came to the conclusion that the inclusion of a Personal Pathway would shine a light on existing inequality rather than create more inequality.

“I do understand the concerns around equity, but I suppose I think about it, young people with greater access to opportunities through school or out of school will still have that access, whether a light is shown on it by the use of a Diploma or not. When learners come to write their personal statements or job applications or complete CVs, they'll be able to bring that richness of opportunities. Rather than shy away from that, does this challenge us as a system to create greater equity of access of opportunities for young people in a better engagement with young people to help them understand how their role, perhaps as a young carer or in undertaking activities out of school. We are allowing them to acknowledge the kind of skills that are going to be really significant in their future and could actually maybe be richer than somebody who's got access to lots of clubs and activities.” – (CCG member - Public & Third Sector Employers)

There were two options. We could remove the Personal Pathway from the Diploma which would leave the situation where some learners had few, if any, opportunities to learn in this personal space or we could keep it and tackle the issue of equity. We chose the latter. Making sure that every learner in Scotland has opportunities to engage in social, cultural, well-being and economic activities is a crucial part of what it means to be educated in Scotland. This should be an entitlement for every learner.

4.8 Enhancing Decisions on Future Pathways

Within the Personal Pathway learners should have opportunities to consider what future pathways they might follow post-school/college. Colleges, employers and universities emphasise the importance of the contribution made to education by the components of the Personal Pathway. For example, learners should be able to reflect on their learning and their wider achievements. This might include their interests, the ways in which they contribute to their communities or to broader society and the thinking they have done about the kinds of future study or employment that might best build on their skills and aptitudes. Universities commented that the Personal Pathway was a way of bringing together the different aspects of the SDA.

There are new opportunities to enhance all learners' career experiences. The Career Review (Smith, 2023) proposes a new approach to the career ecosystem, from information, advice and guidance, to brokerage and careers education, to support learners, schools and colleges in this process. This includes opportunities to develop skills in entrepreneurship. Stewart & Logan (2023) focus in particular on

women, commonly underrepresented in this field. These opportunities should be taken.

The challenge of obtaining opportunities for all learners in workplaces was one commonly raised during the Review. Technology offers opportunities for virtual workplace experiences through augmented reality. However, actual location in the workplace provides a powerful experience and one that will help learners make better informed decisions about future study or employment.

Building a system where every learner has access to workplaces cannot be the responsibility of a few employers. Many SMEs nationally are involved in working very positively with schools and colleges and a number of large employers in the private and public sectors have high quality programmes that offer work experience. However, for this to become a national offer, work needs to be done to widen the base of those involved. Having workplace opportunities is good for learners. It also offers opportunities for employers, for example, where staff have opportunities to develop and expand their mentoring skills.

Learners' choice of what to apply for post school, college, university or employment would be better informed by having opportunities to reflect on their learning from a personal perspective. Mentoring conversations will improve the quality of future decisions, if learners are encouraged to think about their reasons for choosing courses or subjects, how these link to the projects they choose to undertake and how their interests and experiences relate to the decisions they take about future Pathways.

If experiences for the Personal Pathway are to be available for all learners, the opportunities available for careers guidance and related workplace experiences would have to be increased significantly. It is beyond the remit of the Review to make a formal recommendation but it would be a sensible step to bring together the Government, educationalists, business and industry to identify how careers advice and workplace experiences might be available for every learner in the future.

4.9 Project Learning

In this area of the SDA, learners have the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills they have developed in their Programmes of Learning, to tackle a significant question or a problem that is important to them. Through this experience, learners will have opportunities to develop skills that are essential for their future progress.

“Skills are the global currency of the 21st century in which working life will become increasingly networked. Work will be increasingly variable and done on a project basis with contributors with complementary skills working in teams. These skills require development through a change of classroom practice and should be developed at all levels throughout education.” (RSE, 2023)

The importance of integrating knowledge and skills was a dominant theme in the Review. The new model recognises the increasing importance in society of learning

across different areas of the curriculum and proposes the inclusion of Project Learning in the Diploma.

4.10 What do we mean by Project Learning?

Project Learning will provide an opportunity for learners to bring together different experiences in an area that is of relevance and real interest to them. It will be part of the educational experience of every learner. The Vision for the future of qualifications and assessment states that the system should be inclusive. Project Learning will, therefore, be for all learners though the experience will be different for different learners.

Some learners may tackle a global challenge, one that they see as crucial for the future of society, for example, climate change, artificial intelligence or conflict. This aligns with recent work in learning for sustainability.

They will tackle an area that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single subject. The description of this approach to Project Learning has much in common with what is commonly described as Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL). Subjects are not disciplines but they are the way learners in secondary schools encounter different areas of academic study.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh highlights:

“Interdisciplinary learning (IDL) cannot be properly understood without a clear understanding of the nature, benefits and limitations of disciplines.” (RSE, 2023).

Drawing on their learning in individual subjects, learners will focus on a project which invites them to mobilise knowledge, methodologies and concepts from a range of subjects to bring different perspectives to the project they are tackling.

“Disciplines may also be inward-looking and fail to address new and relevant real-world problems, whereas major new insights and breakthroughs increasingly occur in interdisciplinary areas.” (RSE, 2019)

For other learners, the project may be concerned with a more local challenge where learners bring together different areas of their curriculum to tackle a problem that matters to them, for example, how to challenge misconceptions of disability. For learners with severe and complex learning needs, Project Learning may be designed on an individual basis.

However, for all learners Project Learning will enable them to use knowledge and to develop skills, for example, critical thinking, problem solving, application of knowledge, creativity, teamwork and leadership.

The national curriculum body, SQA, is currently undertaking work in this area. They shared the definition they are currently using [Interdisciplinary Learning: ambitious learning for an increasingly complex world](#).

“Interdisciplinary Learning is a planned experience that brings disciplines together in one coherent programme or project. The different disciplines plan and execute as one. These disciplines might fall within one curricular area (for example, languages, the sciences) or between several curricular areas. IDL enables children and young people to

- learn new knowledge or skills, and develop new understanding of concepts;
- draw on prior knowledge, understanding and skills and;
- transfer and apply that collective knowledge to new problems or other areas of learning.”

This is different from learning, for example, which takes place when several disciplines or subjects are linked up through a common theme or topic, but the student’s experience and educator planning is discreet, or separate in each discipline or subject. This can be referred to as multi-disciplinary learning.”

The National Qualifications Body, SQA, has a wide range of courses that could support work in this area. There are exciting examples of ‘next generation’ Higher National qualifications, and these should form part of future discussions about Project Learning.

During the Review we heard conflicting views as to whether the term interdisciplinary learning or multidisciplinary learning should be used. Some people believed that neither term was helpful. There remains work to be done in Project Learning to develop a language with which everybody is comfortable.

The new national bodies for the curriculum and qualifications should work together with partners, including teachers, lecturers, employers, and universities to develop examples of what Project Learning could look like in practice in different contexts.

Work currently underway with the National Co-design IDL group led by Education Scotland would be an effective starting point to support the more intensive work as needed. In particular, we understand the work being done by schools in the North East of Scotland with the Wood Foundation as part of the [Excelerate Programme](#) provides Project Learning.

Employers and learners are strongly supportive of the proposal to have Project Learning as part of the SDA (as indicated in the Review’s Interim Report). Employers place particular value on people who are able to demonstrate the skills that would be shown in Project Learning and learners are keen to build these skills and carve out a degree of independence in terms of how a project could be taken forward. Similarly, these meta-skills are the basis of graduate attributes that learners moving on to university will have to develop as part of their courses.

4.11 Project Learning in Practice

During the visits we made to schools and colleges, we saw a wide range of different education projects and programmes. We were impressed by the level of enthusiasm

for these projects amongst learners and staff and learners' achievements were impressive.

However, ideas of project and IDL have been part of the discourse of Scottish education since the inception of CfE. Yet, not every learner in Scotland has such opportunities. Given the importance of this area to learners, colleges, universities and employers, it is crucial that we make these opportunities available for all learners in the Senior Phase. To make sure that the importance of this aspect of the Diploma is recognised, time should be made available for this work and teachers, as appropriate, should be supported to develop the skills to engage with more open enquiry. The recent Sixth Form Matters (2023) report noted that:

“Many jurisdictions have introduced the option for students to do a major project as part of their certificate programme, initiatives that are not dissimilar in intent to the EPQ in England. In practice these initiatives are more a work-around than a solution. If unexamined, these options are sometimes judged as second tier. If examined, students can find in them a familiar and often unappealing organisation of the learning process, with subject matter defined by syllabuses, delivered within timetables designed for academic study, and taught and assessed by teachers trained in academic subjects.” (Sixth Form Matters 2023)

This paragraph forms a suitable warning. This part of the SDA must be maintained as a priority, time must be given to support learning and teaching in this area and both learners and educators must be empowered to make this element of the SDA a rewarding experience.

Recommendation 9: Use descriptions of knowledge progression and the universal skills framework, in the recently published Skills Review (Withers, 2023), if accepted, to inform the design of Project Learning in the SDA. They should also be used as the basis for assessment.

Recommendation 10: Include the Project Learning element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners.

- Project Learning should be an identifiable and distinct part of the curriculum, building on programmes of study. Individual learners must be allowed to apply their knowledge and skills across subjects to tackle a challenge. Project Learning can be undertaken through a mixture of group and individual work. However, it should be individually assessed.
- Project Learning should take place throughout the Senior Phase. A learner could choose to investigate a new project each year or build on the same project as they progress through the Senior Phase. The level of challenge should steadily increase and achievement should be linked to SCQF levels and credits to demonstrate progression. While the focus of this Review is on the Senior Phase it may be beneficial to promote Project Learning in both primary schools (where it already exists in a range of forms) and in BGE so as to support learners for the type of experience to come.
- Project Learning will be internally assessed within educational settings, with external verification built into the process to ensure shared standards across the country. Processes will be rigorous but light touch.
- There will be flexibility and different pathways within the Project element to promote inclusion particularly for learners with additional support needs, learners who are neurodivergent, learners who are highly able and those who may be educated at home. While some learners may undertake complex, long-term enquiry into major global issues, for learners the project element of the Diploma may involve drawing together educational experiences to help build confidence, for example; in terms of communication or independent travel.
- The focus of a project investigation should be chosen by the learner. We acknowledge it may be necessary to start with a more defined offer in the early stages of the Project element of the Diploma. Examples will be developed collaboratively by teachers and lecturers, local authorities, researchers, national agencies and learners. These examples will be made available to schools across the country for them to adapt to their own circumstances.

In discussing the inclusion of Project Learning within the Diploma it has been suggested that this could reduce subject choice in schools or diminish the importance of subjects. The Review does not propose a reduction in the importance of Programmes of Study nor that time spent on learning in them needs to change.

Different schools and colleges will find different ways to do this. Schools and colleges already involved in this kind of activity have adopted a number of strategies. Some build it into existing arrangements for timetables; others suspend the timetable for one afternoon per week. Some schools suspend the normal timetable for a week at key points in the school year to allow the space to be created for collaborative, problem solving activities.

There are further possibilities. For example, some practitioners suggest that a move away from an external examination at National 5 and a reduction in terms of the weighting of final external examinations in Higher and Advanced Higher courses will help create time in schools that will allow Senior Phase learners to undertake meaningful Project Learning. Others have suggested that a reduction in focus on examination preparation and use of the parts of the school year normally set aside for prelims and study leave could help to create time. One further opportunity raised with us, is to explore the flexibility around time offered within the SCQF framework.

There is work to be done by those with expertise in the organisation of time in education settings to find creative ways to approach this and to provide as examples for others to consider.

4.12 Parity of Esteem

For many years Scottish education, in common with many other countries internationally, has debated how best to achieve parity of esteem between general pathways (sometimes called academic), and professional and technical pathways (sometimes called vocational). This debate has carried on through this Review. Although we recognise that parity of esteem has been a long-term aspiration in Scottish Education, it has been difficult to achieve because lack of parity is commonly a consequence of views that are deeply ingrained in society. This Review firmly rejects the assertion that a successful Senior Phase experience should be measured only in terms of the completion of National Qualifications. We all learn differently, and we all have different goals. Our belief, as reflected in the Review's Vision and Principles, is that a very broad range of achievement should be celebrated in the award of the SDA.

We recognise the importance of language in this debate. Many individuals and organisations with which the Review has engaged argued that the continued use of the term 'Higher' influences behaviour across the education system. There is a strong perception that society expects both individual and school success to be measured in the number of Highers achieved and this skews the breadth of curriculum offered and undoubtedly weighs heavily in the choices learners make. This view is reflected in the Review's Phase Three engagement where over two-fifths of respondents, mainly from schools and colleges, simply said 'yes' to the question 'should all qualifications at the same level have the same name'.

Changing the language around the award of 'Highers' will not, in itself, change the way in which different types of qualification are viewed but, it was argued, it would send a strong signal that different qualifications taken by learners at the same SCQF level with the same credit points are equally highly regarded. However, it is also

important to recognise that any change in respect of the language of qualifications must be weighed against the risk of undermining existing awards and damaging the currency of Scotland's overall approach to qualifications. National Qualifications, and the Higher in particular, are well regarded nationally and internationally.

We recognise how challenging it is to tackle parity of esteem. There is no 'silver bullet' that will change society's collective understanding about the relative value of qualifications. Alongside other recent reports (Withers, 2023), (Muir, 2022) we recognise the importance of the SCQF Partnership in helping learners, education settings and employers to understand the relative value of the complex range of qualifications available in Scotland. Our central recommendation in this area is that Scotland builds on the language of SCQF level to help provide a better understanding of different qualifications and how they relate to one another.

Putting Learners at the Centre (Muir, 2022) recommended that the SCQF Partnership should be brought into the proposed national agency for Scottish education in order that its framework and staff could play an enhanced role in planning learner journeys to provide greater parity of esteem. In responding to this recommendation The Scottish Government welcomed Professor Mur's recognition of the value of the SCQF in driving forward a cohesive learner journey from early years to postgraduate study. They also accepted his premise that SCQF should be more strongly embedded within the education system. In proposing a change to the way in which qualifications are described, this Review seeks to begin to address the long-standing issue of parity of esteem. This proposed change will also help to strengthen the position of SCQF within Scottish education. It is supportive of the direction of travel suggested by Muir and the stated position of The Scottish Government. However, further work on the SCQF framework is required, particularly on the relationship between different qualifications within the same level. This work should be undertaken in partnership with key stakeholders in the field.

Recommendation 11: Enhance Parity of Esteem between types of qualifications by recognising as equal all qualifications at the same SCQF level with the same credit points

- Scotland, should use the SCQF Level followed by name of the qualification in promotional literature and in recording of results.
- All references to qualifications in promotional materials for learners, parents and carers and in information about subject choices, learner pathways and career opportunities should follow the same pattern:
 - SQF Level, Name of Award and Provider, Subject or Programme, Grade (as appropriate).
- All owners of programmes, offering qualifications/awards in the Senior Phase should be expected to certificate these in a standard format.

- Academic, vocational, professional and technical qualifications should all be included within the Programmes of Study element of the Diploma.
 - The inclusion of academic, professional and technical qualifications within the Programmes of Study element of the Diploma is, in itself, a strong driver for change as a Diploma will include all qualification types under a single award.
- Ensure due attention is given to developing all three elements of the Diploma. The content of the Diploma will represent the individual achievement of all learners and will illustrate much more than the completion of programmes.

5. Assessment Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence

5.1 Assessment and Information Technology

The advances in information technology since the beginning of the 21st century have been significant, and these advances have been mirrored by advances in assessment. We have encountered a range of innovative assessment approaches as part of this Review: assessments that adapt to the responses of learners to provide more personalised assessment; real time assessment, where learners receive feedback as the work is being assessed augmented; reality where assessment is undertaken through simulation; the use of apps to have learners respond throughout a lesson and provide information on class responses. The range of innovative approaches to assessment is ever expanding and offer new ways to assess and to examine progress and achievement.

Ofqual's (2020) Report Online and on-screen assessment in high stakes, sessional qualifications notes, "There is a broad body of research examining the potential benefits and challenges of implementing online and on-screen assessment in different contexts." Ofqual suggest that there are three barriers currently preventing greater use of digital assessment including variation in IT provision in schools and colleges (range and access to devices/broadband speed), implementation challenges (national or local implementation/mandatory or voluntary adoption) and ensuring fair treatment of all students (managing the impact of different software and devices). While the report was written pre-pandemic and reflects the context in England, it provides a useful base from which to consider how digital assessment could be better established in Scotland where the barriers are likely to be the same.

Ofqual suggests a range of actions which may help overcome barriers in this area a number of which are relevant to the Scottish context and resonate closely with the findings of this Review. Possible actions suggested by Ofqual include:

- Jurisdiction wide initiatives led by a sponsoring national or regional government or awarding organisation, often in collaboration – which feature: investment in school/college infrastructure and online or on-screen systems,

well considered risk appetite including an acceptance that things may go wrong, and system leadership.

- A vision that assessing on-screen or online matches wider societal changes and needs, including those of students and employers and that the anticipated benefits justify the investment and required appetite for risk.
- Significant engagement and communication activities with key stakeholders, often inviting early adopters to play an influential part in the roll out of programmes or pilots.
- Clear advice and support for teachers, IT support staff, examinations officers and invigilators on expectations of them prior to and on the day of the assessment.

To maintain consistency, fairness and continuity in respect of digital assessment a coordinated national approach appears to be essential. We also note Ofqual's suggested need to communicate clearly the benefits of a change while also supporting the those responsible for learning, teaching and administration of the assessment itself. A fair national approach, clear communication of change and support for the education workforce will all be key in a move to digital assessment and indeed the broader reform of qualifications and assessment in Scotland.

5.2 Artificial Intelligence

Earlier in this report we discussed the potential of AI to disrupt current qualification practices and society more broadly. We highlighted the different reactions to the potential impact of AI on coursework. Opinions range from those expressed by the head of Ofqual, England's chief examination regulator who argued that AI bots could lead to the end of coursework with invigilated examinations becoming more important; to the position taken by the CEO of the IB who proposed that we should learn to live with AI. The IB would not ban the use of AI or change the nature of the IB programme which includes coursework. He positioned AI as an addition to existing technologies, such as spell checkers, translation software and calculators. The task for educators, he argued, was to support learners to use AI tools effectively and ethically.

5.3 Artificial Intelligence: unsettling or transformational?

AI in the form of Large Language Models (LLM) such as ChatGPT has inspired both shock and admiration amongst those impressed by the apparent capability of the technology. Earlier in this report we outlined ways in which this new technology exemplifies the nature and speed of changes in societies across the world. AI has also raised questions about the knowledge, skills and competences learners will need to be qualified as citizens able to participate in a mid to late 21st century democracy. We also discussed the difficulty of making accurate predictions about the future and therefore, the importance of having an adaptable, flexible system for qualifications to allow timeous adaptations to be made as required.

When a potentially disruptive technology, such as the AI large language models, is first introduced it can be difficult to assess its potential impact, essentially to separate authoritative comment from views and reactions. In May 2023, the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) published an interview with Rodney Brooks (authority on AI, Faculty member of MIT, Carnegie Mellon and Stanford University) (Zorpette, 2023). The IEEE is an authoritative voice as the world's largest professional organisation for Engineering and Applied Sciences.

The article is entitled, *“Just Calm Down about ChatGPT-4 Already”*. Brooks argues that ‘all rapid and pivotal advances in technology have a way of unsettling people. He is not as fearful as others of recent developments in AI. He argues that there is a danger that we mistake performance for competence.

“We see a person do something and we know what else they can do, and we can make a judgment quickly. But or models for generalising from a performance to a competence don't apply to AI systems.”

LLM, he suggests are better than search engines, but they have a fundamental problem. They provide answers with confidence but the answers are commonly inaccurate. He is sceptical about whether the next generations, GPT-5 or GPT-6 will make significant progress because the LLM has no underlying model of the world, it simply correlates language, for example, predicts the next word.

“What the large language models are good at is saying what an answer should sound like, which is different from what an answer should be.....I think it's going to be another thing that's useful.”

5.4 AI: Truth, Fake News and 21st Literacy

How to know whether or not text is dependable is not an issue that has arisen only with ChatGTP. The rise of social media and the impact of ‘fake news’ has troubled societies for some time. Concerns about the ever-increasing challenge of how to know whether or not you can trust what you see, hear or read are now being reflected in the practices of major organisations. For example, the BBC, in May 2023 launched BBC Verify with the following justification:

“The exponential growth of manipulated and distorted video means that seeing is no longer believing. Consumers tell us they can no longer trust that the video in their news feeds is real. Which is why we at the BBC must urgently begin to show and share the work we do behind the scenes, to check and verify information and video content before it appears on our platforms. And as AI weaponises and turbocharges the impact and consequences of disinformation, this work has never been more important.”

These changes in whether or not we can trust what we see or what we read are evident in text produced by AI. Current LLM may produce text that sounds convincing but contains inaccuracies. Other technological advances raise similar problems. This is a crucial issue for the future of education. To be literate in a mid to late 21st century society, means more than being able to read and write. Being digitally literate and understanding how to check whether or not a source is dependable or a response accurate, will be fundamental skills for citizens in all democratic societies and will be a major responsibility of education systems.

5.5 AI: Implications for Qualifications and Assessment

There are implications for the curriculum in schools and colleges. Learners and teachers/lecturers, will have to learn how to use these tools, for example, how to write good prompts and to understand what LLM are good at and their limitations. There are also implications for assessment and qualifications. Different kinds of tasks will be needed in coursework. For example, a learner could be asked to generate a ChatGTP answer and the coursework task would be to check the accuracy of the response or to consider how AI generated responses might be improved. ChatGPT-4 is the AI tool that has attracted most attention but since its release, numerous others have followed that generate images or sounds, computer code and video. There is the potential to use them to have learners generate a far wider variety of forms of evidence of learning than the methods we currently use most commonly, for example, essays.

Teachers and learners have already been experimenting with ChatGPT. Some teachers have reported that lesson plans can be produced in a fraction of the time taken traditionally. Others have used ChatGPT to evaluate papers and have reported that it provided detailed and useful feedback very quickly. Websites are already beginning to emerge with lists of how to use AI to help teachers and learners, for example, [Ditch that Textbook](#) As with all resources, these need the critical, professional eye of the teacher, but they offer the potential to allow teachers to spend more time on supporting learning rather than on more bureaucratic activities.

There are also likely to be implications for the ways in which we judge achievement. For example, assessing a learner’s work might, in future, be undertaken with the learner present. Learner would be judged on their descriptions of the process and how the output was achieved rather than judging the output alone.

One of the most common challenges emerging from AI is the fear that its use will lead to cheating in coursework. However, cheating is not a new concern. Coursework, and the potential to cheat, has always been a source of concern in high stakes

assessment sometimes reflected in dramatic newspaper headlines. For example, on the 14 January, 2021, the Scottish Sun ran a headline, “Qualification Fraud: Coronavirus Scotland: Lockdown ‘allows school pupils to cheat on SQA coursework’ with fears parents are doing it”. Although the text of the article is a little more balanced, the headline is stark.

During the Review, a number of respondents raised the issue of parental support with existing coursework as an issue of equity. There were perceptions that learners from socially advantaged communities were more likely to be supported at home than learners who came from less advantaged circumstances. In the current context, teachers are aware of the dangers that coursework could be undertaken by someone other than the learner. They know the learners with whom they work and the kinds of performance they would expect from each learner. They spot, for example, when coursework is not consistent with classwork produced by the learner. The same approaches that teachers use currently to ensure that coursework is authentic will help detect AI generated coursework. Some argue that, if all learners have access to AI, it might even help to level the playing field. Coursework tasks undertaken in education settings is one strategy to promote greater authenticity.

5.6 AI: A Common Approach Across Education

These issues about how best to live with AI are debates that are currently underway in colleges and universities and the strategies outlined above are ways in which they intend to tackle the current challenges of AI. It would be helpful if there were common approaches to the use of AI across all education contexts.

When technology is new, how it will ultimately be used is open to debate. Mitchel Resnick (2023), Professor of Learning Research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) suggests that for AI, just as with all previous technologies, for example, personal computers or the internet, decisions have to be taken about if, and how, the new technology should be integrated into the learning environment. He advocates beginning from first principles, decisions about what kind of education we want for our learners and our society. We then design the uses of the new technology to be consistent with our values and vision.

Scotland’s educational values are those inscribed on the mace in The Scottish Parliament, “wisdom, compassion, justice and integrity”. The country’s commitment to the Children’s Rights as articulated in the UNCRC, put learners at the heart of education. Every learner matters. These values sit well with Resnick’s argument that given the uncertainties of the future, all learners need opportunities, *‘to think creatively, engage empathetically, and work collaboratively, so that they can deal creatively, thoughtfully, and collectively with the challenges of a complex, fast-changing world’* (Resnick, 2023).

Resnick (2023) suggests that, at present, the future is ours to write. AI has the potential to have a negative impact on learning to constrain learner agency: AI systems could become traditional tutors, setting learner goals, giving information, asking questions and assessing performance. Or they could be designed to help learners build agency; setting their own goals and expressing their own ideas. The

latter approach, he argues, would help build initiative, confidence, motivation and creativity. The skills they will need as future citizens.

Resnick (2023) argues that if the pandemic has taught us anything, we have learnt how important relationships are. AI systems can provide useful feedback but they cannot build the relationships with learners that good teachers do, getting to know learners, their motivations, their concerns. Good teaching involves knowing how to build mutually supportive communities of learners where learners feel that they belong.

AI could enhance learning, by supporting project-based, interest driven learning experiences by providing students with the understanding of how to use AI tools as a resource to support the creative learning process. Resnick (2023) argues that AI systems should be seen as a new category of educational resource. He proposes that as educationalist, we should develop a set of guiding principles to design and use AI systems 'to engage young people from diverse backgrounds in creative, caring and collaborative learning experiences. We should:

- support learners as they engage in design projects and navigate the creative learning spiral;
- ensure that learners feel a sense of choice and control in the learning process, enabling them to develop their interests, their ideas, and their voices;
- supplement and support (rather than replace) human interaction and collaboration;
- provide opportunities for learners to iterate and refine their ideas and their creations and;
- take into account the different needs, interests, and aspirations of learners from diverse backgrounds, especially those from marginalised and vulnerable communities.

However, at present AI is insufficiently regulated and future security will depend on governments internationally acting now to build in safeguards for future generations of AI.

Recommendation 12: Establish a cross sector commission on education on Artificial Intelligence.

- As a matter of urgency, Scottish Government should convene and lead a cross sector commission to develop a shared value position on the future of AI in education and a set of guiding principles for the use of AI.
- The use of AI LLM, such as ChatGPT, should not be banned but learners and teachers/lecturers must be supported to make best use of them. AI offers the potential to reduce administrative burdens and to lessen the time taken for other teaching tasks. All opportunities to do that should be taken.
- Coursework should remain an integral part of qualifications but existing tasks should be reviewed to ensure that they are compatible with the new context created by recent developments in AI.

6. The Scottish Diploma of Achievement: Realising the Potential

6.1 Introduction

Change happens when people make it happen. Our Vision for qualifications and assessment, and the commensurate improvement in life chances for every learner in Scotland, will only become reality if communities work together to make it real.

Recommendation 13: Create a national plan to make the Scottish Diploma of Achievement a reality for all learners in all educational settings.

- A national plan should be agreed for the introduction and development of the Scottish Diploma of Achievement to turn ideas into a reality for all learners in all educational settings. This plan should include resource implications.

Throughout this Review, we have heard people from all communities ask for change to qualifications and assessment but also to culture. In a joint think piece with the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Chapman (2019) presents a model that helps to describe the changes to be made if the cultural shift that everyone believes will lead to a better system is to happen.

	Low social cohesion	High social cohesion
High social regulation	<p>‘Fatalistic culture’ <i>‘uncertain nostalgic organisations’</i></p> <p>B</p>	<p>‘Hierarchical culture’ <i>‘bureaucratic, managed organisations’</i></p> <p>A</p>
Low social regulation	<p>‘Individualistic culture’ <i>‘market-based state-funded organisations’</i></p> <p>C</p>	<p>‘Egalitarian culture’ <i>‘mutualistic self-improving organisations’</i></p> <p>D</p>

Figure 4: Chapman (2019)

During the Review, we have seen evidence of all perspectives represented in this matrix. Those who are fatalistic, believe that despite the extensive engagement undertaken during the Review process and the political interest that underlines the commissioning of the work, nothing will change; or if anything does change, it will be for the worse. Some people feel trapped in hierarchical cultures, often highly bureaucratic establishments and organisations, angry, feeling that their expertise is not well used. Some state their commitment to reform but find only problems in any change proposed; others are passive, they do not complain, they conform. We have heard from people who see themselves not as part of a wider educational system concerned for the welfare and progress of every learner but as individuals, belonging to an educational establishment where they feel that their principal concern has to be for the reputation of their school and how well it compares with other schools or for the need to protect their organisation.

We have also encountered many schools, colleges, individuals and organisations where there is a strong sense of excitement about learning and a determination to enhance every learner's opportunities. In these schools, colleges and organisations, where everyone in the establishment has the chance to be involved in developments, there is an energy that is evident in everything that happens. Learners, teachers, lecturers, parents/carers and leaders all have more rewarding experiences.

When people spoke with us about changing the culture, almost without exception that meant moving towards a more egalitarian culture, where within and across organisations, people learn together with a shared purpose, to improve the life chances of every learner in Scotland. In the context of qualifications and assessment, that is our Vision. There is a great deal of creativity in Scottish Education, the change process should be designed to release that creativity.

6.2 An Inclusive Approach to Change

One theme emerging through the work of this Review has been the desire across communities for more collegial, more empowered ways of working. The focus of activity should be to provide high quality learning experiences for all learners and for everyone involved, Teachers, lecturers, headteachers, principals, local authorities, RICs, national agencies, universities, employers and the voluntary sector should each ask what contribution they can make to ensure the Vision for qualifications and assessment real for every learner in Scotland.

Each has a part to play in bringing the Vision to life. It is important that each individual and every organisation is clear about their contribution to the realisation of this. Identifying roles and responsibilities is an essential part of building on expertise and avoiding overlap. However, for some colleagues, collaborative ways of working may be new and support and encouragement may be required if all are to feel confident in different ways of working.

“Professional learning might be needed for some teachers to be able to participate in co-creation of assessment approaches - this the legacy of years of top-down decision-making” – (CCG member, Teaching Profession)

Recommendation 14: Development the national plan and the wider process of change in ways that are inclusive and collegial.

- It should be based on the Vision and Principles, must involve all those with an interest in qualifications and assessment and have a clear indication of how different communities will contribute to making the ideas in the Vision a reality for every learner in Scotland.
- It is critical that all communities have opportunities to develop an understanding of the new approach to assessment and qualification system in Scotland. There should be opportunities for all involved in qualifications and assessment to discuss this report and to consider how the Vision and Principles might be put into practice in their context.
- The plan should include a review cycle (Recommendation 4) where evidence is gathered from policy and practice to explore the relationship between ideas and practice and, where these start to diverge, to take appropriate action. This formative approach to review should be undertaken in partnership by practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

Recent publications have highlighted the need for cultural change. Changing from a culture that is hierarchical to one that is more collaborative and empowering. Many schools, colleges and organisations are inclusive and collaborative. Leaders constantly seek to improve the culture by working collegially with learners, teachers and parents. However, the evidence from this Review and from other recent reviews suggests that this is not universally the case. Muir (2022), reported that young people he interviewed were often dissatisfied with their education and raised *“profound questions of the culture that exists in some parts of the system”*(p12). Priestley et al (2023) reported that a strong culture of performativity in schools which was having a negative effect on the Senior Phase. Many schools, the researchers reported were *“encouraging the instrumental selection of content and/or organisation of curriculum provision to maximise attainment in the Senior Phase”*. (p9)

The plan for change discussed in this Chapter is neither top down nor bottom up. It is an inclusive approach that is built on mutual respect and collaboration. This approach will depend on all those who want to improve learners’ experiences of qualifications and assessment being willing to work together. No contribution from any community is more important than any other. Change comes from the power of communities collaborating in the interests of all learners, not only for the learners in their schools, colleges or communities. In this Chapter we identify the kinds of contributions that different communities can make to ensure that the Vision becomes a reality for every learner in Scotland.

Scotland is a country where, historically egalitarianism has been valued. The principle of equally valued contributions based on collaborative approaches is a strong theme in policy documentation. Yet, Humes (2023) argues that significant change is required if statements about collaboration and empowerment in policy

documents are to become practice. He is critical of what he perceives to be a pattern of activity in Scotland where reform is associated with changing structures. That, he argues, is insufficient.

“Cultural reform is arguably more important than simply changing structures, but it is not easy to achieve and takes time. Many observers, inside and outside the world of education, perceive the system as authoritarian (despite the use of a soothing rhetoric of ‘empowerment’).” (p25)

Similar concerns about the challenges facing Scottish Education were reflected in Chapman & Donaldsons’ (2023) analysis of the future for Scottish Education. They suggest that:

“while there are many good examples of collaboration, there can be a ‘hidden’ sense of competition compounded by the desire to hide differences or ‘variations’ in performance, irrespective of their nature or source.” (p7)

They describe the Scottish educational system as being at a crossroads and urge us to “up our game if today’s young people are to thrive in an increasingly complex and challenging world.”

This Review offers an opportunity to improve future qualifications and assessment in Scotland and to undertake that task in a more collaborative, empowering way. In planning for successful cultural change in qualifications and assessment, the reported experiences of learners, the impact of accountability systems, the need for more equitable power relationships and the challenge of building an education system that is collaborative rather than competitive are themes that should be at the heart of the process if change is to lead to improvement.

However, the context for the Review of qualifications and assessment in Scotland is complex. The effects of the pandemic remain profound on learners, teachers and on wider society. We have to begin the process of change from where the system is, rather than where we would like it to be. There are global challenges, for example, in climate change and a protracted war in Europe. The financial climate is more challenging than it has been for many years and many families across Scotland are facing hardship as inflation soars. However, the speed at which society is changing (Chapter One) means that we have to find ways to ensure that qualifications and assessment are right for future learners and for wider society.

The proposals in this report are not cost neutral, so change has to be carefully managed, linked to the capacity of the system and the resources available. The phases for change outlined in this Chapter are a proposal. Whether or not it is realistic will depend on the resources available. The timeline should be kept under review to reflect changing circumstances, positive or negative. If the timeline is too fast, the system may not be able to respond. If it is too slow, momentum will be lost.

6.3 Planning for the Future of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland

One of the first tasks of the change process should be opportunities for learners, teachers, parents/carers and lecturers across Scotland to discuss the proposals for changes to qualifications and assessment. Discussions should begin from the Vision and Principles, what the proposed changes seek to achieve and why they matter. It is important that links are made across the various parts of the broader education reform process to allow all those involved to see the bigger picture, and how the proposals fit within it. As changes to qualifications and assessment have implications for wider society, a communication strategy should be developed to raise awareness across communities of the proposals for change (see below).

The Importance of beginning with and maintaining a focus on purpose: Vision and Principles

The idea of having a Vision, a clear purpose of what an innovation seeks to achieve, is commonly part of the early stages of the development process. However, too often after the initial introduction, the Vision is set aside, and the focus of attention moves from why the innovation matters to what should be done, how it should be done and when it should be done. When that happens, the sense of purpose can become disconnected from the actions being taken.

The Vision and Principles (Chapter Five), the purpose of the reform, should be the starting point when taking forward recommendations from this Review. All communication should begin with purpose, why qualifications and assessment are changing and what the reform seeks to achieve. People need space and time to make sense of ideas. For example, in educational settings, there should be opportunities for learners, teachers and, as appropriate parents and carers to discuss the Vision, before considering the SDA as a whole and its three components parts. People need time to consider ideas and to reflect with colleagues on what the SDA would look like in their context if the Vision were to be in practice.

A Plan to phase change

Recommendation 15: Introduce the Scottish Diploma of Achievement in phases.

The introduction of the SDA should be in a series of three overlapping phases. The phases should first, create the conditions to support successful change, second, make changes to create the new qualification, and third, embed the qualification across the system. Each phase should have a plan to support the enactment of ideas in practice in ways that empower communities. Resource implications should be clearly identified. The plan for the phased introduction of the Diploma should be discussed and agreed by the start of session 2024-25.

We acknowledge that there are dependencies including other changes envisaged in The Scottish Government's wider education reform programme and the availability of resources to support these changes.

It will be key that educators are well prepared to lead and to put the SDA into practice. Learners and other communities must be involved in the process and

understand the significance and reasons why the system is taking this direction of travel.

The details of implementation are out with the scope of this review. However, the key features of each phase should include the following:

Phase One: Creating the Conditions for Scottish Diploma of Achievement (2023-27)

- place learners interests at the heart of every decision during the process;
- develop an implementation strategy for the three phases, including a communications plan to raise awareness of the SDA across all IRG communities. This should include consideration of the digital infrastructure requirements and the opportunities and challenges afforded by AI;
- commissioning of an independent longitudinal evaluation of the design, implementation and early impact of SDA;
- build collaborative networks where every organisation has a clear understanding of the roles each will play in the design and development of the SDA; and
- invest in professional learning to support implementation.

Phase Two: Creating the Scottish Diploma of Achievement (2026-30)

- design and develop different parts of the Diploma with collaborative networks of educational settings;
- review and revise National Qualifications;
- put system-wide professional learning in place to support the Diploma into practice;
- implement national moderation plan and build system capacity to put it into practice and;
- develop and trial e-portfolio and digital infrastructure.

Phase Three: Embedding the Scottish Diploma of Achievement (2028-32)

- first cohort of learners are awarded the SDA;
- all educators confident and competent in supporting recognition of learners achievement to be recognised through SDA;
- all learners in Scotland working towards SDA;
- review and refinement of systems and processes based on early findings from independent evaluation and;
- system-wide confidence in SDA.

Recommendation 16: Make time available for staff in Education. Education staff need time to access professional learning, to collaborate and to engage with the changes being proposed. Given the unique needs of the GME sector professional learning tailored to help support the Diploma for Gaelic speaking learners and educators is crucial.

Education staff must have time to access professional learning, collaborate and engage with the changes being proposed, for example,

- It will be crucial that educators are confident to engage in meaningful Project Learning and to guide individuals in respect of the Personal Pathway. It is likely that support in these areas will be needed for a range of groups who may be involved in elements of the Diploma – this may include teachers, lecturers, parents/carers, youth workers, school, colleges and other settings that provide education.
- The creation of a Personal Pathway element of the Diploma will require teachers, and others, to help learners identify opportunities and then support them to reflect on learning they have undertaken. While developing skills in this area should be an important part of the overall professional learning offer, we further recommend that dedicated resources should be made available to support this aspect of the Diploma. Strong system leadership will be required for it to be embedded in Scottish education.
- Professional learning that brings together curriculum design, learning, teaching, assessment and qualifications must be accessible for all educators working in the Senior Phase. This must support better understanding of the importance of learner voice, progression in learning, task setting, feedback and moderation processes.
- Staff in national bodies also need time to work with others to review and develop courses, to trial new approaches and to establish new systems that are rigorous but light touch. To enable progress to be made to the recommendations in this Review in a reasonable timescale, existing commitments may have to be reviewed and a limited number of clear priorities agreed.

6.4 Introducing the new approach to Qualifications and Assessment

Recommendation 16: [Develop a long-term engagement and communication strategy](#)

The new approach to qualifications and assessment should be supported by a long-term engagement and communication strategy. It should be developed with different communities to meet their needs and its impact evaluated.

Communication is an essential part of any reform. The wide range of individuals and groups involved in qualifications and assessment make it particularly important that the communication plan recognises this, and that communication is targeted to reflect the needs of different communities. For example, the culture of qualifications in Scotland is deeply embedded, steeped in the traditions of generations of people who have gone through school and whose expectations are that the current experiences of learners will be similar to their own. The communication strategy should consider creatively how to explain the changes to wider society. For example, in Ireland during the reform of their Junior Cycle, they created short, explanatory videos that were shown on television and in cinemas see, [explanatory video](#).

The communication strategy should be long-term. It should aim to begin when parents/carers make contact with Early Years settings and build through primary schools where connections can be made between practice in early years and primary education and the achievements that will be recognised as learners progress in the Senior Phase towards the SDA in educational settings.

Communication is not the same as dissemination. Communication means engaging with individuals and communities. The IRG and the associated CCGs included a wide range of members from different communities, all of whom could be part of the communication strategy. It is those closest to each community who best understand the needs of their community. They understand what will work and what will not. It will be important that approaches to communication are planned with communities. Asking members of the CCGs to share information about the SDA with their community could also be an effective way to communicate.

The impact of approaches to communication should be evaluated and evidence from the evaluation used to influence future communication.

6.5 A National Model for Supporting the Profession in Sharing Standards

[Recommendation 18: Build a national strategy for standards.](#)

- [There should be an agreed national plan to build and sustain local and national standards for qualifications and assessment.](#)
- [Training in how to avoid bias should be an essential part of the strategy and should involve teachers from Scotland's increasingly diverse workforce.](#)
- [The strategy should be developed collaboratively by policy makers, practitioners and researchers.](#)
- [Current quality assurance processes should be reviewed to ensure that they are dependable, but not overly bureaucratic.](#)
- [As a matter of urgency, digital solutions to labour intensive, paper-based quality assurance systems should be introduced.](#)

It is crucial that every learner in Scotland who undertakes the Diploma is treated fairly. The SDA places greater emphasis on the professionalism of teachers and their professional judgement. To ensure that teachers' judgements are consistent across the country, a system to share standards through local and national collaboration will be required. This will be a central feature of building qualifications that are highly regarded. Colleges already have established moderation processes built up over many years that may offer useful examples of how to make moderation manageable.

Building a strong understanding of national qualification standards amongst teachers is important for qualifications to be dependable. It is, however, just as important as an issue of equity. Commonly, teachers work in one school, or a small number of schools where their understandings of progression are based on the learners with whom they work. Some may have experience of national standards, for example, in working as a marker with SQA, or have experienced professional learning. However,

beyond qualifications, having teachers who understand standards, matters to learners.

Standards should exist within a strong progression framework. To build a good, practical understanding of standards, teachers need appropriate opportunities to discuss examples of pupils' work at different national standards. They then need opportunities to share and discuss examples of their own learners' work with peers and to learn about factors that can interfere with good judgement, for example, unconscious bias. These experiences will deepen teachers' understandings of standards and will not only ensure more dependable judgements but will feed back into improved classroom practice. For example, better understandings of standards will reduce the potential for teachers to underestimate the standard, offer feedback based on that and inadvertently disadvantage learners.

Teachers must have a good understanding of standards and be able to use them in practice if all learners are treated fairly. To make sure that learners are to be treated fairly no matter who is their teacher or what school they attend, schools will need to work with others in moderation activities. Effective moderation requires a national system where national agencies, local authorities, teachers, headteachers and researchers agree fit for purpose approaches to moderation. Approaches to moderation should recognise the importance of teacher professional judgement and build capacity through an appropriate balance of peer support and proportionate national processes. Processes should be fit for purpose and not overly bureaucratic. Bureaucratic approaches are created; they are not inevitable. Fairness for learners should be the core of the process.

Building confidence in teachers' professional judgement is crucial and takes time. There are resources available on the SQA website to support the process of sharing standards in examinations, coursework and on key factors in developing an equitable system, such as, addresses issues of bias. These offer a starting point to explore national standards. Training in how to avoid bias should be an essential part of the strategy and should involve teachers from Scotland's increasingly diverse workforce.

However, there is more to be done. Urhahne & Wijnia (2021), having analysed international research evidence on teacher judgement over a period of 40 years, suggest that how dependable teachers' professional judgement depends on the task they are undertaking. The researchers differentiate between relative and absolute judgements. Where teachers are making relative judgements, for example, judging whether one piece of work is better than another to produce a rank order, the accuracy of their judgements is high. When making absolute judgements, for example, the difference between teachers' predicted scores and learners' actual achievements, teachers tend to over-estimate performance. The evidence suggests that teachers find estimating the performance of learners making less progress more challenging than learners who are high performing. Developing a sound understanding of how bias (race, gender, class and disability) can impact teachers' professional judgement is crucial if every learner is to have a fair assessment.

6.6 The Scottish Government, the National Education Bodies and Local Government

The Scottish Government, new national education bodies and local government should play a prominent role in leading the reform of qualifications and assessment in ways that clearly signal a commitment to cultural change. Plans for developing the SDA should be developed and put into practice collaboratively to recognise and value the contribution of every participant.

Recommendation 19: The Scottish Government and the new national education bodies should model cultural change.

- As the SDA is developed and introduced, the Scottish Government and the new national education bodies should model cultural change by working collaboratively in ways that recognise and value the contribution of every participant.

Recommendation 20: Embed Qualification and Assessment developments clearly and explicitly within the wider reform agenda.

- The Scottish Government must, as a matter of urgency, communicate a clear narrative that shows how the developments in qualifications and assessment are an integral part of the wider reform agenda.
- The Scottish Government should establish collaborative structures to take forward the development of the SDA that mirror those developed during this Review to ensure that all those with an interest in qualifications and assessment continue to be part of the strategy for its realisation.

6.7 The New Qualifications Body

Recommendation 21: Design the new national qualifications body to work in partnership with learners, teachers, policy and research communities to:

- Develop a flexible modular approach to National Qualification courses to allow learners to build credit over time towards qualifications and to enable the system to respond with agility to the changing needs of individuals, society and the economy.
- Extend the range of assessment methods within National Qualifications and identify what other actions might be taken to reduce the potential for rote learning and enhance the learner experience.
- Rationalise the existing range of courses to create a clear, coherent offer for learners, parents/carers, schools, colleges, employers and universities.
- Build a new approach to qualifications and assessment that has public confidence, is highly regarded nationally and is rigorous but not overly bureaucratic.

The new qualifications body has the opportunity to make a significant contribution to promote high standards of personal achievement for every learner, and to the development of a more collegiate culture.

The current Examination Authority, SQA, has staff with highly specialised knowledge and skills in qualifications design and development. The organisation offers a wide range of internationally recognised qualifications, extending far beyond the more widely used National Qualifications. Within that broad profile, there are examples of courses that could provide a helpful starting point for some of the more innovative aspects of the SDA, for example, Project Learning.

The wide range of qualifications available in the SQA catalogue can be contrasted with the smaller range of courses that are accessed by learners in schools and colleges. SQA already has plans in place to rationalise the extensive range of courses on offer, particularly where courses developed to meet historical demand, have similar content. We would support that decision and believe that it would help clarify the purpose of 'families' of courses, reduce the time spent on course bureaucracy and help to reduce the complexity for learners, parents and carers, colleges, employers and universities.

6.8 The New Curriculum Body and the New Qualifications Body

The new national bodies have opportunities to work collaboratively to support the profession in the introduction of the SDA, drawing on the different but complementary expertise across the two organisations. The current curriculum agency, Education Scotland has staff with significant expertise in collaborative professional learning. Professional learning will be a crucial part of building the SDA. Researchers in different universities in Scotland also have significant international expertise in the processes of change. The new national curriculum body has an opportunity to draw together expertise in professional learning from across research, policy and practice communities to develop a national network to work with schools and colleges across the country to in taking the Diploma forward.

There are important tasks to be undertaken to bring the ideas in the Diploma to life. For example, the new curriculum body in partnership with the new qualifications body should work with learners, teachers, (including subject specialists), policy and research communities to improve course progression between the BGE and the Senior Phase, and within National Qualifications offered in the Senior Phase. There should be a golden thread running through curriculum, progression, assessment and qualifications. Good models of progression are central to qualifications that are progressive.

A second priority lies in Project Learning. Although many schools and colleges engage in Project Learning within courses or across subjects or programmes, for others it is less familiar. There is little point in every school and college developing similar resources to support Project Learning, what some teachers have described as 'reinventing the wheel'. National bodies working with local authorities/RICS and

researchers have a key role to play in working with school and college leaders and teachers and lecturers to develop and to examples of Project Learning that can be shared across the country for educational settings to adapt to suit their own circumstances.

Third, national agencies have a major role in helping to build and to sustain national standards to take forward the national strategy for standards (Recommendation 17).

Recommendation 22: Ask the new curriculum body, in partnership with the new qualifications body to work with learners, teachers, policy and research communities to:

- Improve course progression between the Broad General Education (BGE) and the Senior Phase, and within National Qualifications offered in the Senior Phase.
- Co-construct and to trial examples of Project Learning in different educational establishments across the country. These examples should be made available to schools and colleges nationally for teachers/lecturers to adapt to their own circumstances.
- Work with local authorities, schools, colleges, teachers and lecturers to build a national moderation system that is rigorous but proportionate.

6.9 The Independent Inspectorate

HMIE have the potential to be powerful agents to support the introduction of the Diploma. For example, inspectors can support its development by identifying, sharing and promoting practices that are key to its effective introduction, for example, working across subjects, mentoring learners in personal learning.

In addition, HMIE are employed as professional evaluators. In addition to their Inspection Programme, working with researchers, policy makers and practitioners, teams could be built to undertake regular formative evaluation of the SDA as it develops in practice. The earlier potential problems are identified, the easier it is to take action to bring ideas and practice into closer alignment.

Recommendation 23: Ask the Independent Inspectorate (HMIE), to work in partnership with learners, teachers, policy and research communities to:

- Ensure the process of inspection effectively supports the introduction of the SDA in ways that are consistent with a collaborative, empowered culture.
- Review practice with researchers and practitioners as the SDA develops and to identify if gaps are emerging between intentions and practices. The evidence emerging from these reviews should be used formatively to identify actions to re-align the process.

6.10 Embedding the Scottish Diploma of Achievement as Expected Practice.

Over time, it is important that the Scottish Diploma of Achievement becomes the norm in all educational settings in Scotland. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and the General Teaching Council in Scotland (GTCS) have major roles to play in that process.

6.11 Initial Teacher Education and the Teaching Qualification in Further Education

ITE has a crucial role to play in the introduction of the new approach to Qualifications and Assessment. ITE is, for most new teachers, is the first in-depth contact they have with teaching as a profession.

In ITE there are opportunities to build in new practices as part of the role of being a teacher. Students who study subjects and also work in interdisciplinary contexts in ITE will expect to do the same in schools. Student teachers who have opportunities to develop mentoring skills with learners will be able to use those skills with their own classes and as part of the Personal Pathway. Student teachers who are introduced to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and qualifications as a whole will build that understanding into their practices. When introduced to Assessment, for, as and of Learning, they can build expertise in task design, feedback and moderation processes. These experiences will provide student teachers with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed for effective transition into schools. They will also provide schools with increasing numbers of teaching staff who are well placed to support the introduction of the new SDA.

The Teaching Qualification in Further Education (TQFE) also has a significant role to play in setting expectations for lecturers in colleges about the nature of their role. It will be important for TQFE providers to review their programmes and to include the three aspects of the SDA to ensure that FE lecturers are able to support all learners as they work towards the Diploma.

The GTCS have responsibility for setting entry criteria to the profession and professional standards for teachers. They also ensure that teachers are committed to ongoing learning by requiring teachers to complete a process of Professional Update. The new approach to Qualifications and Assessment will require a shift in balance in their roles and responsibilities. The GTCS can support this different balance by reflecting these changes in the standards and their exemplification. It would be particularly important to ensure alignment between changes in ITE and the related professional standards. While we understand that the Professional Standards have recently been reviewed, we are of the view that they should be updated as necessary if the Diploma is to be introduced.

Recommendation 24: The SDA should become expected practice for teachers:

- Teacher Education Institutions should work with the GTCS to review their programmes to ensure that newly qualified secondary school teachers and college lecturers are well-prepared to work with the different elements of the SDA.
- TQFE providers should review their programmes to ensure that college lecturers are well-prepared to work with the different elements of the SDA.
- As part of their review cycle, GTCS should reflect the need for all secondary teachers to work with the SDA in their Professional Standards.

6.12 Colleges and Universities

The success of the SDA will depend significantly on its use by colleges, universities and employers. As indicated previously in this report, qualifications in Scotland are an important currency for learners. Qualifications are used to select learners for courses or for interview. In discussion, a number of employers spoke of the limited nature of evidence existing qualifications offer and argued that a broader range of evidence including the skills developed by learners would help them to make better decisions. Universities, likewise, now pay significant attention to graduate attributes. These are closely linked to the evidence being requested by employers. Learners also wanted to have opportunities to personalise their qualifications and assessment profile, to offer to colleges, universities and employers a better sense of who they are as individuals including their broader achievements.

The three elements of the SDA offer a wider range of evidence for colleges, employers and universities to use to support better decisions about admissions to courses and programmes.

Recommendation 24: Encourage colleges, employers and universities to use the wider evidence base provided by the SDA as the basis of decisions they take when selecting students or employees.

6.13 National monitoring and accountability systems

One of the most common complaints we heard during the Review related to the negative impact on schools, teachers and learners' of data gathering for monitoring and accountability purposes.

The gathering of data on National Qualifications as the principal measure of attainment in schools was identified as having significant, unintended washback effects. Schools perceived themselves to be judged on this measure alone rather than on the broad range of qualifications they offered to meet the needs of all learners. National Qualification performance is the evidence used by newspapers to create league tables. The league tables are perceived in some communities as evidence of school effectiveness yet on the whole, they reflect the socio-economic

circumstances of schools. By providing only a partial picture of what goes on in schools, they also contribute to problems of parity of esteem. If National Qualifications are the evidence used to judge performance, then they must be what really matter. The Scottish Government has taken steps to try to broaden the evidence it gathers. However, the unintended consequences remain in the system which suggests the need for further review.

For example, many argued in the Review that some schools, concerned to improve their metrics, advise learners to take courses that would improve school metrics rather than meet the needs of learners. It was also reported that publishing this data often had an impact on schools who were low in media generated league tables, undermining confidence in the school in its community and leaving hard working learners and teachers dispirited.

Recommendation 26: Require national monitoring and accountability systems to gather information on the breadth of achievements recognised within the SDA. Insight and the National Improvement Framework (NIF) should be updated to reflect success as envisaged in the SDA.

There are alternative approaches for gathering data to inform local and national policy that do not have a negative washback effect on practice. National surveys offer policy makers a way to gather evidence that will give them high quality data but will not drive unintended consequences of the kind described earlier in this report. Scotland previously ran a national survey, the Scottish Survey of Achievement. This survey was conducted over time in different areas of the curriculum whilst also giving information on literacy and numeracy. Local authorities also had the option to opt for an enhanced sample to be gathered within their authority. This provided authority level data that could be compared against the national picture.

Surveys also have the advantage of being able to address specific questions of interest to policy makers, for example, about the performance of specific communities or groups of learners.

Although it is beyond the remit of this Review to make recommendations on alternative approaches to national monitoring and accountability, we would urge The Scottish Government to consider alternative survey based approaches.

7. Recommendations

In this final chapter, we bring together all of the recommendations from the IRG. These recommendations provide a framework to take qualifications and assessment forward in ways that will ensure that our qualifications and assessment remain highly regarded in these fast-changing times. The SDA offers the potential for a future that would offer better chances to every learner in Scotland and would position Scotland as a society better able to respond flexibly and creatively to whatever the future might hold.

CHAPTER ONE

Recommendation 1: Change Qualifications and Assessment in the Senior Phase in Scotland. Change must be carefully planned and resourced.

CHAPTER TWO

Recommendation 2: Continue the process of cultural change. Scotland should retain the structure of the IRG and allied CCGs as a key method of engagement, as the country introduces and develops new approaches to qualifications and assessment. It should also build on this Review's attempts to involve every educational establishment in the country, learn from where it worked well and how that learning should influence future consultations.

CHAPTER THREE

Recommendation 3: Work in partnership with countries with similar aspirations to Scotland to develop qualifications and assessment. Learn from experience within Scotland but also be outward looking. Seek to learn with other nations with similar educational ambitions to build a qualifications and assessment system that will remain fit for the future.

CHAPTER FOUR

Recommendation 4: Adopt the Vision and Principles proposed in this Review into policy and practice. Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland should be aligned with the Vision and Principles.

Recommendation 5: Adopt the SDA as the new approach to qualifications and assessment. The SDA (the Diploma) should contain three elements: Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and the Personal Pathway.

Recommendation 6: Use the SDA as a graduation certificate for all Senior Phase educational settings.

The following criteria should be used as a starting point for further development of the Diploma:

- All learners must be offered the chance to experience learning in respect of all elements of the Diploma. This should be viewed as an entitlement.

- The overall Diploma should not be graded. It should be awarded when achievements are recognised in each element, Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and the Personal Pathway.
- The Diploma will be awarded at point of exit and will include achievements gathered to that stage. This will include, qualifications, awards, credit accumulated and learner reflections on their personal learning through the Personal Pathway.
- The three elements of the Diploma should not be weighted. All elements are important as evidence of breadth of achievement.
- The Diploma, and the evidence within it, will move with the learner to be built on in college, employment, university and the voluntary sector.
- If a learner does not show evidence of learning in all three elements, the Diploma will not be awarded. They will leave with a record of what they have achieved. It will be possible to undertake learning at a later stage to allow for the award to be made.
- All elements of the Diploma should be accessible to Gaelic Medium Learners.
- All learners should have a digital profile to allow them to record achievements in Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and Personal Pathway. The profile will be owned by the learner. The Qualifications Body will regulate the information about achievements in Programmes of Learning and Project Learning. The Personal Pathway will be entirely in the control of the learner.
- The digital profile must be fully accessible for all learners and available in Gaelic and other minority languages.

Recommendation 7: Include the Programmes of Learning element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. All learners should be offered a broad range of courses including academic, vocational, professional and technical courses. It is an entitlement.

The Review recommends that the learning, teaching and assessment of Programmes of Learning can be strengthened by collaboratively taking forward the following actions:

- Review course specifications to ensure that there is a strong relationship between what matters in the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and qualifications.
- Improve progression between the BGE and the Senior Phase and within the Senior Phase in schools and colleges.
- Broaden the range of assessment methods for National Qualifications in the Senior Phase including increased opportunities for classroom assessment.
- Act to reduce the number of examinations in the Senior Phase and involve only internal assessment at SCQF Levels 1-5. This will open up a range of possibilities, e.g., for SCQF Level 6 Higher courses to progress across two years.
- Where appropriate, retain external examination. Current examinations should be reviewed to reduce susceptibility to question prediction and over-rehearsal.
- Increase flexibility by modularising courses and Programmes of Learning. This will allow learners to build credit as they progress through courses.

- Create more time for learning and teaching. These proposals offer the potential for there to be more time for learning and teaching. Be vigilant to make sure that the time released is used for that purpose.

Recommendation 8: Include the Personal Pathway element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners. This is an issue of equity. It must be flexible for all learners, recognising the importance of personal choice and should focus on what learners have achieved.

This element should:

- Encourage and celebrate the interests, competences and achievements of every learner.
- Be owned by the learner, promote personalisation and choice.
- Support learners to self-reflect on the skills and attributes they have developed.
- Focus on what an individual has learned through an experience rather than on the number or location of experiences.
- Subject to authentication processes but not graded.
- Aim to include social, cultural, economic and well-being aspects. In many cases learners' experiences will integrate a number of these aspects.
- Include a reflective, personal discussion which should be undertaken across an academic year and throughout the Senior Phase.

Supportive structures should be established to support the development of this area of the Diploma. This should include professional learning and to ensure that the importance of this area of work is recognised, is well co-ordinated and has status, a promoted post should be established for those leading this work in schools and colleges.

Recommendation 9: Use descriptions of knowledge progression and the universal skills framework, in the recently published Skills Review (Withers, 2023), if accepted, to inform the design of Project Learning in the SDA. They should also be used as the basis for assessment.

Recommendation 10: Include the Project Learning element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners.

- Project Learning should be an identifiable and distinct part of the curriculum, building on Programmes of Study. Individual learners must be allowed to apply their knowledge and skills across subjects to tackle a challenge. Project Learning can be undertaken through a mixture of group and individual work. However, it should be individually assessed.
- Project Learning should take place throughout the Senior Phase. A learner could choose to investigate a new project each year or build on the same project as they progress through the Senior Phase. The level of challenge should steadily increase, and achievement should be linked to SCQF levels and credits to demonstrate progression. While the focus of this Review is on the Senior Phase it may be beneficial to promote Project Learning in both

primary schools (where it already exists in a range of forms) and in the BGE Phase so as to support learners for the type of experience to come.

- Project Learning will be internally assessed within educational settings, with external verification built into the process to ensure shared standards across the country. Processes will be rigorous but light touch.
- There will be flexibility and different pathways within the Project element to promote inclusion particularly for learners with ASN, learners who are neuro-divergent, learners who are highly able and those who may be educated at home. While some learners may undertake complex, long-term enquiry into major global issues, for other learners the project element of the Diploma may involve drawing together educational experiences to help build confidence, for example in terms of communication or independent travel.
- The goal of a project investigation should be chosen by the learner. We acknowledge it may be necessary to start with a more defined offer in the early stages of the Project element of the Diploma. Examples will be developed collaboratively by teachers and lecturers, local authorities, researchers, national agencies and learners. These examples will be made available to schools across the country for them to adapt into their own circumstances.

Recommendation 11: Enhance parity of esteem between types of qualifications by recognising as equal all qualifications at the same SCQF level with the same credit points:

- Scotland, should use the SCQF Level followed by the name of the qualification in promotional literature and in recording of results
- Academic, vocational, professional and technical qualifications should all be included within the Programmes of Study element of the Diploma
- Due recognition is given to all elements of the Diploma as an award that illustrates much more than the completion of programmes.

Recommendation 12: Establish a Cross Sector Commission on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- As a matter of urgency, Scottish Government should convene and lead a cross sector commission to develop a shared value position on the future of AI in education and a set of guiding principles for the use of AI.
- In the interim, teachers and learners should be supported to use AI, to take advantage of opportunities to reduce bureaucratic tasks. Coursework tasks should be reviewed.

CHAPTER FIVE

Recommendation 13: Create a national plan to make the SDA a reality for all learners in all educational settings.

- A national plan should be agreed for the introduction and development of the SDA to turn ideas into a reality for all learners in all educational settings. This plan should include resource implications.

Recommendation 14: Develop the national plan and the wider process of change in ways that are inclusive and collegial

- It should be based on the Vision and Principles, must involve all those with an interest in qualifications and assessment and have a clear indication of how different communities will contribute to making the ideas in the Vision a reality for every learner in Scotland.
- It is critical that all communities have opportunities to develop an understanding of the new approach to assessment and qualification system in Scotland. There should be opportunities for all involved in qualifications and assessment to discuss this report and to consider how the Vision and Principles might be put into practice in their context.
- The plan should include a review cycle (Recommendation 4) where evidence is gathered from policy and practice to explore the relationship between ideas and practice and to take appropriate action. This formative review should be undertaken in partnership by practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

Recommendation 15: Introduce the SDA in phases.

- The introduction of the SDA should be in a series of three overlapping phases. Space should be created to enable staff, learners and parents/carers to engage with the Vision and Principles and to be involved in the development of the Diploma. The plan for the phased introduction of the Diploma should be discussed and agreed by the start of session 2024-25.

Recommendation 16: Make time available for staff in Education. Education staff need time to access professional learning, to collaborate and to engage with the changes being proposed. Given the unique needs of the GME sector professional learning tailored to help support the Diploma for Gaelic speaking learners and educators is crucial.

Recommendation 17: Develop a long-term engagement and communication strategy.

Recommendation 18: Build a national strategy for standards.

- There should be an agreed national plan to build and sustain local and national standards for qualifications and assessment.
- Training in how to avoid bias should be an essential part of the strategy and should involve teachers from Scotland's increasingly diverse workforce.
- The strategy should be developed collaboratively by policy makers, practitioners and researchers.

Recommendation 19: The Scottish Government and the new national education bodies should model cultural change.

- As the SDA is developed and introduced, the Scottish Government and the new national education bodies should model cultural change by working collaboratively in ways that recognise and value the contribution of every participant.

Recommendation 20: Embed Qualification and Assessment developments clearly and explicitly within the wider reform agenda.

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- Extend the range of assessment methods within National Qualifications and identify what other actions might be taken to reduce the potential for rote learning and enhance the learner experience.
- Rationalise the existing range of courses to create a clear, coherent offer for learners, parents/carers, schools, colleges, employers and universities.
- Build a new approach to qualifications and assessment that has public confidence, is highly regarded nationally and is rigorous but not overly bureaucratic.

Recommendation 22: Ask the new curriculum body in partnership with the new qualifications body to work with learners, teachers, policy and research communities to:

- Improve course progression between the BGE and the Senior Phase, and within National Qualifications offered in the Senior Phase.
- Co-construct and to trial examples of Project Learning in different educational establishments across the country. These examples should be made available to schools and colleges nationally for teachers/lecturers to adapt to their own circumstances.
- Work with local authorities, schools, colleges, teachers and lecturers to build a national moderation system that is rigorous but proportionate.

Recommendation 23: Ask the Independent Inspectorate (HMIE) to work in partnership with learners, teachers, policy and research communities to:

- Ensure the process of inspection effectively supports the introduction of the SDA in ways that are consistent with a collaborative, empowered culture.
- Review practice with researchers and practitioners as the SDA develops and to identify if gaps are emerging between intentions and practices. The evidence emerging from these Reviews should be used formatively to identify actions to re-align the process.

Recommendation 24: Establish the SDA as expected practice for teachers:

- Teacher Education Institutions should work with the GTCS to review their programmes to ensure that newly qualified secondary school teachers and college lecturers are well-prepared to work with the different elements of the SDA.
- As part of their review cycle, GTCS should reflect the need for all secondary teachers to work with the SDA in their Professional Standards.

- The Teaching Qualification in Further Education (TQFE) providers should review their programmes to ensure that college lecturers are well-prepared to work with the different elements of the SDA.

Recommendation 25: Encourage colleges, employers and universities to use the wider evidence base provided by the SDA as the basis of decisions they take when selecting students or employees.

Recommendation 26: Require national monitoring and accountability systems to gather information on the breadth of achievements recognised within the SDA. Insight and the National Improvement Framework should be updated to reflect success as envisaged in the SDA.

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9. APPENDIX

9.1 Sample Learner Journeys

BASED ON THE PROPOSED SCOTTISH DIPLOMA OF ACHIEVEMENT (SDA)

The following pages of the report provide a range of learner journeys based on the proposed Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA). These are illustrative only but are designed to show how several different learners could achieve a Diploma. It is important to note the learner journeys provided are not exhaustive of all circumstances. This will hopefully provide an insight into how the Diploma may operate if introduced. We have worked with a variety of settings to develop these example journeys.

All journeys have been developed in partnership with education settings and key stakeholder groups.

Robin's Journey

Background

Robin is a high attaining young person who is autistic and lives with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). They have a keen interest in literature. They were keen to progress their development within the school setting to achieve the SDA.

Programmes of Learning

Robin was able to progress within the areas of learning that reflected their skills, abilities and aspirations, within their secondary school, moving from SCQF Level 5 in S4 to SCQF Level 7 in S6. Evidence was gathered in different ways to truly reflect the learner's acquisition of learning and the ability to apply this knowledge in a way that suits them. As a neurodivergent learner, they are able to complete their coursework when they felt able, with the timings being flexible around them. This is in contrast to the previous model of assessment being focused more on external examination which would put pressure on them to perform in a high-stakes environment.

Project Learning

Robin has dedicated time within their educational setting and support to focus on their chosen topic for their Project element of the Diploma. They chose to investigate literature through the ages, which is a topic that they can build on each year with an increasing SCQF level to demonstrate achievement and progression. They were supported closely throughout with a consistent key member of the teaching staff who was aware of Robin's needs.

Personal Pathway

Robin was able to self-reflect on several areas of personal learning with the support of a key member of staff. This was important to their development as it focused on the skills gained from their experience. Being autistic, Robin was able to use their special interest of LGBTI literature within their education, utilising key knowledge and

skills in this area. They noticed progression and development on their journey and in their ability to recognise and articulate their skills and attributes.

Award

This resulted in the award of the Diploma. This allowed Robin to demonstrate their knowledge and experience, and progress to higher education studying English literature.

Amber's Journey

Background

Amber is a 17-year-old female pupil who is care experienced. Amber has multiple diagnoses including a learning disability and is registered blind. Amber uses vocalisations, facial expression and body movement to communicate. Amber requires support for all aspects of her mobility and personal care. Amber has worked well within the Foundation Milestones throughout her BGE and is working at National 1 (units or awards) at SCQF Level 1.

Amber's future pathway in adulthood will require 24/7 care for all aspects of life. She is a young woman who enjoys and anticipates routine, she has a range of interests and the capacity to adapt to new environments.

Programmes of Learning

Amber is progressing well within the areas of learning that reflect her skills, abilities and aspirations within her chosen educational setting, at an appropriate SCQF level for her. Due to Amber's complex support needs, evidence is gathered in the following ways: observation, photographs, videos and through staff documenting her responses. The continuum of engagement is used as an additional measurement of her acquisition of learning and the ability to apply that knowledge.

Amber has developed her confidence and exhibits success in music at SCQF 1 through participating in individual and group contexts. Amber is an effective contributor in music within either group or individual contexts. She demonstrates skills in using different instruments, following a rhythm and is starting to produce her own rhythms for others to respond to.

Amber has developed her skills in supported cycling and has increased her stamina in being able to make longer journeys. One aspect of this involves exploring the local area, this enables Amber to be exposed to new experiences in a supported way. Literacy and communication skills development is building her capacity and access across all subject areas, where a key focus has been on interactions, having her voice heard and exposure to vocabulary to aid communication and understanding.

Curricular areas covered included music, physical education, creative arts, health and wellbeing, literacy, numeracy, relationships, sexual health and parenthood, social subjects and science through a four-term interdisciplinary approach. Amber is involved in a whole school community eco project, Rights Respecting Schools and celebrations and uses her skills and talents to contribute.

Amber has specific interest in music of various genres, her Senior Phase programme has enabled this to form a key part of her curriculum and has expanded to community activities and experiences which is supporting Amber's transition to adult services.

Project Learning

Amber has applied skills developed in music to other contexts, further developing and demonstrating these within a community music group as part of her senior transition programme. Observation, video and photographs with the continuum of engagement were used to measure development of Amber's skills over time.

Amber has applied skills developed through her daily cycling programme to be able to use these across out of her education setting. An aspect of this has been around developing Amber's capacity to adapt and integrate in new settings. During cycling, Amber has gone from being passive to being able to let adults know when she wants to continue or finish. Amber enjoys being outdoors and this has been supported by her daily cycling programme.

Amber's personalised timetable was co-created with the key people in her life, in particular her carers' voices. All involved know Amber well and agree that this programme reflects her interests and skills. The school specifically focused on areas that would be sustainable in adult life and were transferable to a range of different learning contexts. Amber is specifically motivated by music and being outdoors. This enabled a bespoke programme for her which involves access to different environments and opportunities to have new experiences. Goals and targets were co-created with her carers to ensure that Amber would experience challenge, breadth and depth to enable her to continue to grow and develop. Amber's carers also support her interest and skills development in music by providing additional out of school music lessons.

Communication skills development is enabling Amber to have her voice heard in different contexts. Amber has a communication toolkit which enables her to interact in her wider community.

Personal Pathway

Amber's curriculum is organised to enable opportunities for personal achievement. A key emphasis of her Senior Phase considered her role as a member of her school and wider community, recognising that at 18, she will be accessing her community as an adult participant in her preferred activities. Amber uses a range of communication tools, including vocalisation, facial expression and body movements to convey her views and those who know her well used this to gauge levels of engagement and satisfaction. This enables Amber to share reflections of her experiences with those who know her well.

Award

This resulted in the award of the Diploma which incorporated Amber's skills development across each of the three areas of the Diploma (Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and Personal Pathway) and which reflect her progression in learning. This will enable Amber to access adult community group activities when she moves into adult services.

Dom's Journey

Background

Dom has been a residential learner at a special school for several years. Now 16, he has a learning disability and is neurodivergent. He uses a talker to communicate and visual cues such as sequence strips that support him throughout daily routines. He has made excellent progress throughout secondary education and with one-to-one support, he is able to participate in small group activities.

Dom worked within the Foundation Milestones throughout the BGE and is now working at National 1 in a range of areas, focused on those that will support the move to adult services with as much independence as possible. Dom will continue to require 1:1 support throughout the day. When Dom feels safe and secure, and events are predictable, he develops friendships and positive relationships with those around him. Social stories help Dom to make sense of changing situations.

Programmes of Learning

Dom enjoys learning and has made very good progress within a consistent, safe environment. A continued emphasis on the four capacities in the Senior Phase has equipped him with key skills to enjoy adulthood with as much independence as possible, as well as a range of interests to ensure he will enjoy a high quality of life. Central to this is continued access to a varied diet and sensory activities paired with suitable sport and social opportunities. Dom particularly enjoys numeracy work, and this is reflected in his patterned approach to art-making.

Dom's achievements at National 1 reflect this range of activities and includes areas such as preparing a healthy snack and making art for display. These achievements can be further developed as he moves beyond school.

A key focus has been the Emotion Works programme. Study in this area is designed to boost self-esteem and promote emotional self-awareness. By recognising the differences between anxiety and excitement, Dom has been able to identify scenarios where he anticipates joy (excitement) as well as those that provoke anxiety, such as spending time in noisy areas busy with unfamiliar people.

Project Learning

Dom gains much satisfaction from mastering new concepts in numeracy. Throughout the Senior Phase, Dom has been working towards telling the time on a 12-hour clock and this will remain a core aim in the months ahead. Applying this understanding in real-life contexts and using it to help plan activities will further promote learning beyond school.

Personal Pathway

Dom thrives when he is able to participate in small group activities where he feels safe. Dom is capable of making big transitions when supported by people who are familiar and who understand his sensory needs well. Such transitions need to be introduced slowly, and careful consideration needs to be given to the consistency of those supporting Dom.

Dom enjoys physical activity indoors and outdoors, and in all weathers. Exploring new settings with a familiar group of people is central to ensuring that as Dom moves into adulthood, he increases his independence. Having continued access to a talker, a consistent team and predictable visual prompts which allow Dom to reflect on his experiences are central to the success of these new challenges.

Award

This resulted in the award of the Diploma. The award recognises Dom's skill development across the three areas of the SDA and reflects his progression in numeracy, physical education and Emotion Works. This will enable Dom to access adult community group activities.

Rama's Journey

Background

Rama is an S4 learner who hopes to progress to a career in childcare. They took a twenty-week, one afternoon per week, Masterclass in third year.

Programmes of Learning

Rama's learner pathway is focused on developing skills, knowledge and values to enable them to progress to their chosen career. Along with their other Programmes of Learning, Rama has gained Skills for Work qualifications which will lead into a Foundation Apprenticeship in the local college. Rama has gained employability skills such as understanding of workplace and employees' responsibilities including reliability, organisation, reflection, leadership, communication and having a flexible adaptable approach and many more. Rama is delighted that there will not be any external examinations at the end of their fourth year.

Project Learning

Through a range of partnership working, Rama has been on a work placement in a local nursery. They have worked with staff from the nursery to create meaningful learning experiences for the children. Applying their skills and observing children learning in a real-life context. Leading play experiences and reviewing their effectiveness. Rama has gained key practical skills within the workplace.

Personal Pathway

Rama is delivering Bookbug sessions in a local primary school. They have learnt songs, rhymes and actions to support P1-P2 acquisition of language. They have reflected with their mentor on the experience of volunteering with the children. Rama enjoys the sessions and has articulated that they like observing the excitement of the young children and how they can see them developing and reacting. Volunteering in a local primary school has developed Rama's confidence and helped reassure Rama that the next step should be a formal childcare course.

Award

Rama successfully completed all the elements of the Diploma and progressed to a childcare course at the local college.

Harris' Journey

Background

Harris is an S5 learner who dreams of a career using his acting and singing skills and moving onto employment in the theatre which the school are determined to support. The school is aware that in the past ten years, jobs in the creative industries have expanded significantly. As a result, they have introduced a range of programmes under the banner of Creative Industries.

Programmes of Learning

Harris successfully completed the Skills for Work: Creative Industries course. Harris liked the assessment based on a range of methods including a folio and practical activities. He enjoyed carrying out a self-evaluation on a range of skills, reviewing progress and identifying action points as part of the assessment of employability skills. He also completed SCQF Level 5 credits in English, drama and music and SCQF level 4 awards in Mathematics and history. Like other SCQF Level 4 and 5 courses, assessment is internal with external verification.

In S5, Harris was keen to progress their skills further in voice, movement and acting. Harris also continued the study of English, drama and music at SCQF Level 6, and opted for a National Progression Award in music performance and SCQF Level 6.

Project Learning

The school offers a NPA at SCQF Level 6 in Musical Theatre. Harris, with the support of his careers mentor, thought this course would be a better preparation for his future ambitions as it would extend practical skills and knowledge of musical theatre. As the course is delivered jointly by the drama and music department, it fulfilled the Project Learning aspect of the Diploma.

Personal Pathway

Harris is an active participant in school shows and enjoys singing regularly to elderly residents in a local care home. Harris has well developed skills in reflection and self-evaluation through his coursework which he used to good effect in the personal area of the Diploma. Always striving to improve performance, Harris maintained a personal portfolio of feedback from auditions which supported his personal learning and development.

Award

Harris completed the Diploma, having achieved SCQF Level 6 in English, music, drama, music performance, and SCQF Level 4 in Mathematics and history. Harris completed an interdisciplinary National Progression Award at SCQF Level 6 in musical theatre and maintained a reflective diary of progress. Harris left school after his fifth year and embarked on a college course in acting and theatre performance.

Michael's Journey

Background

Michael is a high attaining S6 leaver who spends time at both school and at college virtually. He has a keen interest in humanities and languages and required extra

support via technology. He was keen to progress his development within the school and college settings to achieve the SDA.

Programmes of Learning

Michael was able to progress within the areas of learning that reflected his skills, abilities and aspirations, within his chosen education setting at the correct SCQF level for him. Thanks to positive interaction with colleges – including those not in his local authority – he's able to access the widest variety of subjects at the SCQF level best suited for his aspirations. Evidence was gathered in different ways to truly reflect the learner's acquisition of learning and the ability to apply that knowledge.

Project Learning

Michael has dedicated time within his education settings and support to focus on his chosen topic for the Project Learning area of the SDA. Michael decided to undertake a new project each year achieving progression in SCQF level, preparing him well for the wide variety of courses available at the university he aspires to attend. The project allowed a fusion of Michael's passions in French, history and computer science, while also developing an interest in politics due to the increasing politicisation of technology and history during the period of study.

Personal Pathway

Michael was able to self-reflect on several areas of personal learning with the support of staff in educational settings. This was important as it allowed a focus on the skills gained from his experience. Michael noticed progression and development on his journey in his ability to recognise and articulate his skills, knowledge and attributes.

Award

This resulted in the award of the Diploma which included the subjects of French, History and computer science alongside project and personal learning. This allowed Michael to successfully apply to university and secure an unconditional place.

Malcolm's journey

Background

Malcolm is undertaking his Senior Phase through Gaelic Medium Education (GME). Throughout his BGE, Malcolm achieved well. He wanted his Senior Phase education to include geography and various sciences through the medium of Gaelic. Thus, progressing his learning within the school and community settings to achieve the award of SDA. Malcolm was fortunate that his school offered a selection of GME subjects in the Senior Phase, but he was aware that some other schools only offered one subject, Gaelic language.

Programmes of Learning

Malcolm was able to progress well within the areas of geography and different sciences which reflected his skills, abilities and aspirations. He was able to attend school to focus on his areas of study through the medium of Gaelic. His learning was assessed throughout, and at an appropriate SCQF level. Malcolm was able to access the widest variety of subjects, thanks to the local college offering subjects of interest for Malcolm in GME, which was not available at the school. Evidence for

assessment was gathered in different ways to reflect the learner's acquisition of knowledge, skills and attributes and the ability to apply them.

Project Learning

Malcolm undertook a project relating to his specific skills and aspirations with the support of a Gaelic setting. Malcolm chose a topic that allowed him to build on each year with the SCQF level increasing to demonstrate achievement and progression. This is a supported element of the SDA, ensuring that cooperative conversations take place with teachers/lecturers/supportive adults on topic selection to ensure successful completion is achieved. Malcolm's project successfully brought together a range of learning including through the subjects of geography, biology and chemistry as well as his keen interest in the environment. Most importantly for him, the project was undertaken through the medium of Gaelic. Some of Malcolm's friends chose a different path and, along with Senior Phase GME subjects, competed a Foundation Apprenticeship through the medium of Gaelic.

Personal Pathway

Malcolm was able to access a range of Gaelic language opportunities at community level, which allowed him to gain new skills whilst at the same time working alongside community-based Gaelic projects. This included music and media opportunities made possible by Gaelic organisations. Malcolm was able to self-reflect on several areas of personal learning with the support of a teacher/responsible adult. This was important as it focused on the skills gained from their experience whilst developing his fluency in Gaelic. Malcolm also participated in The John Muir Award which supported progress across all four capacities of CfE. Malcolm recognised the progression and personal development on his journey and was able to recognise and articulate skills and attributes in his chosen subjects whilst strengthening his Gaelic language further. Malcolm also benefited by learning about career and further learning opportunities in Gaelic at this stage.

Award

This resulted in Malcolm receiving the award of the Diploma in Gaelic which included geography, biology and chemistry alongside their Project Learning and personal self-reflection experience. This allowed Malcolm to successfully apply and secure a place with a local employer to undertake a Modern Apprenticeship which would enable him to continue using his Gaelic. Along with this, Malcolm's learner journey had included other skills and opportunities which added to his confidence and which he could return to at a later stage.

Rina's Journey

Background

Rina is undertaking her Senior Phase through her local college. Rina wanted to undertake her Senior Phase in a new environment, as she felt there was too much distraction within her previous school setting. This allowed her to focus on her development. Rina wanted her Senior Phase to incorporate a wide variety of subjects, which the college could accommodate. This meant she could progress her learning within the college setting to achieve the award of SDA.

Programmes of Learning

Rina was able to progress with both dance and theatre, technical and professional courses whilst undertaking English, drama and business management to widen her opportunities within the SDA. Her learning was assessed throughout her journey at an appropriate SCQF level. Thanks to college provision, Rina accessed a wide variety of subjects to suit her skills and aspirations. Evidence for assessment was gathered in different ways to reflect the learner's acquisition of knowledge, skills and attributes and the ability to apply them.

Project Learning

Rina undertook a project integrating her specific skills and interests within the college setting. Rina took the decision to undertake a new project each year achieving progression in SCQF level for each topic. This allowed her projects to cover a variety of interests. This is a supported element of the SDA, ensuring that cooperative conversations take place with lecturers/supportive adults on topic selection to ensure successful completion is achieved. Rina's projects successfully brought together a range of learning including through the subjects of drama, English and business management as well as her keen interest in social economics and theatre production.

Personal Pathway

Rina was able to self-reflect on several areas of her Personal Pathway with the support of lecturer/responsible adult. This was important to Rina as it focused on the skills gained from her experiences throughout her different project topics which provided a wide variety of experiences. Rina noticed progression and development on her journey, which strengthened her ability to recognise and articulate her knowledge, skills and attributes.

Award

This resulted in Rina receiving the award of the Diploma which included English, drama and business management alongside her projects and personal self-reflection experience. This allowed Rina to successfully apply and secure a place within college to undertake further study relating to drama and theatre. Along with this Rina's learner journey had included other skills and opportunities which added to her confidence providing her with the option to return to this at a later stage.

Veronika's Journey

Background

Veronika is an S4 learner from the Ukraine who moved to Scotland in January 2022 with her family. She joined the secondary school in S3. Veronika hopes to progress to university to study computing science or cyber security or achieve a Graduate Apprenticeship in a related area of employment. She looks forward to travelling the world and plans on finding a job which will allow for remote working. She is studying a range of subjects which link in with this career pathway.

Programmes of Learning

Veronika is currently studying eight subjects at SCQF Level 5: English, maths, Spanish, modern studies, physics, chemistry, engineering science, computing

science. Her strengths are related to maths and computing, as well as languages. Along with these subject commitments, Veronika has also been involved in the wider life of the school through sport and clubs, including basketball, netball, badminton as well as STEM club. She has also joined a number of after school clubs such as Coding and STEM projects.

Project Learning

Veronika has also been in focus groups in the school, including for a recent HMIE visit. She joined another group of as a guide in August at the S1 Parent Information Evening to escort parents to workshops. Each of these opportunities have allowed Veronika to develop her language skills in a variety of contexts as well as grow in confidence and feel included in the school and community. Veronika is aiming to complete an SCQF Level 6 project by the end of her sixth year using her language learning, linked to STEM. She has developed skills and responsibilities such as: reliability, organisation, leadership, communication among others.

Personal Pathway

Through partnership working, Veronika has been involved in a new initiative within the learning community to connect and support young people who have arrived in the area from Ukraine. This has been positive and has enabled young people to share experiences and make new friendships. The meet up was hosted at different schools in the Learning Community and takes place several times throughout the year. Veronika has also been a great support to new S1 pupils who have recently arrived in Scotland, acting as a mentor and buddy.

Award

Veronika has gained credits throughout her fourth year and is very well-placed to achieve the SDA by the end of her sixth year.

Sam's journey

Background

Sam requires additional support to help with gaps in her learning. Sam is care experienced and has had several school and home moves in the last four years. Sam has now settled well in school. She has developed good relationships with the teachers and has made good friends with others in her year. Sam is a talented musician and performs in the school band. Sam also enjoys cooking and has recently commenced a part time skills development placement in the kitchen, where she helps to prepare meals and provide hospitality. Sam is committed to gaining qualifications and achieve the SDA. She is being supported to apply for music courses at college for next year.

Programmes of Learning

Sam has been supported to progress through her Personal Learning Plan and further develop her own interests through subject options and a skills development placement for one day a week. Sam receives additional support for literacy and numeracy through creative learning classes, which is helping her to progress through qualifications. Sam has chosen music, media, hospitality and mental health and wellbeing as her options.

Project Learning

Sam is working well towards the Project Learning element of the SDA. As well as applying herself during timetabled classes, Sam attends the after school “Tuned In” music club with others in the school band to work on the development of their own record label and practise for performances. This is also helping her to work towards SCQF Qualifications; music and media, and other awards, such as The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, an arts award and a Youth Achievement Award.

Personal Pathway

Sam has demonstrated leadership skills and innovation through her work on the record label project. She has also grown in confidence on stage, during music performances and within the kitchen setting at her skills development placement. Sam noticed progression and development on her journey and strengthened her ability to recognise and articulate her skills and attributes.

Award

Sam is working well towards the Diploma and will continue to be supported in her transition to Further education.

Peter’s journey

Background

Peter is home educated, with a keen interest in the outdoors and requires extra support with learning. Peter and his family have been provided with all the information needed from their Local Authority, to enable Peter to achieve the SDA. Prior to being home educated, Peter had been receiving help from speech and language, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy, this continued to be offered after Peter switched to home education. Peter was also assessed by an independent educational psychologist who advised on ways to help support Peter with his learning.

Programmes of Learning

In the home setting, Peter was able to progress within the areas of study that reflected his interests and skills. Peter and his parents were able to access curriculum information from national websites and had access to submit work towards the same portfolio of qualifications available to students in any other educational setting. Peter and his parents were able to choose which parts of the curriculum were appropriate for Peter’s learning needs, and how the curriculum would be delivered.

Project Learning

Peter chose a project to start a small business to sell eggs in the local community. This was supported by Peter’s parents and required Peter to bring together a range of learning including, IT skills to produce advertising media, financial / business studies skills to create company accounts, biology and animal welfare to correctly care for the chickens, and practical craft skills to build a suitable enclosure. Peter chose to continue this project, especially focusing on the IT element by creating a website and increasing sales. By submitting a project portfolio including video, photos, drawings, accounts, write-ups, Peter’s project was verified.

Personal Pathway

Peter was able to self-reflect and articulate the skills he had strengthened alongside new skills he had learned from the project. His parents were able to verify Peter's self-reflection from these experiences since he is Home educated.

Award

This resulted in Peter receiving the award of the Diploma, which included National Qualifications and National Certificate courses alongside a project and personal self-reflection experience. This enabled Peter to then join the college system when he was 16, at an appropriate level allowing him to continue his post compulsory education.

Gabriella's Journey

Background

Gabriella is a 16 year old learner of Roma descent. Her education has been interrupted due to her family's return to Romania for a few months every year. Her parents migrated to Scotland to access a better education for her and her siblings. She has assumed adult responsibilities within the extended family from a young age. Gabriella would like to travel with her extended family in the future.

Gabriella's attendance through her BGE and in her fourth year was below the national average. She reported several incidents of bullying to her pastoral care teacher. Gabriella has a small group of close friends. The school identified that she was a risk of not completing her SDA and involved a range of partners to support engagement with her and her family.

Programmes of Learning

During fourth year, Gabriella undertook a range of qualifications and awards. She benefited from intensive literacy support and achieved credits in literacy at SCQF Level 3. She also completed Programmes of Learning and achieved credits in numeracy, ESOL, travel and tourism and hospitality in school, and a Prince's Trust SCQF Level 3 Managing Money at the local library. Gabriella likes the youth worker delivering the Prince's Trust award and enjoys learning in the library.

Project Learning

Gabriella has completed an SCQF Level 3 project through the Prince's Trust focused around planning a trip with her peers. This has been validated by the youth worker supervising the project.

Personal Pathway

Gabriella has assumed caring responsibilities for her younger siblings from a young age. She has found it difficult to talk about this experience with her pastoral care teacher. She has found it easier to talk about and reflect on her situation with a family liaison worker. Her family liaison worker validated her learning.

Award

With support from her family liaison worker Gabriella successfully completed all the elements of the Diploma and left at the end of her fourth year.

Florin's Journey

Background

Florin is a 15 year old young man of Roma descent, who is now in S5. Florin and his family came to Glasgow in 2015 and has lived in Govanhill since then, in two different homes. Florin lives with his Mum, Dad and four siblings. He is the oldest child in the family. Florin's family came to Scotland to provide a better future for them and their children. Florin's Mum stays at home and looks after the family while Dad works to provide for them. The family travel back to Romania every year to visit family and friends.

Florin has witnessed friends and family being bullied. He himself has been the victim of some unkind words but is determined not to let that impact him. Florin is passionate about sharing his culture with others and feels lucky to have family and friends who support him.

Programmes of Learning

During S4 Florin studied National Qualifications in a variety of subjects. His favourite was Spanish as he already understood the language. He has benefited from support from the English as an Additional Language department. He always attends Summer School and particularly enjoys making new friends and working with youth workers. He has also completed SCQF Awards in Personal Development and Employability.

Project Learning

He completed a Leadership Award which was overseen by the drama department when he was involved in the school show. Being involved in the school show facilitated his Project Learning using his knowledge of drama and music. It ensured he developed and strengthened his English further. Overall, the Project Learning element of the SDA also enabled him to successfully develop creativity, teamwork and leadership skills.

Personal Pathway

Florin completed the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award. He is a keen drummer although he has no formal qualification in this. He attended the Big Noise in primary school, and this encouraged him into music.

Florin is ambitious and wants to help people who have been the victims of discrimination or violence. He is reflective when describing his own experiences.

Award

Florin plans to stay on to S5 to complete his SDA.

9.2 Results of EQIA Framing Exercise

Overview of Policy - The Scottish Diploma of Achievement

As part of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment, the Independent Review Group (IRG) led by Professor Louise Hayward has developed a new model for qualifications and assessment in the Senior Phase.

This model centres around the creation of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA) which the IRG states will: “gather evidence of learner achievement in a broader range of areas than is currently the case” and allow “learners to have opportunities to demonstrate achievements in three main areas: Study, Project and Person”. The SDA would be awarded on completion of all three elements and at point of exit from the Senior Phase. Phased adoption of the Diploma is a key recommendation within the final report of the Independent Review, as is the need to continue to work with all communities with an interest in reform to qualifications and assessment in Scotland.

Who will it affect?

The Scottish Government will consider the recommendations of the Independent Review and will respond in due course. Should Ministers choose to accept, or partially accept, the recommendations of the Review including the Diploma, then this would directly affect learners, parents/carers, teachers, lecturers and a range of individuals employed in the education sector. There would also be wider implications across the education landscape including for the proposed new education bodies and the new inspectorate. There would likely be implications for wider society including further and higher education, recruitment and employment practices.

Inclusive Approach to Policy Design

The Independent Review states in its interim report that the Review has “adopted an inclusive approach to the design and development” of the Scottish Diploma of Achievement. There were three phases to the Review and three points at which comments and views were sought from stakeholders. The Review’s engagement centred around the IRG and associated [Collaborative Community Groups \(CCGs\)](#)

The IRG state that they have reflected on the three phases of engagement as well as a range of other evidence to develop the Diploma.

Framing Exercise - Scope

In the latter stages of the Review when the IRG had settled on a preferred model, an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) Framing Exercise was led by the Reviews’ Independent Secretariat and involved policy officials from within the Scottish Government’s Learning and Education Reform Directorates’. The task was to explore the Diploma using the Equality and Fairer Scotland impact assessment criteria. The aim of the exercise was not to provide a definitive assessment of potential impact, but to begin to explore some of the issues and provide advice around areas which require further exploration by Scottish Government, ahead of decisions being taken in respect of the Diploma. This short report prepared by the Review’s Independent Secretariat provides a summary of the exercise and the emerging conclusions.

It is important to be clear that the exercise focussed on the potential impacts of the Diploma on learners and did not explore potential impacts on those that will deliver the new qualification, or wider societal impacts.

It is also important to note that this summary was written before the final report and recommendations of the Review were written, thus final changes to the model have not been considered in this discussion.

The Framing Exercise – Summary of our discussion and findings

Framing Exercise: How

During the Framing Exercise we looked at evidence available under the protected characteristics as listed within the Equality Act 2010. In addition, the scope of the exercise was extended beyond the list of legally protected characteristics to include a number of other groups who may be impacted by the Diploma.

The task was to consider for each characteristic, relevant qualitative and quantitative evidence and consider a series of questions:

- The strength of the evidence available for that characteristic in respect of the policy and identify possible gaps in evidence.
- What areas of concern have been raised by stakeholders as part of the Review's engagement?
- What opportunities might the Diploma present for advancing equal opportunities?
- What potential negative impacts might arise, and any mitigating actions?
- Which groups Scottish Government will need to engage with as part of the formal EQIA?

Evidence was primarily drawn from Scottish Government statistics and from the Review's engagement. Links to the independent analysis of the three phases of the Review's engagement can be found on the [Independent Review Group's page on gov.scot](#)

Framing Exercise – Summary

The key conclusion from the exercise is that the Diploma, and the changes it would bring are likely to have an impact on learners in different ways. This includes learners with protected characteristics. The potential impacts, issues and opportunities identified during the exercise are summarised below. We recommend that a full EQIA is undertaken by Scottish Government as part of their considerations of the report and recommendations and in advance of any decision regarding adoption of the Diploma.

Protected Characteristic: Disability

The evidence considered during the exercise indicated that in principle the Diploma presents opportunities to improve educational outcomes for learners with disabilities and ASN. However, the ability to capitalise on these opportunities will depend on the detail of the Diploma and how it is implemented in practice.

During the Framing Exercise it was noted that the Diploma appears to align with one of the recommendations in the Morgan Review, Support for Learning: All our children

and all their potential (2020) which called for, greater recognition of wider achievement beyond national qualifications.

“...the [qualifications] system should be set up to recognise the particular achievements of children and young people which goes beyond SQA qualifications....Children and young people for whom exam-based qualifications are not aligned to their learning needs and potential are not failures. The Review evidence is consistent that there must be recognition of individual achievement in Learning for Life. This means creating equally valued alternative pathways and ways of measuring individual progress.” (Morgan, 2020)

Evidence from Children in Scotland’s [Inclusion Ambassadors](#) received as part of Phase Three was considered. It was noted that the Inclusion Ambassadors were broadly “positive about the proposals”, and that they valued in the Diploma “the move towards recognising wider forms of success beyond the formal exams and assessments system and the opportunities for more personalised approaches.” (Inclusion Ambassadors / Children in Scotland – Phase three non-survey response)

However, areas were identified which the group felt would require further exploration by Scottish Government. These include:

- a detailed consideration of how the Diploma might impact on learners with a range of disabilities and additional support needs, including highly able learners;
- the potential impact on learners with multiple and complex disabilities and;
- the impact of teacher bias in assessment and the options for mitigating teacher bias.

There should be further engagement with disability organisations before a decision is taken around the Diploma. Further, should a decision be taken by Scottish Government to accept the proposals around the Diploma, there must be ongoing engagement with these groups to help design and develop the detail of the Diploma. This will be essential to ensure that the Diploma capitalises on the opportunity to improve the Senior Phase experience for learners with additional support needs and disabilities and crucially does not create unintentional disadvantage.

Protected Characteristic: Race

During the Framing Exercise consultation responses including from the Coalition for Racial Equality Rights (CRER) and Anti-Racism in Education Programme (AREP) were considered as well as notes from an Intercultural Youth Scotland led learner CCG discussion. These responses indicated particular concern around the proposal for greater reliance on teacher assessment in the Senior Phase.

“Teacher involvement in the setting of predicted grades in Scotland during the Coronavirus pandemic provides some insight into this. Learners from every ethnic group, on average, experienced over-estimated grades compared with actual performance within their group in previous years. With the exception of African, Caribbean and Black young people, however, every BME group of learners had lower levels of over-estimation than peers from white ethnic groups. This puts those from white ethnic groups at a relative advantage, as their attainment has been artificially raised to a greater extent.” (CRER)

“If Scotland is to move forward with more formative assessment relying on coursework marked by teachers, how will we ensure that racial bias (and other forms of bias) does not affect grades? Estimated grades for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners are often lower than actual grades for blind-marked exams.” - A working group of anti-racist organisations and education stakeholders: Education Leadership and Professional Learning subgroup of the Scottish Government's Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme.

Possible mitigating steps to reduce teacher bias were discussed in the Framing Exercise. These include support and training for teachers as well as systems of school and national moderation. It is recommended that further research is undertaken to explore the potential for teacher bias and mitigating measures, before any decision is taken by the Scottish Government to increase teacher led assessment in the Senior Phase.

“I think from 2020 I believe it was scored on teacher student relationship. For some subjects I had higher scores but for some I know I failed but got good grade. The way it's going there is definitely some bias.” - (CCG member - Learner, Intercultural Youth Scotland)

Another key concern in respect of racial equality was in relation to the Personal Pathway component in the Diploma:

“A range of known barriers impact Black and Minority Ethnic learners' access to opportunities to gain awards and achievements outside of school. Racism within mainstream services targeted at young people is one such barrier... Black and Minority Ethnic households are twice as likely to experience poverty... Activities with a cost, including basic costs such as travel, may be inaccessible for many. Allied to this, the parents of Black and Minority Ethnic learners are more likely to be working in occupations with long or non-standard hours, making the practicalities of getting to and from clubs and activities more difficult.” - (CRER)

During the Framing Exercise it was noted that since the public consultation was issued, and in response to feedback during Phase Three of the Review, the proposed Personal Pathway in the Diploma has been amended. The focus of the Personal component is not on the number of experiences the learner has undertaken but on what an individual has learned through an experience i.e., the reflection. It was noted that focussing on the reflection would have a lesser impact than focussing on activities. The proposal by the IRG that support from a suitable adult for example a Youth Worker or teacher is provided to complete the Personal Pathway, should be framed as an entitlement and should be guaranteed for each learner, was seen as a mitigating action. Notwithstanding this we felt that there may still be equalities issues in respect of the Personal Pathway which need to be explored further.

It is recommended that further work is undertaken with CRER and AREP to explore in more detail the opportunities and actions needed for the Personal Pathway component to support racial equality, before a decision is taken on this aspect of the Diploma.

It is recommended that before any decision is taken in respect of the Diploma further engagement is undertaken with representative organisation such as CRER, BEMIS and those representing Gypsy Traveller and Roma communities, to identify any other potential opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and crucially to ensure that the Diploma does not unintentionally create further disadvantage.

Protected Characteristics: Religion and Belief

It was noted that there may be equalities issues in respect of religion and belief. For example, the requirement in Roman Catholic schools to teach Religious and Moral Education throughout the Senior Phase was noted as something which needs to be considered. The Framing Exercise also flagged that that there could be equality implications in respect of the Personal Pathway.

It is recommended that engagement is undertaken with relevant faith groups such as Interfaith Scotland to explore the Diploma in respect of Religious and Belief equality.

Protected Characteristic: Sex

Qualitative evidence which indicates that there are ongoing structural barriers to girls accessing some subjects, in particular STEM subjects was considered as part of the Framing Exercise, and it was noted that the Diploma would not directly address this issue.

Overall, the group felt that the flexibility within the Diploma could potentially support both boys and girls but concluded that further work is needed by Scottish Government to explore in-depth the potential opportunities, and issues which the Diploma could present, in respect of Sex.

It is recommended that further research is undertaken in respect of assessment methods in relation to boys and girls. It is also recommended that there is engagement with the Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning to ensure, that if accepted, the Diploma is designed and delivered in a way which will support gender equality in education.

Protected Characteristic: Age

The Framing Group noted that the Independent Review Group's intention is that the Diploma would be available to all learners regardless of their age, and that for learners who have left school, they would have the opportunity to undertake the Diploma at a college.

It will be important for Scottish Government to engage with colleges to ensure that the proposal to deliver the Diploma in colleges can be realised in practice.

Protected Characteristic: Pregnancy and Maternity

The Framing Group are not aware of any relevant existing evidence at this time on pregnancy and maternity in relation to the policy. However, as part of the formal EQIA Scottish Government may wish to seek views on this.

Protected Characteristic: Gender reassignment

The Framing Group are not aware of any relevant existing evidence at this time on gender reassignment in relation to the policy. However, as part of the formal EQIA

Scottish Government may wish to seek views on whether the proposals are likely to have any unintended consequences for this group.

Protected Characteristic: Sexual orientation

The Framing Group are not aware of any relevant existing evidence at this time on sexual orientation in relation to the policy. However, as part of the formal EQIA Scottish Government may wish to seek views on this.

Other Areas for Investigation:

In addition to the protected characteristics a number of other groups of learners were identified as requiring further consideration in respect of equality impacts.

Socio-Economic Aspects

Evidence considered in respect of socio-economic aspects drew on responses received during the three phases of engagement and in particular from the Equity CCG led by Dr Edward Sosu of Strathclyde University.

The main concern in relation to socio-economic equality was in respect of the Personal Pathway component. Many respondents in the public consultation and in the Phase Three engagement felt that for a variety of reasons it would be easier for learners from higher socio-economic backgrounds to complete this section of the Diploma than learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds, thereby exacerbating existing and longstanding inequalities in educational outcomes.

As outlined above, under Race, the Framing Group reflected that since the public consultation was issued, and in response to feedback during Phase Three the Personal Pathway component in the Diploma has been updated. The focus of the Personal Pathway component is not on the number of experiences the learner has undertaken but on what an individual has learnt through an experience i.e., the reflection. It was noted that focussing on the reflection would have a lesser impact than focussing on activities.

The proposal by the IRG that support from a suitable adult for example, Youth Worker or teacher, to complete the Personal Pathway component, would need to be guaranteed for each learner, was also welcomed and seen as a potential mitigating factor. Notwithstanding, the group felt that there may still be equalities issues in respect of the Personal Pathway component which will need to be explored further.

Other areas of concern in the Diploma noted by respondents in respect of socio-economic equality, include the possibility of teacher bias against learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds and concern around a move towards more digital learning, recognising that not all learners have access to digital technology and/or broadband.

“Digital inequity remains a serious issue for many learners, who lack access to IT devices and to wireless/broadband connectivity. We would further note that digital poverty can be hidden and is easily overlooked.” – (EIS)

On the other hand, the Framing Group reflected that during school visits the Review team had received positive feedback from a number of teachers and learners about

aspects of the Diploma which they felt had the potential to reduce the poverty related attainment gap. For example, some teachers and learners reflected that:

- the move towards more teacher assessment was felt to be fairer since teachers know their student's ability and could provide more accurate grades than terminal examinations;
- an increase in flexibility and choice evident in the Diploma would support equality and;
- the Project and Personal Pathway component were viewed as opportunities to steer the focus away from success being purely about achievement in traditional academic subjects.

It is recommended that further engagement with organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group and other similar organisations is a necessary next step to fully explore the potential socio-economic impacts of the Diploma.

Gaelic Medium Learners:

Bord na Gaidhlig, Comann nam Pàrant (Nàiseanta), CLAS (Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd Sgoiltean/Gaelic Secondary Teachers' Association) and Education Scotland were amongst the responses received by the Review which considered the specific needs of Gaelic Medium learners.

It was noted that whilst those representing Gaelic interests were broadly supportive of the three components and the principle of the Diploma the following was emphasised:

Any new system needs to start from:

- an understanding across all indicators that Scotland provides education in either English or Gaelic depending on parental choice;
- opportunities to extend and develop the four capacities must be available equally for GME pupils and EME pupils and;
- all resourcing and training for education teams should be provided equally for the GME and EME systems.

If the Diploma or parts of the Diploma is adopted the GME sector including learners and teachers, must be involved in helping to design and develop the detail of the Diploma.

Looked after children:

The group reflected that whilst educational outcomes for looked after children have improved over the last decade there is still large gaps compared with all pupils. It was noted that it will be important to consider how the Diploma can be designed and developed to improve educational outcomes for looked after children. It will also be important to identify any unintended consequences on this group. Whilst organisations such as CELCIS and Who Cares? Scotland have provided views into the Review it is recommended, that should a decision be taken to adopt the Diploma, further engagement is undertaken with CELCIS and Who Cares? Scotland around the design and development of the model.

Home Educated Learners:

Home educated learners and their parents/carers involved in engagement as part of the Review expressed concern at any changes to the system which would make access to qualifications for home educated learners more difficult. Home educated learners and their parents/carers noted the current challenges with accessing national qualifications.

It is important to ensure that the needs of home educated learners are considered in the design and development of the Diploma and it is recommended that there should be further engagement with this sector, should a decision be taken to introduce the Diploma.

“It is important that the SDA is accessible to home educated young people. Needs checks and balances.” - (CCG member - Learners – Phase Three response)

Framing Exercise - Conclusions

As noted above this exercise is not intended to be a definitive statement or a full assessment of impacts. It does however present preliminary and indicative impacts which will require further exploration by the Scottish Government as part of its consideration of the IRG’s recommendations. It also highlights areas where there is a lack of evidence in respect of a number of protected characteristics.

Following this exercise, it is recommended that a full EQIA is required by Scottish Government and that this should be undertaken before Scottish Government respond to the proposals around the Diploma. This EQIA should include an assessment of the impact on learners and staff who will deliver the new qualification (predominantly teachers and college lecturers) as well as a broader consideration of wider societal impacts.

9.3 Terms of Reference

Introduction

This document sets out the remit for the Qualifications and Assessment Independent Review Group (IRG), which will be led by Professor Louise Hayward, Professor of Educational Assessment and Innovation at the University of Glasgow (the IRG Convener).

Background

This work stems in part, from the recent OECD reports into Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence - Into the Future (2021) found that whilst CfE "continues to be a bold and widely supported initiative, and its design offers the flexibility needed to improve student learning further the structure, learning practices and assessment approaches in the Senior Phase also need adapting to be consistent with CfE's vision, and to allow for the smooth curriculum experience promised from 3 to 18." The subsequent report by Professor Gordon Stobart, (2021) Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective sought to provide insight into the perceived 'misalignment' between curriculum and assessment and to highlight opportunities for reform of assessments in the Senior Phase.

In addition to these recent OECD reports, following the cancellation, due to COVID-19, of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams in 2020 and 2021 there has been a renewed public debate in Scotland about assessment, particularly in the Senior Phase. Thus, in October 2021 the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced that Professor Louise Hayward of Glasgow University would lead work, consulting on the purpose and principles which should underpin any reform of national qualifications and assessment.

This work will take as its starting point, a consideration and analysis of the OECD reports; prior engagement, research and the numerous consultation responses received as part of Professor Ken Muir's work which relate to qualifications and assessment specifically; early engagement by Professor Hayward with colleagues from the Scottish Youth Parliament and Children's Parliament and relevant prior research and surveys of students, teachers and parents & carers on this subject.

Scope

The Convener, supported by the IRG and Collaborative Community Groups (CCGs), will provide a report and recommendations to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, advising on the purpose and Principles which should underpin any reform of national qualifications and assessment in the 'Senior Phase'. This will predominately cover S4-S6 in school and ages 15-18 out with school, however it is also recognised that there may be implications for some adult learners who study courses which fall within the remit. The focus of this work will be school and college qualifications accessible in the Senior Phase. The Review will not consider or make recommendations on the content of individual courses.

It is anticipated that the IRG will explore issues such as:

- the purposes and uses of a qualification/exams system, including recognition of learning, accreditation, selection and accountability;
- consider the approaches to assessment in vocational and technical subjects and lessons that could be learned from these approaches;
- fairness, equity and the impact of different approaches to assessment for qualifications;
- from ideas to practice – the process of change and learning from our past and;
- wider National and International approaches to the future of assessment and qualifications.

The conclusions that the Convener and IRG reach will be made independently of the Scottish Government and all other institutions.

The Convener will invite membership to the IRG from individuals who come from a variety of backgrounds and who have a range of skills, expertise and knowledge.

Membership of IRG and CCG

Membership of the IRG and CCGs will ensure that all interested groups with a stake in the future of qualifications have the opportunity to feed into the Review.

Membership will include, but is not limited to:

- those most directly concerned (users, students, parents and carers) ensuring that there are individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds from all of these groups;
- those immediately responsible for delivering courses leading to qualifications – teachers, lecturers, school and college leaders and training providers including those representing the Gaelic Medium Education Sector;
- those who use these qualifications as young people transition from higher education, further education, employers, and external agencies (for example. Skills Development Scotland);
- those responsible for providing such qualifications: for example. SQA, other awarding bodies and other regulatory bodies;
- those responsible for local policy in relation to qualifications, for example. local education authorities and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES);
- researchers in fields essential to the work of the group, for example. curriculum, qualifications and assessment, equality and social justice, accountability, national and international assessment systems, sustainable change and;
- representation from all parts of the country, in both urban and rural settings.

Here you can access a full list of [activities, outcomes and approach](#) of the Review.

Last updated: December 2022

9.4 Independent Review Group (IRG)

List of membership:

Those for whom qualifications matter most

Learners

- Beinn Grant (Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament)
- Ruby Cardie (Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament)
- Supported by Mo Whelton, member of staff from the Scottish Youth Parliament

Parents/Carers

- Cheryl Burnett (National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS))
- Barrie Sheppard and John Semple (NPFS)
- Eileen Prior from May 2022 until March 2023, then Patrick McGlinchey from March until May 2023 (Connect)

Design, development and delivery of qualifications

Teachers and lecturers

- Andrea Bradley (General Secretary, EIS Union)
- Peter Bain (Headteacher)
- Andrew Findlater (Principal Teacher)

Design and development

- Douglas Hutchison (Local government)
- Dr Gill Stewart (SQA)
- Martyn Ware (SQA)
- Aileen Ponton from May 2022 until December 2022, then Pauline Radcliffe from January until May 2023 (SCQF, National qualifications alignment)

Informing the process: research base

- Professor Chris Chapman (University of Glasgow) - the process of change
- Dr Joseph Smith (University of Stirling) - advised by Professor Mark Priestley (University of Stirling) - curriculum

- Professor Jo-Anne Baird (University of Oxford) - qualifications
- Dr Edward Sosu (Strathclyde University) - inclusion and equity

Informing the process: policy base

- Professor Ken Muir (University of the West of Scotland) Putting - Learners at the Centre (2022)
- Professor Gordon Stobart (University of Oxford) - Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland (2021)
- Professor Graham Donaldson (University of Glasgow) - Curriculum for Excellence/Teaching Scotland's Future (2010)

Those who use qualifications

- Business/industry – Tracy Black (CBI) - Employers
- Professor Ken Thomson (Forth Valley College) - Further Education
- Professor Jonathan Powles (University of the West of Scotland) - Higher Education

9.5 Collaborative Community Groups (CCG)

Learners group

Led by Beinn Grant and Ruby Cardie

- SYP
- Young Scot
- Youthlink Scotland
- Home Education Scotland
- Dyslexia Scotland, Young Ambassador
- Kelty Youth Group
- Stills Gallery Youth Advisory Panel
- The Big Project
- An Independent School Pupil
- East Ayrshire Youth Cabinet
- North Coast Youth Forum
- Fast Forward
- Who Cares
- Carers Trust Scotland
- Intercultural Youth Scotland (Phase two)
- Gaelic Medium (Gaelic and Scots Group via Young Scot)

Parents and carers group

Led by Cheryl Burnett and Elieen Prior / Patrick McGlinchey

- Connect
- National Parent Forum of Scotland – Barrie Sheppard and John Semple
- Children in Scotland - Annie Watson
- Contact - Donna Tomlin
- Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection - Linda O'Neill
- Comann nam Pàrant - Magaidh Wentworth
- Home Education Scotland - Mark Nixon
- Bobath Scotland - Sharon Collie

Profession

Led by Andrea Bradley

- Eileen Imlah - Education Institute of Scotland
- Simone Coetser - Education Institute of Scotland
- Pamela Manley - Education Institute of Scotland
- Kristine Dempster - Education Institute of Scotland
- Julie Ferguson - Education Institute of Scotland
- Scott McGimsey - National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
- Afifa Khanam - National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
- Mike Corbett - National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
- Tara Lillis - National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
- Catherine Nicol - Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association
- John Guidi - Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association
- Seamus Searson - Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association
- James Cowan - Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association
- Jim Thewliss - Senior Leaders Scotland

Headteachers

Led by Peter Bain

- Kirsty Ayed - Kings Park Secondary School, Glasgow
- Tony Breen - Portree High School, Skye
- Barry Graham - Wallace Hall Academy, Dumfries
- Graham Hutton - Grove Academy, Dundee
- Stephen Ross - Beath High School, Cowdenbeath
- Julie McDonald - Nairn Academy, Nairn
- John O'Neill - High School of Glasgow
- Jon Reid - Larbert High School, Falkirk
- Andrew Sharkey - St Kentigern's Academy, Blackburn
- Andy Smith - Larkhall Academy, Larkhall
- Pauline Walker - Royal High School, Edinburgh

Teachers

Led by Andrew Findlater

- Kirsty Hair - University of Strathclyde, Teaching Fellow
- Scott Hunter - Turriff Academy
- Caroline McFarlane - Banff Academy
- Lynsey McNamee - Queen Anne High School
- Marc McWhirter - Speyside High School
- John Schmidt - Currie Community High School
- Darren Brown - Inverness High School
- Rachel Richards - Currie Community High School
- Sandy Lunan - Dunblane High School
- John MacInnes - Ardnamurchan High School

Local government

Led by Douglas Hutchison

- Stewart Nicolson (Head of Service, South Lanarkshire Council, Chair)
- Matthew Sweeney - (COSLA)
- Grace Vickers (SOLACE)
- Gerry Lyons (Head of Service, Glasgow City Council)
- Maria Lloyd (Head of Service, Fife Council)
- Lyndsay McRoberts (Director of Education, South Ayrshire Council)
- Julie Calder (Head of Service, Renfrewshire Council)
- Adam Stephenson (Education Officer, Inverclyde Council)
- Campbell Hornell (Acting Education Officer, Lasswade High School)
- Andrew Brown (Senior Education Officer, West Dunbartonshire)
- Fiona Robertson (Executive Director of Place and Children, Young People and Partnerships Midlothian)
- Linda McAulay-Griffiths (Chief Education Officer/Head of Schools, East Ayrshire)

National Agencies

Led by Dr Gill Stewart

- Sally Smith (Head of Graduate Apprenticeships and Skills Development, Edinburgh Napier University)
- Ollie Bray (Strategic Director, Education Scotland)
- Andy Creamer (Head of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Education Scotland)
- Maeve MacKinnon (Senior Education Officer, Gaelic, Education Scotland)
- Tracy Johnston (Senior Education Officer Health and Wellbeing, Education Scotland)
- Pauline Stephen (General Teaching Council for Scotland)
- Victoria Smith (General Teaching Council for Scotland)
- Louise Campbell (General Teaching Council for Scotland)
- Alison MacDonald (HMIE, Education Scotland)
- Joe Mulholland (HMIE, Education Scotland)
- Ann Floyd, HMIE (Education Scotland)
- Ken Edwards (Education Programme Lead, Skills Development Scotland)
- Eleanor Wilson (Head of Outreach, Glasgow Caledonian University)
- Martin Ware (Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA))

National qualifications alignment

Led by Pauline Radcliffe

- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
- Connect
- Education Scotland
- Lantra
- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
- Scottish Prison Service
- Skills Development Scotland
- Scottish Funding Council
- Student Partnerships in Quality, Scotland
- Scottish Qualification Authority

- Scottish Social Services Council
- Scottish Training Federation
- Youth Link Scotland
- Youth Scotland

Process of change

Led by Professor Chris Chapman

- Professor David Hopkins (The University of Bolton)
- Professor Mel Ainscow (University of Glasgow, Education and Leadership)
- Jenny Langley, Former Headteacher, Kingsway Park High School, Rochdale
- Professor Melanie Ehren (University of London, Governance of Schools and Education Director)
- Professor Andy Hargreaves (Boston College, Teaching, Curriculum and Society)

Curriculum

Led by Dr Joe Smith

- Alice Crawford - Forrester High School, Curriculum Leader
- Professor Daniel Alvunger - Linnaeus University, Sweden, Curriculum Studies
- Julia Liesse-Fernandes - Forrester High School, Curriculum Leader
- Professor Kathryn Hibbert - Western University, Ontario, Canada, Education, Curriculum Studies
- Martin Ennis - Forrester High School, Depute Headteacher
- Mhairi Sheail - Forrester High School, Curriculum Leader
- Molly Fray - Forrester High School, Curriculum Leader
- Sarah Jarvis - Inveralmond High School, Qualifications and Assessment

Inclusion and Equity

Led by Dr Edward Sosu

- Sara Spencer (Child Poverty Action Group, Cost of the School Day)
- Professor Stephen McKinney (University of Glasgow, Pedagogy, Praxis & Faith)
- Anne Haggart (ASPIRENorth, Schools for Higher Education Programme, Regional Co-Ordinator)

- Alastair Wilson (University of Strathclyde, Senior Research Fellow)
- Dr Markus Klein (University Strathclyde, Director of Research, School of Education)
- Professor Cristina Ianelli (University of Edinburgh, Education and Sport)
- Dr Adriana Duta (University of Edinburgh, Education and Sport)
- Dr Roxanne Connelly (University of Edinburgh, Sociology and Quantitative Methods)
- Dr Geetha Marcus (University of Edinburgh, Education and Sport)
- Professor Yvette Taylor (University of Strathclyde, Education)
- Linda O'Neill (CELCIS, Inequalities in Outcomes of Children in Care)
- Professor Sheila Riddell (University of Edinburgh, Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity)
- Dr Stephanie Thomson (University of Aberdeen, Education)
- Professor Donald Gray (University of Aberdeen, Education)
- Professor Margaret Sutherland (University of Glasgow, Scottish Network for Able Pupils)
- Dr Fiona O'Hanlon (University of Edinburgh, Gaelic Medium Education)

Policy and Process

Led by Professor Ken Muir

- Billy Burke (Headteacher, Renfrew High School)
- Emeritus Professors Walter Humes (University of Stirling)
- Associate Dean Khadija Mohammed (University of the West of Scotland/Scottish Association of Minority Ethnic Educators)
- Professor Graham Donaldson (University of Glasgow, Education)

Employers

Led by Tracy Black

- Allan Colquhoun (Leonardo MW Ltd)
- Anna Gillies (NatWest Group)
- Becky Nicholls (Babcock International Group)
- Gillian Collin (PricewaterhouseCoopers)
- Helen Arthur (GlaxoSmithKline plc)
- Jackie Archer (Balfour Beatty)

- Jacqueline Hall (BAE Systems plc)
- Jo Szulikowski (Phoenix Group Holdings)
- Jonathan McCreadie (Amazon)
- Mairi Elder (Scottish Power)
- Mandy McMillan (Glasgow Airport Limited/AGS)
- Mark Essex (Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler)
- Matt Woods (Spirit AeroSystems (Europe) Ltd)
- Nikhil Sharma (Tata Consultancy Services)
- Raymond King (Babcock International Group)
- Richard Turner (BT Group plc)
- Steven Grier (Microsoft Limited)
- Suzanne Burns (STV Group plc)

Further education

Led by Professor Ken Thomson

- Lorraine Cowan (New College Lanarkshire)
- Caroline Watson (South Lanarkshire College)
- Brian Dunn (North East Scotland College)
- Lisa Doonan, South Lanarkshire College
- Stef Black and Ali McDade (Student Participation in Quality Scotland)
- G Graham and Katie Paget (Dundee and Angus College)
- Ann Heron (Ayrshire College)
- Rob McDermott (Forth Valley College)
- Loraine Lyall (Edinburgh College)
- Lisa Calderwood (Fife College)
- B Browlee (West Lothian College)
- J Gracier (Borders College)
- Jessica Borley and Liz Cook (University of the Highlands and Islands)
- Karen Gray (Scotland's Rural College)
- Sarah-Jane Linton (West Lothian College)

Higher education

Led by Professor Jonathan Powles

- Professor Nazira Karodia (Napier University, Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice Principal of Learning & Teaching)
- Professor Moira Fishbacher-Smith (University of Glasgow, Vice-Principal of Learning & Teaching)
- Shona Barrie (Stirling University, Director of Admissions and Access)
- Martin Gibbons (St Andrew's University, Deputy Director, Director of Widening Access and Participation)
- Emma Forster (University of Aberdeen, Deputy Director, External Relations Head of UK Recruitment & Admissions)
- Dr Stephanie McKendry (Strathclyde University, Head Of Access, Equality & Inclusion)
- Dr Sally Middleton (University of Aberdeen, Access & Articulation Manager)
- Kirsty Wadsley (LEAPS, Widening access partners)
- Amanda Baldwin (Focus West, Widening access partners)
- Professor Catriona Cunningham (Napier University, Head of Department of Learning & Teaching Enhancement)
- Dr Laurence Lasselle (St Andrews University, Senior Lecturer)
- Jim Thewliss (Senior Leaders Scotland, General Secretary)
- Jane Lewis
- Dr Pauline Hanesworth (University of Highlands and Islands, Head of Learning and Teaching)
- Professor Alison Machin (Council of Deans of Health Scotland, Convener)
- Ellie Gomersall (NUS President)
- Dr Alison Nimmo (Glasgow Caledonia University, Head of Academic Development)
- Luke Millard (Abertay University, Dean of Teaching & Learning)
- Katrina Castle (Edinburgh University, Head of Strategic Partnerships & Transitions)
- Stephen Watt (University of the West of Scotland, Careers and Employability Manager)

- Fiona Burns (Scottish Funding Council, Assistant Director Outcomes, Access)
- Mary Senior (University and College Union, Scotland Official)
- Professor Vicky Gunn (Royal Conservatoire of Glasgow, Academic Registrar)

Qualifications

Led by Professor Jo-Anne Baird and Professor Gordon Stobart

- Dr Lena Gray (Qualifications and Assessment Consultant/Researcher)
- Emeritus Professor Jenny Ozga (University of Oxford, Department of Education)
- Professor Pasi Sahlberg (Southern Cross University, Education)
- Emeritus Professor Dylan Williams (University of London, Assessment)
- Professor Ewart Keep (University of Oxford, Education, Training and Skills)
- Professor Anne Looney (Dublin City University, Executive Dean of the Institute of Education)

Allied Discussion Groups Members

Secure Care Centres

- Good Shephard Centre
- Kibble education centre
- St Mary's Kenmure
- Rossie
- Howdenhall

Public and Third Sector Employers

Led by Kevin Kelman, NHS Academy and Karen Reid, NHS Education for Scotland

- Marion Allison (Community Learning and Development Standards Council)
- Catherine Cartmell (Historic Environment Scotland)
- Caroline Deane (Scottish Care)
- Ceri Dodd (Fire Scotland)
- Jim Duffy (Youth Scotland)
- Stephanie Harold (Audit Scotland)
- Jennifer McHarrie (Education at Bòrd na Gàidhlig)
- Rosie Megginson (Social Work Scotland)

- James Russell (Skills Development Scotland)
- Amanda Spark (Improvement Services)

Scottish SME Employers

- James Whitrod (Sitekit)
- Carol Nicholson (VSA)
- Paul Murray (Bon Accord)
- Shawn Hogg (Air Source 1)
- Nicola Campbell (HomeFix / Reiver Clyde Homes)
- Saj Sharif (Zen Consulting)
- Pauline Scott (Tigers)
- Janet Menzies (Mage Control Systems)
- Jamie MacGregor (Dunollie Castle)

Grant Aided Special Schools (GASS)

- Andrew Philip (Capability Scotland)
- Catriona Campbell (Eastpark School)
- Jen Baillie (Craighalbert School)
- Laura Watkins (Donaldsons School)
- Lucy Chetty (Sight Scotland)
- Mandy Shiel, (Harmeny School)

9.6 Review activity – Meetings, Events and Visits

Meetings

Professor Hayward met the following individuals and organisations as part of the Review.

- Alison Preuss, Scottish Home Education
- Ana Stewart, Women in Enterprise Review
- Andrew Paterson, AI the future of Education, report and website
- Angela Morgan, Convenor of Review of additional support for learning implementation
- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
- Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland Union
- Awards Network
- Autism Resource Coordination Hub, South Lanarkshire
- Ben Murray, Ireland's approach to qualifications
- BOSCH Headteachers Group
- Carol Campbell & Alma Harris, National Discussion
- Carole Ford & Frank Lennon, Reform Scotland's Commission on School Reform
- Children in Scotland, Inclusion Ambassadors
- Chris Ross, Children in Scotland, Youth Ambassadors
- Christian Ydesen, Denmark's approach to qualifications
- Christopher DeLuca, Canada's approach to qualifications
- Clare Wyatt-Smith, Queensland's approach to qualifications
- Curriculum and Qualifications and Performance and Improvement Networks
- Daydream Believers
- Desmond Bermingham, The Australian Council for Educational Research, UK
- Developing the Young Workforce, National Leads Network
- Dr Pauline Stephen, The General Teaching Council for Scotland
- Education Children and Young People Committee
- Education Scotland
- Education Scotland, Timetabling Group

- Esther Papworth, Support for learning teacher, Dumfries Academy
- Gaelic Medium Education Stakeholders Group
- Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning
- Gina Wilson, Head of Strategy Children's Commissioner
- Grahame Smith, Careers Review, Skills Development Scotland
- Mark Nixon, Home Education Scotland
- James Withers, Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape
- Jim Metcalfe, College Development Network
- John Edward, Director General, Regions Group, UK Government
- Kevin Kelman, NHS Scotland Academy
- Learned Societies' Group on Scottish STEM Education
- Matthew Sweeney, COSLA
- Moira Fischbacker Smith and Martyn Hendry, Glasgow University
- Michael Marra MSP, former Party Spokesperson on Education, Scottish Labour
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- NASUWT, Teachers Union
- Ross Greer MSP, Party Spokesperson on Education, Scottish Green Party
- Oliver Mundell MSP, former Party Spokesperson on Education, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party
- Professor Clare Peddie, Vice-Principal Education, University of St Andrews
- Professor Dame Sally Mapstone, St Andrews University
- Re-thinking Assessment Group Advisory Group
- Royal Society of Edinburgh
- Scottish Catholic Education Services
- Scottish Council for Development and Industry
- Scottish Secure Care Units, Heads of Service
- School Leaders Scotland
- Skills Development Scotland
- Steve McCreadie, The Lens
- The Federation of Small Businesses
- Teachers group, Highland Council - Primary, Secondary, CLD, ELC

- Tom Bewick & Paul Eeles, Federation of Awarding Bodies
- Willie Rennie MSP, Party Spokesperson on Education, Scottish Liberal Democrats
- Young Scot
- Youth Scotland
- Youthlink Scotland

Events

Professor Hayward and the independent secretariat have discussed the Review at the following events and meetings:

- Anti Racism in Education Programme Board
- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications Network
- Awards Network Member Event
- Children in Scotland, Voices Forum
- COSLA, Children and Young Person Panel
- Curriculum and Assessment Board
- Dundee Headteachers Conference
- Edinburgh Headteachers Conference
- Education Reform Programme Board
- International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA)
- OECD
- Royal Society of Edinburgh Committee
- School Leaders Scotland Conference
- School Leaders Scotland Webinar
- Scottish Government, Teacher Panel Group
- Scottish Learning Festival
- Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) Consultation Workshop
- SCQF School and College Ambassadors Event
- Voices Panel, Children in Scotland

- Women in Enterprise Review, Bute House
- Youthlink Scotland and Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group

School and College Visits

Professor Hayward and the independent secretariat visited the following settings as part of the Review:

- All Saints Secondary
- Autism Resource Coordination Hub (ARCH)
- Anderson High School
- Banff Academy
- Beath High School
- Borders College
- Craigroyston High School
- Forth Valley College
- Galashiels Academy
- Good Shepherd Centre
- Grove Academy
- Invergarven School
- James Gillespie's High School
- Kelvinside Academy
- Kibble Education Centre
- Larbert High School
- Mearns Castle High School
- Oban High School with video link discussion with Tiree School
- Royal Blind School, Edinburgh
- St Leonards
- The Community School of Auchterarder

9.7 Review Phases and Published Resources

Phases of the Review

There were three phases to the Review and three points at which comments and views from stakeholders were sought

- Phase One: summer 2022 - consultation on Vision and Principles
- Phase Two: October 2022 - public consultation on Options for Change
- Interim Report: early March 2023
- Phase Three: March 2023 - engagement on a preferred model
- Final report: submitted to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills by the end of May 2023

Phase One: Draft Vision statement and Principles

Phase One of the Review was live between August and September 2022. Phase One sought views on a draft Vision statement and Principles. Responses were received from 12 Collaborative Community Groups and 2 allied discussion groups. A total of 221 responses were received from a survey sent to schools and colleges. A number of schools and colleges held group discussions with multiple teachers/lecturers and learners, and these responses were submitted on behalf of the group. The feedback from phase One has been independently analysed.

Read [the associated report](#) (December 2022).

Phase Two: Exploring options for the future of Qualifications and Assessment

Phase two of the Review opened in October 2022 and the Review held a [public consultation](#) which closed on 13 January 2023. Views were gathered on different ways on which the Vision and Principles might be put into practice. It also included the opportunity to suggest other approaches. The purpose of Phase Two was to identify a preferred model for qualifications and assessment.

The public consultation received over 700 responses, but we know that a great many of these responses, in particular those from schools and colleges, involved group discussions and therefore the total number of individuals who participated in the consultation was far greater than this. We have published all [consultation responses](#) where permission to do so has been granted, alongside a [final independent report](#) of the consultation analysis.

Phase Two [supporting documents](#)

Alternate formats

This document is also available in [Gaelic](#)

Interim Report

In the [Interim Report](#) we engaged with stakeholders from all corners of the Scottish Education landscape; learners, parents /carers, teachers and lecturers, school and college leaders, employers, policy makers, national bodies, politicians, wider practitioners, researchers (national and international) and universities. Insights from the wide range of communities involved in this Review have informed thinking to date and act as a major source of evidence for this Interim Report.

Alternate formats

This document is also available in [Gaelic](#)

This document is also available as a [British Sign Language video](#).

Phase Three: Testing the preferred model

- Phase Three took place during March and April 2023. The aim of Phase Three was to test the preferred model for qualifications and assessment identified in Phase Two and in the Interim report. We sought views on a proposed approach and the practical steps that would be needed for implementation to be successful. During Phase Three the Review took into account relevant findings from the National Discussion on Education.

Phase Three [briefing paper](#)

Engagement via schools and colleges

- Materials were issued to all Scottish schools, colleges and alternative educational settings, reflecting each of the three phases of the Review, they were invited to lead discussions within their own communities throughout the Review period.

Phase Three [schools college pack](#)



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