Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment: Supplementary Analysis

1.   Supplementary Analysis of Phase Three responses

This paper is a supplementary report that should be read alongside the analysis of Phase Three responses undertaken by Progressive Partnership.

Progressive Partnership were commissioned to undertake an external analysis of responses up to the original response deadline. This included 365 responses to the survey and detailed submissions from 21 CCGs received up to and including 14 April.

It was agreed that the deadline would be extended by three weeks to allow a greater number of schools to provide their responses. In order to ensure that responses after the original deadline were included in the overall analysis, The Scottish Government officials analysed these responses using the approach and analytical framework used by Progressive Partnership in their main analysis. This comprised 90 responses to the online survey and 30 responses received by email.

This report supplements the analysis provided in the main report, summarising and giving voice to the school and college respondents who responded between 15 and 31 April.

2.   The proposed model

Q1: Do the three areas described offer learners the potential to gather and reflect a broader range of achievements important for their future progress? Is there anything you would add or delete?

The responses included in the main analysis were positive about the proposed model, although this was qualified by some respondents who suggested that further work was required to demonstrate that the proposals could be implemented successfully.

Analysis of this tranche of responses reflected the findings above, with respondents positive about the intention, but with comments on the challenges of implementation.

"This sounds like a great idea in principle for pupils to gain a wider range of skills and achievements, however I wonder how this will be executed/who will be responsible for this/how records or profiles will be maintained accurately by pupils. You would need allocated staff members to oversee this."

> "In theory this offer does seem to provide the potential to gather a broader range of achievements. There was concern amongst the group that this would be change for the sake of change unless there was a genuine and authentic change in all aspects of Scottish education. They questioned if there will be genuine funding available for the development of personal pathways, especially in areas where staffing is an issue? How can we ensure that there will be parity of resources and delivery between schools, especially in areas of high deprivation?"

2.1 Pupil views

Two responses from schools (in this tranche) indicated that they sought views from pupils on the proposals, with children and young people generally in favour of the emphasis on a broader range of achievements being evidenced as part of the Senior Phase.

> "[Students] agree with this as it would allow you to work out your strengths and areas of development so you can see what you want to do in the future. It's a good idea for those who may struggle with exams but excel in personal pathways or projects. We think it would allow students to be recognised for their achievements both in and outside of school."

> "Pupils in general felt that the three areas were positive and would provide a good variety of learning experience. Some pupils however, felt that gathering evidence on a broader range of achievements would potentially benefit some pupils more than others. This was based on the fact that some pupils may not have a specific wider interest. Pupils were keen to develop skills within different contexts but wanted to ensure that there was no further stress applied to the system with respect to gathering evidence on other areas outwith school subjects."

2.2 Relative weighting of elements

As in the main analysis, several respondents commented on the relative weighting across the three elements of the model. This included views on whether the elements should have equal weighting, and whether there should be a shift from from "academic" learning to a wider concept of skills and learning.

> "There requires to be emphasis on all of the three areas, so that the focus, as is, on 'academic' learning and exam results may be shifted to a more holistic approach that recognises and values individual skills and talents, the range of available achievements as being of equal value, application and adaptability and interests, and the benefits of these individual capabilities in transitioning from school into adult life i.e. employment/further education.'

> "Not removed necessarily as I do like the idea but I don't believe all 3 areas should be given equal weighting. The interdisciplinary project sounds extremely daunting, and I would hope that the ideas/different level of courses/lessons would be distributed nationally for everyone to use as each school coming up with different projects sounds unmanageable."

2.3 Teacher workload and resource

Respondents also talked about the need for robust evidence gathering and the associated workload for teachers and schools. Common themes included models of verification and ensuring standardisation across the system.

> "The method of gathering evidence would be crucial to the success of the proposals as a whole. For young people to be able to leave a course after one year whilst others continue for two would mean that achievements would need to be gathered through coursework, and they must be robust at a given level."
>
> "Yes they offer learners the potential to gather and reflect. However has it been considered the workload involved in maintaining records, the verification of resources and teacher workload administering these areas?"

3.   Subject studies

Q2: What are your views on the proposals for recognising achievements in subjects/curricular areas?

As indicated in the main analysis, respondents that agreed with the proposals were often most positive about reducing the frequency of exams that learners sit during the Senior Phase. They also agreed with the underlying assumption of the proposals that continual assessment is better for students/teachers in terms of stress (removing the 'two-term dash' prevalent in S4-S6) and that it leads to a better learning environment.

Respondents in this tranche indicated the benefits of the proposal included a move to continual and more varied assessment, less reliance on high stakes exams, and potentially encouraging pupils to stay in education for longer. However, a number of respondents who were positive about the proposal also pointed out the implications for teacher workload .

"A move to reduce emphasis on 'rote' learning and the success (or not) of a year/two year long course being dependent on one exam paper is positive. The proposed move to evidence collection over time and learning being comprised of more varied assessment collection removes the current dependence on achieving a certain grade at a certain time in a certain manner, therefore reducing stress for pupils and establishments. It will also hopefully reduce the time spent on exam preparation/technique/prelims etc., and allow more time to be spent on study which may then be evidenced in other ways."

"We broadly agree with these proposals although these have precipitated a number of questions regarding how assessment information will be gathered and the weighting this will be given in the Scottish Diploma of Achievement. In general, we support the idea of reducing the number of exams young people take and the idea of predominantly taking final qualifications at the end of S5 or S6. Teachers have asked many questions regarding workload and capacity for increased internal or coursework assessment.

3.1   Pupil views

Pupil feedback in school responses indicated that they were positive about the broad focus on achievements, but that its success would depend on its implementation.

"We think everyone's achievements should be recognised and the skills they learn from the subjects they study as well. Allows students to continue with the subjects they enjoy."

"The implementation of the model would require careful consideration to ensure that the pupils were able to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to prepare them for progression into a positive destination."

3.2   Meeting the needs of pupils in different settings

Some respondents indicated the importance of ensuring that the proposals meet the needs of pupils in different settings, including those with complex additional support needs.

"Again, please do not forget those with additional support needs (ASN); too often, guidance caters for those that are able and schools supporting complex learners are left to find their own way."

This was also the case for Gaelic Medium Education (GME), where respondents wanted to ensure parity with English Medium Education (EME).

"There is scope for the subject/curricular area to ensure GME pupils have recognition that they have been educated through the medium of Gaelic. Currently many young people exit the Scottish Education system without any recognition of their learning journey in GME. To ensure parity with EME those who experience GME should be able to access a wide range of subjects in the medium of Gaelic."

3.3   What queries/concerns did schools/colleges have about the proposals?

Respondents in this analysis raised a number of queries and concerns about the proposals, which broadly mirrored that of respondents in the main analysis. Some respondents questioned the use of an exam as an "exit ticket", with concerns noted around performance and what happens if the course is not completed.

"The idea of using an exam as an exit ticket is not effective. In prelim assessments pupils often perform worse as it is their first experience of the exam, making their first experience their final would likely lower results. Also pupils can express a wish in S4 to go on to Higher level but without rigorous assessment it is unclear to teachers whether that is possible for that child."

The main analysis found that a significant minority of schools and colleges favoured the approach of annual external examinations. For some respondents, it was important to retain the parts of the current model in the senior phase that they believe "worked", including external assessment. This was particularly the case for subject teachers who gave examples of how courses in their subject area achieved a balanced of external and continuous assessment.

"Experiences in subject areas has to remain the key focus here. There may be flaws in some of the systems employed, but overwhelmingly we do have programmes of study in schools in the Senior Phase that allow pupils to thrive and achievements to be recognised appropriately. A situation like Covid should not lead to a wide spread thought process that the examination system is deeply flawed. It is not. It generally works well and large parts of the current curricular model in the senior phase should be retained including the methods of assessment which should largely be determined by robust, external assessment be that a final exam or an item such as a project."

4. Learning in context (inter-disciplinary learning)

> **Q3: What are your views on the proposals for recognising achievements in knowledge and skills in action?**

As in the main analysis, a number of respondents were very positive about this element of the model, with benefits for learners including development of a wider range of skills including social skills, working on real life problems, and positive effects on wellbeing.

> "I think that it is a very good thing, allowing students to develop not just through their school work but through their beliefs, working together and working on real-life problems. It will prepare students for when they enter the world of work and life outside of school. It will also help with students' mental health and social skills too."
>
> "This would be beneficial for all learners. Development of skills is crucial for all and a single skills framework would be beneficial to support professional understanding."
>
> "This is incredibly helpful for those learners that find learning easier in context of using practical skills that they have developed and put into practice."

Some school respondents outlined pupil feedback on the proposal in their responses. The feedback indicated enthusiasm for the proposal, although there was recognition that it may not suit all learners. To address this, it was felt that adequate time in school and specialist/trained members of staff were essential.

> "Pupils felt that, at times, learning in subjects was driven by the need to pass exams/assessments as opposed to developing appropriate skills…The pupils would like broader learning experiences that allow the development of skills in more 'real-life' situations/scenarios. Engaging in project based, inter-disciplinary work would be a positive context for this to occur however, would have to be meaningful in relation to pupils' future pathways. Some pupils felt that quality work experience should be embedded within any new curriculum model."
>
> "Might not suit everyone so it should be structured carefully… Important to give them time in school to work on the project and have a member of staff that has been trained or specialises in these projects to guide you."

4.1 Professional development
Reflecting the findings in the main analysis, respondents were often in favour of the proposal, but had questions/concerns about its implementation. These respondents felt that professional learning and engagement, alongside changes in staffing and timetable, were essential to make the proposal possible.

> "In principle, we support this proposal but have many questions around the practicalities and detail of implementation. A great deal of professional learning and

engagement is essential before such a shift can happen, both with current practitioners and new entrants into teaching. Responses from our stakeholders suggest enthusiasm for interdisciplinary learning but also anxiety about having the skills, resources and time to do this well."

"Looks very good on paper but would be very hard to execute in practise. We have very limited experience in IDL. This type of teaching is vastly different to what is currently being offered - there would need to be significant training required.
A concern raised many times during our meeting was the planning time required/ the prep time required/ the timetabling of required/the physical resources required/the space required. Fair to assume that this would require a drastic impact on the school day."

4.2   Relative weight of components

Some respondents indicated concerns about the relative focus that would be placed on IDL compared to the other two areas in the proposal, and the potential knock-on impacts this could have on issues such as subject choice and consistency of practice.

"How do we maintain an equal focus on this section when competing against the subject/curricular areas aspect - it is going to be very difficult to change mindsets in relation to this. The concern would be the quality here may be compromised and inconsistent across the board."

"If mandatory, and a separate subject column, this aspect would reduce subject choice, therefore narrow the desired range of studies… A mandatory IDL project in S5 or S6 could prevent students meeting prerequisite qualifications for competitive courses, particularly if universities choose not to support or recognise this type of qualification."

"This would be welcome but there are questions about where this would fit in the curriculum whilst still allowing young people the opportunity to excel in subject areas."

4.3   Equity

Finally, there was a concern among some of those who were in favour of the proposal of how to achieve equity and ensure that all learners have the opportunities to benefit. They raised concerns about how those in socio-economic disadvantaged areas, and/or have fewer opportunities in their geographic location, will be best supported to complete this element.

"It sounds very exciting. However, there must be a determination to achieve equity in terms of pupils' experiences and opportunities in undertaking such a qualification."

"This is an excellent idea - but we would need to think very carefully about how we ensure that young people in financially, socially, culturally and geographically less favoured areas are not disadvantaged.

5.   Personal pathway

Q4: What are your views on the proposals designed to recognise achievements in respect of personal learning?

As in the main analysis, respondents welcomed the personal pathway proposals for a range of reasons. These included enhancing awareness of wider society, supporting less academic pupils to learn and evidence their capabilities, and to prepare young people for the outside world.

"Crucial to the development of our young people as citizens, this will enhance their awareness of wider society and hopefully lead to a more balanced outlook on life and the world."

"I think that it's great and helps students to grow and express themselves. The social part is effective in making young people feel part of something big and important, the cultural part helps students to express themselves creatively and the economic part allows them to experience life in the work world, prepare themselves for the outside world and give them an idea of what they might want to do when they leave school."

"In general, pupils felt that this was a positive proposal and they would like to have their talents recognised. One pupil stated that "it would benefit those who give up their free time to make a difference in the school and would make those who do other things feel recognised". Pupils felt that it would be positive for prospective employers to be able to see their additional talents and achievements outwith a purely educational context."

Respondents focusing on GME were positive about the potential for the Personal Pathway to be of benefit for GME learners, particularly given the importance of community involvement in offering opportunities for developing language skills.

"The Personal Pathway will be of significant importance to GME as extra-curricular/out of school activities such as An Deasbad Nàiseanta, Film-G, The Royal National Mod etc, along with community involvement, play a critical role for opportunities to use and develop Gaelic skills. It is right that achievement in these kind of activities should be recognised. Equitable access to extra-curricular Gaelic medium activities should be the aim, to ensure the same opportunities for EME pupils exist in GME settings."

5.1   Equity

The main analysis showed that many respondents raised concerns about unequal access to opportunities, with factors including limited family support, low household income, additional support needs, geographic location, and digital exclusion. Analysis of the later responses found similar concerns.

"We have many concerns around equity in this area. Whilst recognising that learning takes place away from the classroom and the school we know that some young people have advantages over others in this area - support of parents for example, access to money to support their interests etc. How would this be moderated and verified if it were to be part of an overall Diploma?"

"Extra-curricular activities are to be encouraged and should be rewarding and offer growth for students, but I would be concerned that pupils in care, young carers, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, homes where domestic violence, abuse or addictions may be present, will not have the same opportunities to indulge in such activities and therefore never achieve this aspect of the award."

Pupils in in one of school responses indicated similar concerns around equity of opportunity.

"Some concerns were flagged however, in relation to the equity of such a system as the opportunity to engage in wider experiences may be more limited for some pupils depending on their background. It was felt that the system would have to be fair with appropriate systems in place to ensure that all pupils had equal opportunities to have achievements recognised."

5.2   Issues raised by schools

A range of potential issues with the proposal were raised by schools, particularly in relation to the role of teachers in assessing and recording evidence. The majority of these issues were raised by those broadly in favour of the proposals, but who had concerns about implementation based on their previous experience.

*"Personalisation works well for a lot of pupils to increase engagement. It does make consistent and fair marking much more challenging for teachers especially if a pupil has knowledge or interest in an area the teacher is not equipped to investigate. We currently face this at times when doing the current assignments. If a pupils picks a topic that is unusual then supporting them with a lack of knowledge myself is hard."

"I see great value in this, but worry about the mechanisms for recording of evidence. I consider my own experiences leading a number of overseas World Challenge expeditions. For each and every student, the outcome has been exceptionally beneficial. Their achievements should be formally recognised and celebrated. However, never is there an element of "I better get collecting evidence here". How would that change moving forward?"

Some school responses indicated that the proposal could not be led by teachers within existing staffing, and would require additional resource, such as youth work staff.

"I do not wish to be overly negative here – it would certainly be a good thing to encourage young people to engage in community activities and to encourage schools to put more emphasis on their importance. However – I think if this were to be included as credit towards a qualification then there would need to be a significant resource allocation of youth work staff given to each school to operate it – it could not be operated by teacher volunteers within existing staffing."

6. Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA)

> **Q5: What are your views on the idea of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement for all learners in Scotland?**

As in the main analysis, many of the respondents welcomed the SDA. Reasons for this included achieving better parity of esteem,, incorporating real life contexts for learning, and collating a wider understanding of young people than their achievements.

> "I think it is an excellent proposal and hope that it achieves better parity of esteem, not for awards, but for learners that learn and achieve in different styles and contexts. Our education system is built by those that achieved academically and is designed to benefit those who respond well to academic learning. We need that system for academic learning, but we need that to be part of a broader approach to how we deliver education and value achievement and attainment."
>
> "This is definitely a move in the right direction that incorporates skills and real life contexts for learning. It addresses issues raised in the OECD report and better prepares young people for life after school."
>
> "Pupils feel like it would be a good idea to share information on their wider school experience, talents and skills. This would be positive for future employers to gain an understanding of the young people as a whole rather than simply a record of their academic achievements."

6.1 Perceptions of employers and Further / Higher Education

In the main analysis, many were concerned about whether potential employers and universities would understand the new system and the SDA; and what weight they would place on learners' achievements across the three elements. This finding was reflected in this tranche of responses, with respondents suggesting that the mindset of HE/FE institutions and employers would need to change.

> "Having one single diploma will enable learners to capture all their skills and achievements in one place and be formally recognised. Again, the group stated that universities will have to take a more objective stance when assessing the suitability of learners for individual courses. Again, the mindset of further and higher establishments will have to change."
>
> "I think… that we need to be clear on what the purpose of the three parts is. For most young people, their qualifications are a gateway to further and higher education. Would these institutions take into consideration additional achievements when making offers for entry, or would they simply look at the first, subject based part of this qualification?... for employers, I think there is a risk that the Diploma is overly complicated."

6.2 Equity

As with other aspects of the proposals, respondents had concerns about equality of access to opportunities, and that this could have the effect of entrenching or widening existing inequalities.

> "…we do have concerns that all young people may not have the same access to opportunities and options so we need to be clear that this will not further compound the poverty related attainment gap."
>
> "Again, pupils felt that this was positive but questioned the fairness of it without specific plans in place to ensure equity for all."

6.3 Training and workload

Respondents with concerns about the proposal raised the requirement for regular training and robust resources, alongside consideration and mitigation of the workload that this could entail for teachers.

> "For me the idea in its current form is too open-ended and ill-defined. Whilst it could potentially provide excellent opportunities to recognise the wider achievements of our young people there would need to be a very robust suite of resources in which to chart these, accompanied by regular training of staff to ensure that delivery of the award is standardised. I am concerned about the hidden workload of this type of project and the challenges pupils and teachers would face to keep track of an entire cohort each year."

Q:5a: If you support this idea, what actions should be taken to make this approach work in practice? What alternative would you propose that would be consistent with the vision and principles identified in Phase One of the Review?

Respondents suggested a range of actions that could be taken to make the approach work in practice. For these responses, they generally divided into practical suggestions, and the change in culture that is required.

6.4 Practical suggestions

School respondents suggested a number of actions around planning, training, guidance, and consultation. It was felt that consistency was required across schools to make the proposals work; and that clarity of what was being proposed, what workload this would entail, and how this would be supported, would all be required.

> "Planning and timescales need to be clear, well thought out and realistic.
> Skills need to be quantifiable and measurable. This also needs to be the focus and it must be given time to be implemented and evaluated..."

> "Significant training required by staff to deliver this. There needs to a consistent approach in all schools in Scotland. Within the BGE the benchmarks are open to interpretation by some schools to what constitutes a level 3 or level 4. There can be no such ambiguity in the Senior phase this impacts on learners employment prospects, college and university places."
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> "Far more guidance, clarity and consultation on draft proposals. Working groups of subject specialists and school management with experience of success in delivery need to be involved in consultation, planning and delivery."
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> "Our staff had many questions about the detail of implementation, the time for staff engagement and learning and how the measures of success will need to change in the light of this."

A common theme in these responses was a suggestion for the new model to be rolled out in stages, in order to provide time and space to address any problems, and potentially to test approaches.

> "For this proposal to be a success, the implementation should be considered and thoroughly tested before being rolled out to the nation. Trial periods within: single schools; then neighbourhoods; then regions, should be run to ensure rigour of implementation, quality of delivery and reduction of additional workload on teachers."
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> "A move to 2 years of assessment instead of 3 years could be introduced in advance of the introduction of new cross-curricular experience. This would give schools and teachers time to explore solutions to the potential problems outlined above in rearranging the curriculum."

7. Change in culture

Compared to the main analysis, respondents in this tranche appeared to be more likely to talk about the changes in culture that are required to effect change. This included views on what this new culture would look like.

> "Move away from the comparison of educational establishments and the value of people being through solely exam results. Move towards the success of education in being ensuring all pupils progress in all areas to the best of their ability and potential."
>
> "Emphasis on the importance of development in all three aspects with all stakeholders, with no one area taking precedence over another."
>
> "Stop using the term "wider" achievement if you are genuinely going to see the learning journey from the perspective of the learner, not solely the institutes that deliver our education system."

School respondents offered examples of the changes in culture that would be required for teachers, which included teachers to be trusted in the system and to be active participants in developing the proposals.

> "Genuine trust for teachers and establishments in making judgements / providing evidence, with soft-touch accountability / justification to ensure accuracy."
>
> "Teachers and young people also need to be active participants in making this work in practice and it cannot be thrust upon people. The means of the consultation thus far show a willingness for this to be the case."

Respondents recognised that in order for the proposals to work in practice, work would need to be undertaken to ensure that FE/HE institutions and employers understand and value the approach.

> "There will not just need to be work done to support this in schools but I think it is going to need considerable PR in wider society among employers - they need to understand the system in order to value it - if it is to fulfil its vision and become a "highly regarded qualification and assessment system".
>
> "Most definitely the mindset of further and higher educational establishments as they very much dictate what learners do in the Senior Phase."

8. Qualifications and assessment system

> **Q6: What changes to existing practice, if any, would you recommend to support the development of a new qualifications and assessment system?**

The main analysis of responses found that the significant changes being proposed would require an emphasis on professional learning. Respondents were also keen to stress the time that would be required for teachers to develop the skills/tools/resources they would need to meets the needs of the proposals. This was also the case for the group of respondents in this analysis, including time for development and training, as well as time to roll out the new system.

> "Significant time for development of any new materials, collegiate learning and understanding must be given as teachers are under significant pressure and cannot be pushed to breaking point by a new system being introduced without full consultation and training to ensure best practice across all schools. A significant amount of time to slowly roll this out piece by piece (perhaps over 10 years ?)."
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> "Time will need to be made to ensure that adequate training will need to take place for staff and funding to ensure quality resourcing. There will need to be understanding standards training. Appropriate phasing will need to take place."
>
> "There needs to be more time to develop new approaches and more recognition of the time that effective pedagogy and resources takes to develop."