

Education, Children and Young People Committee
30th October 2024
27th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

Cover Note – Reform of the Senior Phase

Introduction

1. Following the [Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills' statement](#) responding to the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (also known as the Hayward Review), the Committee wished to hear further evidence from Professor Louise Hayward and members of the Independent Review Group.
2. This morning, the Committee will hear from:
 - **Professor Louise Hayward, Professor of Education Assessment and Innovation, University of Glasgow;**
 - **Peter Bain, Executive Head Teacher and President, School Leaders Scotland (SLS);**
 - **Shona Barrie, Director of Admissions and Access, University of Stirling; and**
 - **Dr Douglas Hutchison, Executive Director of Education, Glasgow City Council.**

Appendix

3. A SPICe briefing is available at Annexe A to this paper.
4. A written submission from Professor Louise Hayward is available at Annexe B to this paper.

Clerks to the Committee
October 2024

Annexe A

SPICe

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Education, Children and Young People Committee

30 October 2024

Reform of the Senior Phase

Introduction

On [19 September 2024](#), the [Cabinet Secretary gave a statement to Parliament](#) which outlined how the Scottish Government would progress reform of qualifications in the senior phase.

The Committee will be hearing from Professor Louise Hayward. Professor Hayward led the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (IRQA) which the Government commissioned in October 2021; the IRQA published its [final report in June 2023](#).

The Committee [took evidence from Professor Hayward on 20 September 2023](#). Throughout this session, the Committee has regularly taken evidence on [reform of qualifications and the skills delivery](#), as well as [wider curriculum and structural reform](#). The Committee has also recently concluded [taking evidence on stage 1 of the Education \(Scotland\) Bill](#).

The Committee will be taking evidence from Professor Louise Hayward alongside other members of the review. The Committee is expecting a written submission from Professor Hayward in advance of the meeting. At the time of writing this paper, the submission had not been received.

OECD Reports

In 2021, the OECD published two reports on Scottish Education. The first, ['Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future'](#), was published on [21 June 2021](#) and followed a review of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). The second, [Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective](#), was more narrowly focused on how learning is assessed

and certificated (e.g. through school-based qualifications). This section of this briefing focuses on the first of those reports.

One of the key observations of the 2021 OECD review was that the linkage to Senior Phase (S4-S6) and the period where pupils' learning is certificated is problematic. The report stated—

“The coherence of CfE enactment is less consistent, however, in the Senior Phase (for learners aged 15 to 18 years), where fundamental challenges exist for curriculum and subsequent assessment re-design. Without taking up the task of a re-visioning of CfE in the Senior Phase, the practices in upper-secondary education will keep lagging in its curriculum components (aims, pedagogy and assessment) and will exercise a counterproductive influence on Broad General Education and the transition for students.”

A number of the recommendations in the OECD 2021 review are relevant to assessment and qualifications. These are summarised below:

- **Find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning throughout CfE** to deliver Scotland's commitment to providing all learners with a rich learning experience throughout school education: Scotland could consider how the design of CfE can better help learners consolidate a common base of knowledge, skills and attitudes by the end of BGE, and nurture and hone this base for them to progress seamlessly through Senior Phase and the choices it offers.
- **Adapt the Senior Phase to match the vision of CfE:** Scotland could consider adapting the pedagogical and assessment practices and the structure of learning pathways in the Senior Phase to enhance learners' experience of upper-secondary education and help them develop CfE's four capacities continuously.
- **Align curriculum, qualifications and system evaluation to deliver on the commitment of *Building the Curriculum 5*:** Scotland could first identify modes of student assessment that could be used in school and external settings at Senior Phase levels, in alignment with the four capacities and CfE philosophy; and second, re-develop a sample-based evaluation system to collect robust and reliable data necessary to support curriculum reviews and decision making.

The OECD report authors [gave evidence to the Committee on 8 September 2021](#). Beatriz Pont from the OECD said:

“There are all the student assessments, and the structures are set for students to pass the exams but not to have a broad experience, as CfE considers it. We think that that is hindering the curriculum experience of many young people. Actually, the students whom we met told us that. They said that, when they arrive in the senior phase, having learned in a new way and having had a much broader experience, they then have to go back to learning for the test, which changes the way that they perceive education. We think

that the senior phase has an issue between breadth and depth that is still unsolved and needs attention.” ([Official Report, 8 September 2021](#))

Ms Pont stated the OECD saw better definition of pathways in the Senior Phase as a potential solution to this. The OECD suggests a balance of assessments, ensuring that students have support mechanisms and provisions to give a good understanding of student performance.

Professor Gordon Stobart authored a working paper '[Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland](#)', published in August 2021. The working paper was commissioned by the OECD to complement work on the 2021 review. Rather than providing recommendations, the paper lists assessment options for consideration. In his paper, Professor Stobart describes Scotland as an:

“...international leader in adopting broader ‘21st century’ capacities for education and life outside schooling.” – p9

However, the challenges of assessing the capacities of curricula such as CfE were also highlighted:

“At present there are few examples of how national examinations can assess broader global skills such as creativity, collaboration, and communication.” – p14

Professor Gordon Stobart’s paper compared Scotland’s system of certification in upper secondary to a variety of other countries’ systems. He also noted that Scotland’s students are more frequently examined than in other jurisdictions. During evidence to the Committee in 2021, [Professor Stobart said](#) he was surprised at the number of examinations in Scotland and the complexity of the system. In a further submission to this Committee in 2023, Professor Stobart said—

“In comparative terms, Scottish upper-secondary school students are more frequently examined than those in other jurisdictions, where typically certification is at 18. This results from offering three suites of national examinations (National 5; Highers; Advanced Highers) during S4-6. A consequence of this is the ‘two term dash’ in which students move rapidly from one set of exams to the next.”

[Professor Hayward told the Committee in September 2023](#)—

“There has been consistent evidence across a range of reports that there are real challenges with the idea of having three consecutive years of examinations. We heard consistently from young people and teachers’ deep frustration about the balance of time spent in assessment and examination processes as opposed to focusing and deepening learning and teaching.”

[Professor Stobart’s paper](#) set out options for the future of assessment for Scotland to explore, including:

- Removal of National 5 examinations in S4 and move toward a school graduation certificate or diploma.

- Developing a more resilient upper-secondary assessment system in light of the disruption through the pandemic
- Better alignment of assessment with CfE and pedagogy through broadening forms of assessment.
- Increasing and adapting the role of continuous, school-based assessment carried out by teachers throughout the year, moving away from centralised moderation.
- Ensuring student views are considered and used to shape assessment arrangements.
- Further developing the role of vocational qualifications.

Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment

The [Scottish Government commissioned the Independent Review Group](#), led by Professor Hayward to consider and report on “the purpose and principles which should underpin any reform of national qualifications and assessment in the ‘senior phase’.” This was to be contextualised by both the OECD reports highlighted in the previous section and experience of how certification was handled in the pandemic.

When [giving evidence to the Committee in September, Professor Hayward](#) said in her opening statement that there are five key issues.

These were:

- The report suggested a long-term “direction of travel for qualifications and assessment in Scotland”. It would not be a “quick fix”.
- The report reflects an agreed position from extensive engagement with communities across the education system.
- The vision for the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland is a crucial part of this work.

The proposed vision 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.”

- Implementation would be key, she said “it is not enough to plan for the educational aspect of innovation; there has to be a plan for change ... everyone who is involved in making it work has to be involved in the process”. The pace of change should “depend on the level of resourcing that is available.”

- Every idea contained within the report is already being used in at least one other country. Professor Hayward said the report “is both principled and practical”.

Key recommendations

The [final report of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment](#) (“IRQA”) was published in June 2022.

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
- To support parity of esteem between different types of qualifications the SCQF level should be include in the qualifications’ descriptions. E.g. SCQF Level 6 – Higher.

Scottish Diploma of Achievement

The Review recommended that the Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA) would be made up of three, equally weighted parts. These were:

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.”

The intention was that the programmes of learning will be graded and assessed as they are currently, project learning will be assessed at an SCQF level but not graded, and the personal pathway element will be neither graded nor assessed.

Under Programmes of Learning, the review envisaged a broader range of assessments to be used. The review was critical of too much reliance on external examinations, but that these should be retained (at levels 6 and 7) “where they are an important part of the assessment methodology”.

Under Personal Pathway, the review lists a number of possible activities that this element could include:

- Contributions to the community
- Cultural or sporting activities
- Supporting wellbeing of themselves and others
- Work, enterprise or entrepreneurial activities

The review said that the focus in this aspect should not be about collecting experiences, rather it should be on what has been learned through those experiences.

Nominally schools currently have a great deal of flexibility of which qualifications to offer in Senior Phase and when. Peter Bain, a headteacher who was on the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment, said that the pressures on schools to maintain the traditional presentation patterns comes from the way in which success is reported locally. He said—

“There is a societal pressure—not helped by national newspapers—to publish league tables. The Scottish Government obviously does not publish those itself, but reporters formulate them. That impacts on parents’ views on the success or otherwise of a school, which then impacts on elected members, directors of education and headteachers in schools.” ([20 September 2023, col 35](#))

Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (IRQA) process

The IRQA sought to undertake its work in an inclusive way that drew upon the “thinking of individuals and communities”.

The Independent Review Group (IRG) included a range of participants with an interest in qualifications. These included: learners; parents/carers; classroom teachers; representatives of national bodies; colleges; employers; academics; and universities. The review developed Collaborative Community Groups (CCG) where

members of the IRG led wider stakeholder groups. There were CCGs covering the following communities/topics:

- Learners
- Parents and carers
- Profession (teaching unions)
- Headteachers
- Teachers
- Local government
- Scottish Qualifications Authority
- National qualifications alignment
- Process of change
- Curriculum
- Inclusion and equity
- Policy and Process
- Employers
- Further education
- Higher education
- Qualifications

The Review had three Phases and views from stakeholders were sought at each Phase.

Phase 1 focused on a draft vision statement and principles.

Phase 2 was on exploring options for the future of qualifications and assessment. This included a public consultation that sought views on different ways on which the vision and principles might be put into practice. An [analysis of this consultation was published in April 2023](#). The IRQA used this to help develop a high-level model for qualifications and assessment.

During Phase 3, the IRQA sought to test the preferred model for qualifications and assessment which had been identified in Phase 2. [An analysis of the consultation was published](#) – this included a summary of CCG discussions as well as an online consultation survey that had been sent to all schools and colleges in Scotland.

Scottish Government response

On 19 September, Scottish Government [set out its response to the IRQA](#). A summary of the actions following this response is included in the appendix to this paper.

The Government describes its response as “ambitious, yet pragmatic” and that the actions are “achievable, whilst taking into account the capacity of the system, at a time when our schools are facing a range of complex challenges as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, such as issues around attendance and behaviour.” The Cabinet Secretary told Parliament—

“It is clear that there is a wide range of views on qualifications reform. Some people continue to call for radical changes next week, while others favour a more pragmatic approach, recognising the other pressures that face schools post-Covid.” ([19 September 2024, Col 71](#))

The Government’s response suggests that its approach would form part of a wider package of reform and that more details on this work would be included in the National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan in December.

Approach to assessment

The Cabinet Secretary said that the content of school qualifications would be considered along with wider work to review the curriculum and that this would improve the articulation between BGE and the Senior Phase. She said—

“The evolution of Scotland’s approach to assessment in the senior phase will be an integral part of our wider plans to improve the curriculum. The curriculum improvement cycle is already under way, beginning with maths and numeracy. That means that, for the first time, there will be a systematic approach to ensuring that the curriculum in Scotland remains relevant and forward looking, that it clarifies the role of knowledge and that, ultimately, it supports high-quality teaching, learning and progression.” ([OR 19 Sep 24, Col 72](#))

The Government accepted that there is currently too much focus on examination in the Senior Phase. It announced a number of actions to “rebalance assessment”. What this means in practice is likely to differ depending on the qualification.

In the short term, this may include removing final exams from some practical subjects at National 5 from next academic year. The Scottish Qualifications Authority/Qualifications Scotland (SQA/QS) will “work towards extending the range of approved assessment methods which could be used for national qualifications to better support changes in the balance of assessment” and “set out a longer-term programme of work to rebalance assessment methods across all national courses”. Work will also take place to consider how graded national qualifications (National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher) could be modularised to provide additional flexibility.

Next year, there will also be a pilot of digital onscreen assessment, e.g. in Computing Science.

In order to simplify the qualifications landscape, the SQA/QS will “rationalise the qualifications offer in the Senior Phase, starting with the Creative, Hospitality and Sport and Technology, Engineering and Construction Sectors (which represents 800 qualifications and awards)”.

The Government stressed that the teaching profession should be central in developing assessments. To this end, the Government plans that SQA/QS will second a secondary headteacher. The Government stated that this secondment is “absolutely pivotal to building trust in the new qualifications body and further demonstrating the change in approach to engagement with Scotland’s teachers.” Member will recall from the Committee’s work on the Education (Scotland) Bill that currently individual teachers play a key role in the development of national qualifications.

Interdisciplinary Learning

The Government’s response noted that Interdisciplinary learning (IDL) is intended to be a key part of learning through school education. The Scottish Baccalaureate includes an IDL project, albeit take up of this is low; in 2024, there were around 140 entries.

The Government response referenced Education Scotland’s [Evaluation of curriculum design in Scotland](#) which was published in May 2024. This found that while there was some good practice in this area—

“[IDL] remains an underutilised element of curriculum design across all sectors. There remains lack of clarity regarding high-quality IDL and how it is distinct from other approaches to organising learning.”

Education Scotland recommended that “national bodies and local authorities should enhance and expand their support for staff to develop a greater understanding of the principles and benefits of high-quality interdisciplinary learning.”

The Government’s response to the IRQA said that “more work is required if high quality interdisciplinary learning is to essentially become a mandatory part of the Senior Phase curriculum in all secondary schools.” The Cabinet Secretary said that the Government would establish a “refreshed national working group” to better determine the place of IDL within Senior Phase. (OR 19 Sep 2024 Col 74)

Personal pathway

The Government’s response was positive about the idea of better recognising the breadth of learning outside of qualifications and that it would explore doing so. However, the Government said that it needs “to work through significant concerns [that have been raised about the risk of] entrenching and exacerbating social inequality”.

The Government supports the proposal of a national digital profile. It said, “an initial profile has been developed within the My World of Work platform currently managed by Skills Development Scotland (SDS). This will ensure consistent and cost-free access to all young people in Scotland.” The use of this profile would be voluntary.

Leaving Certificate

The Government said that it “understands the potential benefits of a leaving certificate as a means of recognising a broader range of a young person’s achievements, with the award being flexible to reflect all levels of ability.” The Government continued—

“More work needs to be done to determine the content of the leaving certificate and establish how it will operate. We will endeavour to undertake further testing with Scotland’s teaching profession directly – on the best and most appropriate route forward which may support a leaving certificate in the future.”

Parity of esteem

Under this heading, the Government’s response noted the work on Interdisciplinary Learning and the national digital profile. It also said that it would ask that the SCQF levels of any qualifications be included in their title.

Support for teachers

The Government said that “we must ensure that teachers are supported to work in a new environment characterised by more balanced assessment approaches.” It noted the plans for a Centre for Teaching Excellence and also highlighted plans to reduce contact time. In terms of the latter, it said—

“The Scottish Government remains fully committed to the delivery of our commitment to reduce class contact time by 90 minutes per week. We are keen to inject some urgency into this work and will continue to work with the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) to focus on delivering this as quickly and effectively as possible, for the benefit of Scotland’s teachers and pupils alike.”

Artificial Intelligence

The Government said that it agrees that “it is important that the education sector understands the opportunities, implications and challenges of AI.” The Government said “our approach to AI across all of education, not just qualifications and assessment, sits in the context of [Scotland’s AI Strategy and the work of the Scottish AI Alliance](#)”.

The Government said—

“The Scottish Government will work with Qualifications Scotland and Education Scotland within this context to ensure that AI can be used

effectively and safely in learning, teaching and assessment. We support the work of the current qualifications body in considering the impact of AI on assessment and the work of Education Scotland and ADES in terms of supporting teachers. ... Additionally, and to capitalise on the opportunity which AI may present for reducing teacher workload, we have recently launched an AI for impact 'CivTech Challenge' which invites bids designed to advance a reduction in teacher workload, via the use of AI. We believe that AI presents a unique opportunity to reduce teacher workload; we will use the results from the CivTech challenge to advance a reduction in teacher workload."

The Committee explored the potential impact of AI on Education, particularly in relation to the impact on modes of assessment, during an evidence session in December 2023. The Committee wrote to the Scottish Government on [10 January 2024](#) and received a response on [12 February 2024](#).

Engagement and next steps

The Government's response indicated that the implementation would involve a range of stakeholders – young people, parents/carers, as well as universities, colleges and employers. It suggested that there should be a particular role for teachers; it said—

"It is imperative that teachers lead a refreshed approach to assessment."

Consultation

The Government's response was influenced by the national survey of teachers. This was an [online survey](#) that ran for 13 weeks in 2023. The survey was aimed at the school and college teaching professions. The purpose of the survey was to seek "views on the recommendations from the National Discussion on Education and the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment."

The report of the survey said—

"The consultation received 2,152 responses. 61% (1,317) of responses were from individuals and 39% (835) were from groups. In total, the group responses represent the views of around 9,300 people. Almost all respondents were from schools, a small number were from the college sector and a handful of responses were received from the Community Learning and Development and Youth Work Sector.

"Since respondents were self-selected, they may not be representative of teachers across the entire education sector. The sample may be skewed towards teachers who have a particular interest or perspective on the proposals for education reform. This could mean that certain viewpoints are either overrepresented or underrepresented, making it difficult to draw generalisable conclusions."

The survey asked questions on the recommendations of the IRQA. The survey asked both "which recommendations from the Independent Review of Qualifications

and Assessment are the most important” and “if there were any recommendations from the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment that they disagree with”. Respondents could choose any or all of the recommendations under each question. The responses were mixed. For example, 23.5% of respondents said that “Adopt the Scottish Diploma of Achievement” was one of the most important recommendations and 38.2% disagreed with this suggestion.

Commentary on the Government’s response

The responses to the Government’s position have been mixed.

[EIS gave a “cautious welcome” to the Cabinet Secretary’s statement](#). EIS General Secretary Andrea Bradley said:

“The EIS welcomes the general tone of some elements of the Cabinet Secretary’s statement on the Hayward Review today: the need for culture change in education and for the teaching profession to be front and centre of reform; the need for less reliance on high-stakes exams and over-assessment of students; and, critically, the need to address teacher workload if the profession is to be enabled to meaningfully take forward future work on qualifications reform. Concerns over the annual two-term dash to qualifications through exams are a long-standing issue, particularly with regard to the impact on young people from less advantaged backgrounds, as is the lack of parity of esteem between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ qualifications. Today’s long-awaited statement does not go far enough to remove these concerns or to map out a clear route towards a better future for the Senior Phase of the kind envisaged by the Hayward Review. We need to do more as a country in support of our young people and our educators.”

[NASUWT said](#) that “the decision to retain National 5 examinations in most subjects [is] something the majority of NASUWT members support”. It continued—

“What is now vital, though, is that the flexibilities available in the existing system to limit over-assessment, such as able candidates bypassing National 5 and doing a two-year Higher course in S4/5, are fully utilised. Furthermore, practices which cause unnecessary stress for pupils and increased workload for teachers, such as the excessive use of dual presentation of candidates, must be addressed.

“The encouragement of more use of continuous assessment/coursework in National Qualifications seems reasonable, though this needs to be assessed on a subject-by-subject basis. Alongside this, any quality assurance systems to support enhanced coursework must be fit-for-purpose and not burdensome on teachers. The impact of artificial intelligence on coursework also needs to be fully considered.”

[Scotland’s Children and Young People’s Commissioner](#) expressed disappointment with the Government’s position. She said—

“The Scottish Government’s long anticipated response to the Hayward Review was an opportunity to advance the change that young people

desperately need. Yet instead of committing to the effort of comprehensive reform, today's announcement was little more than tentative steps."

The Commissioner's news release included quotes from Professor Hayward, Angela Morgan and Professor Muir. The news release said that Professor Hayward "welcomed the statement today describing it as the beginning of change, but pointed to the urgency needed for reform." She was quoted as saying—

"Young people's voices were central to the work of the Review and the majority of young people were calling for change. Many described experiences in the senior school phase that were dominated by preparation for exams, past papers, prelims, memorising chunks of text or prepared answers. Some young people were insufficiently challenged, many were stressed and demoralised. Others felt excluded, believing their achievements were neither valued nor recognised. We live in a very challenging financial context and learners and parents, teachers and lecturers, schools and colleges will need time and support for change to be successful. However, during the Review, AI in the form of Chat-GPT emerged, demonstrating how quickly the world is changing and this week OpenAI has emerged, AI capable of reasoning. There can be no more urgent priority than ensuring that Scotland's young people are qualified for the future."

Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture), SPICe Research

23 October 2024

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP www.parliament.scot

Appendix

Overview of Actions - Scottish Government Response to the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment

The following is an extract from the Scottish Government's Response to the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment.

Approach to Assessment

Lead: Current Qualifications Body/Qualifications Scotland working in partnership with teachers, young people and other key stakeholders.

- Take steps to remove external written examinations in practical subjects where appropriate, with changes starting to be implemented from 2025/26.
- Work towards extending the range of approved assessment methods which could be used for national qualifications to better support changes in the balance of assessment.
- Pilot digital onscreen assessment across various subjects, including Computing Science given this is a subject area ripe for consideration. This work will start in 2025.
- Set out a longer-term programme of work to rebalance assessment methods across all national courses, which will align with Curriculum Improvement Cycle activity where possible.
- Rationalise the qualifications offer in the Senior Phase, starting with the Creative, Hospitality and Sport and Technology, Engineering and Construction Sectors (which represents 800 qualifications and awards), the first phase of which is due to complete in December 2024 with other sectors and national courses to follow.
- Starting in 2024, explore models of how graded national courses such as National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher could be organised into 'modules' to allow pupils maximum flexibility to build credit as they go. Learning from the previous experience with unit assessments (which were ultimately removed) and research into different approaches to 'modularisation' in other jurisdictions, will be taken into consideration.
- Implement changes to assessment which are proportionate and take teacher workload into consideration. This partnership approach will be emphasised through the participative governance structures planned for Qualifications Scotland, the detail of which is set out in the recently introduced Education (Scotland) Bill.

Project Learning/ Inter-disciplinary Learning

Lead: Scottish Government and Education Scotland working in partnership with schools and organisations with existing experience of IDL.

- Building on the existing IDL co-design group facilitated by Education Scotland, a refreshed working group, chaired by a senior secondary school teacher experienced in the delivery of IDL, will bring together relevant partners already active in this space. This group will lead a new phase of work with the objective of better determining the place of IDL in secondary schools while ensuring an equitable offer for all young people.
- There are a number of organisations and schools already working in this area including Dollar Academy and Grove Academy (Dundee City Council), Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP), the Wood Foundation, Daydream Believers and Powering Futures and we will ensure they are all involved in shaping our collective next steps. It is imperative that any new model is tested in a range of schools before wider adoption. This exercise will also help expand our shared knowledge as to the ways IDL could be embedded into a school's curriculum including in respect of timetabling while also considering the place of accreditation in this curricular area.

Personal Pathway and the Digital Profile

Lead: On wider achievement the Scottish Government and on the Digital Profile SDS/ES in partnership with a range of stakeholders.

- We are committed to continue to explore how best to recognise wider achievement with a range of stakeholders including young people. In doing so, and before considering whether or not wider achievement could ultimately be included as part of any leaving certificate, we will need to work through significant concerns raised by a wide range of stakeholders, principally, that doing so risks entrenching and exacerbating social inequity.
- To support continued development of the profile and help ensure its effective use in schools, an experienced secondary school leader will be seconded into Education Scotland to work with SDS and the current qualifications body.

Leaving Certificate

Lead: The Scottish Government working collectively with young people, schools, colleges, universities and employers.

- The Scottish Government understands the potential benefits of a leaving certificate as a means of recognising a broader range of a young person's achievements, with the award being flexible to reflect all levels of ability.

- The Scottish Government understands that more work needs to be done to determine the content of the leaving certificate and establish how it will operate.
- We will endeavour to undertake further testing with Scotland's teaching profession directly – on the best and most appropriate route forward which may support a leaving certificate in the future.

Parity of Esteem

Lead: Qualifications Scotland, qualification providers

- Ask the current qualifications body and qualification providers in Scotland (e.g. universities), to ensure consistent use of SCQF levels in their titles to support a clear description of all qualifications (e.g. Higher English, SCQF Level 6).

(Actions outlined above in relation to IDL and the Digital Profile are also relevant for Parity of Esteem)

Support for Teachers

Lead: The Scottish Government, working with Qualifications Scotland and Education Scotland

- Take steps to ensure appropriate support for teachers to effectively deliver new forms of assessment or where necessary, test practice related to IDL.
- Prioritise work through the SNCT to deliver a reduction in contact time.
- Support schools to deliver high quality teaching and learning including through the establishment of the Centre for Teaching Excellence. The Centre will ensure research and evidence is distilled into practical and digestible support for all teachers, no matter their career stage while helping the development of innovative classroom practice.

Artificial Intelligence and Digital

Lead: Scottish Government, current qualifications body, Education Scotland, COSLA

- The Scottish Government will work with Qualifications Scotland and Education Scotland within the context of Scotland's AI Strategy and the work of the Scottish AI Alliance to ensure that AI can be used effectively and safely in learning, teaching and assessment.
- To capitalise on the opportunity which AI may present for reducing teacher workload, we have recently launched an AI for impact 'CivTech Challenge' which invites bids designed to advance a reduction in teacher workload, via the use of AI.

- We will also ensure our education bodies have access to experts from Scotland's leading universities in AI advancements, as well as from outside the education sector, so that our thinking reflects best practice in what is a fast moving and complex area and benefits both teachers and pupils.
- With regards to next steps in digital technology we are currently developing a new digital strategy for school education in Scotland, in partnership with COSLA and key education stakeholders. The strategy will outline the important role we believe digital tools and services play in the future of Scottish education and will highlight the key features of successful technology provision. It will consider both people and technology aspects of digital education in Scotland to help support deployment and purposeful use of technology in our schools.

Engagement

Lead: The Scottish Government

Ensure all key stakeholders including young people, parents/carers, universities, colleges, and employers are involved in discussions to come. We will continue to ensure the views of teachers are listened to and reflected as changes to assessment practices are enacted. This will include ensuring that secondary teachers are given the opportunity to lead on the input required in terms of changes and improvements in respect of their own subject area.

Annexe B

Submission from Professor Hayward

It's Our Future: Identifying Next Steps

Introduction

The Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (IRQA) was initiated in response to two OECD reports, both supportive of Scotland's approach to Curriculum but arguing for change to qualifications in the Senior Phase. The two reports echoed longer term concerns about the extent to which our approach to qualifications was consistent with our curriculum, Curriculum for Excellence, where an educated citizen was defined as one who was successful in learning, confident as an individual, an effective contributor and a responsible citizen. The current senior phase was perceived not to reflect that curriculum, nor to serve young people, their teachers or society well.

The IRQA recognised the power of qualifications and assessment:

Assessment and, in particular qualifications, acts as one of the major drivers of curriculum making. The power of assessment to drive curriculum and pedagogy is recognised as an international phenomenon but too often that power is seen to distort learners' experiences and school practices, increase inequity and to act as a 'drag anchor' on innovation'. (It's Our Future, 2023)

Currently perceived as a negative force, the Review set out to identify how that power could be refocused to help create a more purposeful, equitable education system.

The recommendations in 'It's Our Future' tackle existing problems in our current qualification system.

- Qualifications and Assessment are seen to be separate from the aspirations for the curriculum
- Qualifications and Assessment are perceived to be for some rather than all and there is a perceived hierarchy of qualifications – academic vs vocational
- Knowledge is the focus, although there are recognized problems with progression, and Key Competences are invisible
- There is considerable pressure on learning and teaching- the 'two-term-dash'
- Examination rehearsal dominates learner experiences- focus on passing exams rather than deep learning; experiences that de-motivate learners
- Significant number of learners report excessive stress

- Where schools provide qualifications to meet all learners' needs, they feel penalized as data systems do not reflect the broad range of qualifications offered

IRQA recognized that change requires a clear vision of what a better future would look like. Vision gives purpose. The vision should guide development and act as a touchstone to monitor progress over time.

'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.'(p58)

The three inter-related parts of the SDA (Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and Personal Pathway) seek to serve that vision. They

- formalise what happens currently in many schools who are successful in engaging learners.
- provide more of what learners need to succeed beyond school, in college, university and employment.
- build from our current qualifications in Programmes of Learning (integrating academic and vocational)
- demonstrate crucial meta-skills (Key Competences) by using knowledge and skills in real-life contexts in Project Learning
- personalise learning through the Personal Pathway, helping students understand and connect their learning to future life choices, capturing their contributions, interests, talents, and values, helping them to make better informed decisions about employment, further education, or other life paths.

The SDA provides more comprehensive information about learners' experiences and achievements, enhancing motivation and purpose. It improves more professional experiences for teachers, making the profession more attractive. It offers a better evidence base for colleges, employers, and universities to make informed enrolment and recruitment decisions.

The SDA aims to tackle inequities in education, ensuring all learners have access to broader learning experiences, aligning with the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).

The recommendations from the Review can be summarised on one page (see Appendix 1). Since publication, the support for proposals across IRQA communities has remained very strong. However, in some areas of the wider population, misconceptions have emerged (see Appendix 2).

The Response from the Cabinet Secretary and Progress to date

Given the current financial climate, the Cabinet Secretary has identified a range of areas where progress will be prioritised. Progress will be made cautiously. A further statement is expected later in the year where reform of qualifications and assessment will be set within the broader reform agenda.

There is much to be welcomed in the Cabinet Secretary's statement to Parliament and already progress is being made.

- An integrated strategy for reform

'I shall set out a fresh national approach to educational improvement later this year' (p3)

- A clear operational plan

'The new plan will set out short-, medium- and longer-term priorities for Scottish Education' (p3)

- A strategy to address curriculum and assessment alignment and progression

'Curriculum should drive qualifications, not the other way around.... That's why the qualifications content will also be updated to ensure strong alignment between the Broad General Education and the Senior Phase.'(p6)

- Developments underway in Programmes of Learning

- A wider range of assessment approaches

'The balance of assessment methods in the Senior Phase should change to have less reliance on high stakes final exams.' (p7)

- The decision to retain external assessment in N5 means that an alternative strategy will be necessary to tackle the problem of the 'two-term dash'.

- Developments in Project Learning

A national working group established, chaired by a School Leader, to consider design and management.

'With regards to Inter-disciplinary Learning, or IDL as it is known, I recognise the desire, including from young people themselves, for IDL opportunities to be more consistently available.' (p9)

- Developments in Personal Pathway

Exploring how best to move forward with this.

'The Scottish Government supports the principle that young people should receive recognition for their wider learning'(p10). We will therefore explore

how best to recognise such achievement with a range of stakeholders including young people (p10). In doing so, we will need to work through significant concerns which have been raised - mainly that such a step would further entrench and exacerbate social inequity. (p11)

Equity was an issue much debated in IRQA. One of the research groups advising within the Independent Review Group had a specific focus on Equity. The IRQA report recognised that these inequities exist in our current system and recommended that the Personal Pathway should not focus on the number or location of experiences but on learning from experiences. Key experiences should be entitlements.

- A strategy to develop a digital profile

'I agree that the development of a national digital profile would benefit young people by helping them consolidate their learning.' *'A profile within the My World of Work platform, managed by Skills Development Scotland, has been established and will now be further improved in conjunction with both teachers and young people. (p11)*

- Conversations about a Leaving Certificate/SDA

'Whilst supportive of the development of a leaving certificate as a shared longer-term goal for Scottish education, more work is needed to determine its exact content and how it would operate. We will work with schools to consider how programmes of learning, inter-disciplinary learning and wider achievement could be combined as a more holistic illustration of a pupil's achievements.' (p12)

- Support for Teachers

'We cannot reform our education system without giving teachers more time.' (p13)

'We have launched a 'CivTech Challenge' which invites bids designed to reduce teacher workload, via the use of AI.' (p13) *'Teachers must be empowered to lead the improvements we all want to see.'* (p13)

National Organisations are taking forward key aspects of the work. For example,

Education Scotland

- Using a model similar to that used by the IRQA is reviewing the Curriculum to improve coherence and progression
- Developing Project Learning – collaborative groups
- Exploring timetabling implications -group
- Exploring digital landscape

SQA

- Rationalising qualifications
- Identifying how best to shift the balance of internal/external assessment in NQs
- Exploring digital landscape

Possible Issues to Explore with Committee

The Challenges of Cultural Change

Despite the strategic signals and the progress already underway, from press headlines responding to the Cabinet Secretary's statement, it would have been easy to believe that the only decision the Cabinet Secretary had made was to keep an external examination as part of the N5 qualification. *'Plan to Scrap Exams for 15-year-olds rejected by SNP Government'* The Daily Telegraph or *'S4 exams to stay as Scottish Government rejects reform call'* The Herald.

This focus is evidence of the deeply embedded cultural nature of reform in this area of education. This was an issue raised in Gordon Stobart's review. UK influenced qualification systems 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' and Highers as 'the gold standard'.

Changing culture is notoriously challenging and will require a carefully designed long-term plan that recognises the ways in which information is most effectively shared in contemporary society.

Some of this will take place in education, for example, making the arguments for change in wider public arenas in schools and colleges; introducing changes to parents/carers as children begin early years education/school. However, the communication strategy must find ways to permeate wider society. The range of groups involved in IRQA will all have a role to play, one member of the panel today will explore the role of Universities. How might this best be managed? How might key ideas be shared through democratic processes?

Possible next steps

- Work with the communities already established in the IRG to build reform from the ground up - within the framework of the national vision.
- Design a communication strategy with partners included in IRG. In education, include early years centres and primary schools to build expectations amongst parents and pupils.
- Use existing networks and communication vehicles to promote key messages, challenge misconceptions and extend the range of schools and colleges involved in each constituency.

The Importance of Leadership

Leadership matters at all levels of the system. The vision for the future of qualifications and assessment should inform every action. In earlier paragraphs of this paper, examples of the ways in which national agencies are supporting reform have been identified. How best might we draw on those in leadership positions to support the development of ideas into practice? Two members of the panel today are leaders in schools and local authorities who would be happy to explore how school leaders and local authorities could support next steps in the reform of qualifications and assessment.

In addition, what areas of overlap exist in the education system and how might roles and responsibilities be clarified to create time for reform?

Possible next steps

- Be clear about the commitment to the Vision.
- Within agreed vision, offer more scope for initiative at a local level. Consistency does not mean uniformity.
- Bring together incubator schools- volunteers who explore and develop examples of diverse pathways and develop examples of what ideas could look like in practice.
- Encourage trials of the SDA in volunteer local authorities
- Build an inclusive process. Have a sign-up mailing list where people who want to be involved can contribute, develop and share emerging practices.
- Build working groups to co-ordinate the work of incubator schools and volunteer local authorities.

Evidence in Scotland

Evidence gathering is commonly cited as a cause of overwork and stress. It is also argued that the kinds of evidence gathered have a negative effect on the system, for example, the creation of league tables of qualifications by some newspapers. How might purposeful, dependable evidence be gathered in ways that would, e.g., provide policy makers with sound evidence on which to base decisions without having negative washback in schools and classrooms.

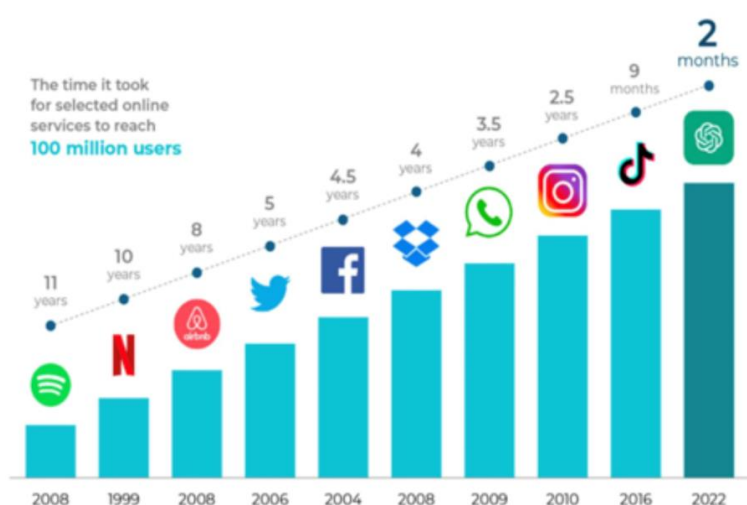
Possible next steps

- We need to address the question of how we build better data literacy in education in Scotland and make the case why it matters.
- Radically review the purposes for data collection, the time taken, the uses to which it is put and its impact (intentional and unintentional). Reform the system.

The Time Conundrum

The IRQA looked to the future. The ever-increasing pace of change in society had led countries internationally to reflect on whether their curricula and assessment and examinations systems were providing their learners with the knowledge, skills, competences and dispositions necessary for their individual futures as citizens and collectively for their societies to thrive.

During the time of the Review, the challenges arising from radical changes in society were amplified by the emergence of ChatGPT, a large language model version of AI. The speed of change is exemplified in the diagram below.



Since the publication of the report, 'It's Our Future' (IRQA, 2023), the speed of change has continued to accelerate. The following examples offer insights into how quickly education is changing. [OpenAI](#)'s most recent model can reason across audio, vision, and text in real time.

The extract from the Kahn Academy (<https://www.facebook.com/khanacademy/videos/448979721016147/>) offers an insight into the assessment feedback built into the curricular experiences of learners that is available now.

International organisations are already partnering with schools to develop innovative approaches to education that transcend traditional subject boundaries and support pupils to use subject knowledge to develop the competences necessary for future success. These schools already include schools in Scotland, e.g., Kelvinside Academy. (<https://nuvux.nuvustudio.com/schools/kelvinside-academy>)

Increasing number of private sector organisations are positioning themselves in the expectation of significant change in Education as a social enterprise. An example of this can be found in 2 Hour Learning (<https://2hourlearning.com/>). This organization seeks to respond to the young people for whom school does not work.

'When MacKenzie Price's daughters told her they absolutely hated school, she realized that she had to channel her lifelong passion for education to bring change to classrooms.

*And that is how **2 Hour Learning** was created: A transformative educational model which empowers students to crush core academics in just two hours a day, freeing up four hours in the afternoon for exploring interests while mastering life skills.'*

These examples are intended to illustrate the current dilemma. As a society, we cannot change more quickly than our system can cope with but there are also dangers in moving too slowly. Teachers and Schools, Lecturers and Colleges will need support but how might that support be designed and developed creatively.

Possible next steps

How might time be created to support development in schools and colleges in times of financial constraint. Previous models that were successful in Scotland might be built upon.

- For example, the small-scale grants available to schools through the Assessment is for Learning Programme allowed volunteer schools within an overall strategy to develop aspects of the reform that were then available for other schools.
- And/or how might the strengths of a range of groups across Scotland be brought together to ask what how their work might be targeted to support developments, e.g., Awards Networks, Youth Education, ASL groups, specific interest groups.

What should we stop doing?

- One of the most significant international challenges in reform is Identifying what to stop doing. Serious attention needs to be paid to this, particularly in a climate of financial constraints.
- Others are also facing this challenge, and it may be helpful to explore this issue with schools and colleges and beyond, for example, through *Making Room for Impact: A De-implementation Guide for Educators* (Hamilton, Hattie, William, 2023).

Appendix 1: Summary of IRQA Recommendations

A. Change qualifications to better fit the 21st c- a Scottish Diploma of Achievement

Qualifications as entitlements for every learner demonstrating achievements in-

- Programmes of Learning Subjects in schools/Programmes in colleges- crucial building blocks of knowledge- parity of esteem
- Project Learning – using knowledge in action to inspire young people and to develop skills needed in life and by employers, universities and colleges
- Personal Pathway - Personalisation – recognise more of what matters for a citizen to be educated – social, cultural, economic- enabling better post school decisions

B. Plan carefully for change

- Be clear and consistent about what you want to achieve (Vision and Principles)
- Keep learners at the heart of every decision and ensure that the practices of all parts the system who will influence the new qualifications' success reflect the V&P.
- Act decisively on AI
- Don't set artificial timelines- make progress in line with the availability of resources
- Continue to work with all those who are needed to have new qualifications of worth

C. Build a learning culture to develop the SDA – open, respectful, willing to learn

- Ensure national and local policy makers and national agencies lead cultural change by example
- Develop a clear, coherent story of the wider reform
- Involve people across IRG communities in decisions about how new qualifications become practice - build on their expertise to ensure changes work well in practice
- Tackle existing issues in CfE that have an impact on qualifications and assessment
 - the place of knowledge in the curriculum and the relationship between knowledge and skills

ECYP/S6/24/27/1

- curriculum and skills progression linked to a national strategy for standards
 - revise approach to data collection
- Work with other countries seeking to ensure their students are qualified for 21c life
- Build a long-term innovative communication strategy with different communities

Appendix 2 Misconceptions emerging since publication.

Since publication, the support for proposals across IRG communities has remained very strong. However, in some areas of the wider population some misconceptions have emerged.

Consensus does not mean unanimous support.

Complete consensus is impossible. 'It's Our Future' presented a future for qualifications and assessment that had broad agreement across all the communities involved in IRG- reflected in the quotations at the start of the report, '*It's Our Future*'.

The Findings from the Independent Review, 'It's Our Future' are a quick fix.

The recommendations in 'It's Our Future' are not a quick fix. They provide an evidence based, collaboratively developed vision and pathways to practice for the longer-term future of qualifications in Scotland.

The Report is one of many Reviews that provide a fragmented picture for the future of Scottish Education

'It's Our Future' is not stand alone. It is part of a road map for the future of Scottish Education. The recommendations in 'It's Our Future' address issues identified consistently across reviews.

- Qualifications that relate more closely to the CfE curriculum, the refreshed narrative, and recognise a broader range of achievements, knowledge, skills and competences, more consistent with learners' and society's future needs.
- Proposes more collaborative ways of working in education and with wider society.

The proposals are consistent with international thinking on the future of assessment and qualifications, including future complex skills.

The Report does not contain sufficient detail about practice.

It's Our Future is neither a guidebook for a qualification authority nor a professional learning resource for teachers. It offers Strategic Direction on the future of qualifications and assessment, a shared vision as the basis for the development of practice led by the profession; practitioners, researchers and policy makers working together to make change work in practice in different contexts.

Teachers' views were not part of the Review.

Teachers' views were included in all three phases of the Independent Review but not all teachers as the Review had intended. There were four Community Collaborative Groups focused on the Profession in schools and colleges: one included all the main teacher professional organisations (contact collectively with more than 90% of the teaching profession); a second of classroom teachers; a third school leaders; and a fourth further education staff. However, the Review design had included a strategy to

include all teachers. Materials was developed and sent to every school in the country. In addition, requests were made for additional time for teachers specifically to take part in discussions. It was not possible to make time available. The follow up consultation initiated by the Cabinet Secretary sought to address that issue. The Review found that teachers who had opportunities to discuss ideas were far more positively disposed to the proposals than those who looked at documentation cold.

Nothing can happen because there is not enough money to support change.

The timeline for reform must recognise current financial constraints. The report was clear that there should be a commitment to an agreed vision with short-, medium- and long-term goals. Given the level of goodwill for change that has built up across communities, there are risks to inaction. However, the timeline for change must be linked to the level of resource available and the speed of reform should respond to changing financial circumstances.

There also must be a clear focus on what teachers should stop doing. The SDA will require better partnerships across the education system between schools and colleges, youth work, the awards network, careers service and other bodies who can contribute to every learner's success. Partners are ready and willing to play their part.