

# Education, Children and Young People Committee

23rd Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday 20  
September 2023

## Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment

### Introduction

Following the two OECD publications on Scottish Education in 2021, the Government commissioned Professor Louise Hayward to lead an Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment. The [review began its work in early 2022 and through 2022 and 2023 undertook a number of phases of consultation](#). Its final report was published shortly prior to the summer recess.

Some of the key recommendations in the report are:

- Adopting an SDA (Scottish Diploma of Achievement) as a graduation certificate for all senior phase educational settings.
- Removing exams in all subjects up to SCQF level 5 (e.g. National 5s), examinations may be retained in levels 6 and 7 (e.g. Highers and Advanced Highers).
- a digital profile for all learners which allows them to record personal achievements, identify and plan future learning.

A full list of the recommendations is provided at **Annexe A**.

### Committee meeting

At its meeting today, the Committee will take evidence on the report, its recommendations and processes from—

- Professor Louise Hayward, Professor of Education Assessment and Innovation, University of Glasgow, and Chair of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment;
- Professor Kenneth Muir, Professor at the University of the West of Scotland, and Member of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment Group; and
- Peter Bain, Headteacher, Oban High School and Member of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment Group.

**Education, Children and Young People Committee Clerks  
14 September 2023**

## Annexe A

## It's Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment recommendations

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

**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.

**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.

**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, for example, 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.

**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.

- 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.

**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.

**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.