

ENHANCING THE PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY OF NATIONAL 4: COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

Purpose

1. This plan outlines how we will enhance our evidence base on the perceived credibility issues associated with the National 4 qualification, and use this intelligence to undertake specific communications and engagement to improve the National 4's currency amongst learners, teachers, parents, employers and others. It has been developed in response to the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) discussion on National 4 in December 2017.

Structure

2. There are two broad components of the plan: developing the evidence base, and enhancing the credibility and currency of National 4's. At points the stages will run side-by-side, and will dovetail with plans around the promotion of the senior phase and the range of different pathways that young people take through this.
3. **This action plan will be discussed at the next CAB meeting on 8 March**, as a means of updating members on the actions arising from its first meeting.

Action Plan

Phase 1 – Developing the evidence base

4. The Scottish Government, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) have previously gathered evidence from parents, learners and education stakeholders, including the teaching unions on the current known challenges of National 4. Some of this evidence has included suggestions on how to enhance the credibility of the qualification and was used to inform the paper considered by CAB in December 2017.
5. The feedback from these exercises has been consistent in terms of the views being expressed. A short summary of the themes emerging from the discussions is described below, with further details provided in **Annex A**:
 - The presence of RPA or 'fallback' has been cited as leading National 4 to be perceived as a consolation award, and potentially driving entry patterns in a downward trend.
 - A current perception by some that external assessment is valued more than internal assessment.
 - The extent to which National 4 prepares learners for progression to National 5 and into vocational pathways. It is key to note that over the past three years the percentage of National 4 learners who have progressed to National 5 in the following year has varied from 23.2% to 23.1% to 22.6%. Approximately 75% are not using National 4 to progress onto National 5.
 - The impact of multi-level and multi-course teaching.
6. Overall, the evidence and discussion at the inaugural CAB meeting has shown that whilst there may be some dissatisfaction with the qualification, there is no consistent demand from the system for further change. There is, however, consensus on the need for stability within the system and appetite to address wider curriculum design and delivery issues.
7. However, whilst we have evidence from these stakeholders, there is a gap in evidence from learners, colleges, employers and local authorities, who can be accessed via a variety of existing forums/groups (see **Annex B**). This section outlines our plans for engaging with these stakeholders.

Phase 1 – Developing the evidence base (Timescales: February – June 2018)		
TIMESCALES	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
Early to Mid-February	Contacting stakeholders listed in Annex B directly via telephone to gauge what level of interaction they would be willing to have with us.	Scottish Government
Early to Mid-February	Develop a format and approach for stakeholder surveys and/or focus group sessions based on these initial discussions.	Scottish Government
End February to end May	Organisation and delivery of a survey and/or series of focus groups. In preparation for these, we will ensure stakeholders are fully briefed on the purpose of the sessions.	Scottish Government and relevant stakeholder forums
January to end of May	SQA will undertake a read across from the Benchmarks (literacy and numeracy), the SCQF level 4 descriptors and the Units and Added Value Units for English, Maths and Applications for Mathematics. This will include all the relevant material SQA has produced to support these qualifications, e.g. Judging Evidence Tables.	SQA
January to end of May	SQA are revisiting the guidance provided to National 4 qualification developers and the support/guidance they have provided to schools in terms of undertaking unit assessment, particularly in National 4.	SQA
Start June	Analysis of stakeholder feedback and SQA exercises, and refinement of communications and engagement plan.	Scottish Government, SQA and Education Scotland
June onwards	Individual discussions with CAB members to identify their role in communications piece to enhance the credibility of National 4.	Scottish Government and CAB members
6 June	Initial presentation of enhanced evidence base plus more detailed communications and engagement activity (i.e. stage 3) to CAB.	Scottish Government & Curriculum Unit

Phase 2 – Enhancing the credibility of National 4 within the wider Senior Phase offer

8. We will work with stakeholders to jointly design and deliver a communications exercise to promote the value of National 4 within the wider pathways available through the senior phase. This is likely to emphasise the value of internal assessment, given that the vast majority of vocational qualifications are internally assessed (drawing on the experiences of the HE and FE sectors); National 4 as a progression route from National 3; and raising awareness of National 4 as a dual purpose qualification - as a progression to the world of work and college, and progression route to National 5. This exercise will also include an announcement on the future of Recognising Positive Achievement; and will dovetail into the work currently being undertaken in BGE, senior phase and the 15-24 Learner Journey Review, as outlined in the respective CAB Papers for meeting 2.

Phase 2 – Enhancing the credibility of National 4 (Timescales: June onwards)		
TIMESCALES	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
June onwards	We propose a dedicated communications exercise to underline the purpose of the senior phase and the value of the different pathways that young people can take through this, with the inclusion of discrete objectives in relation to enhancing the credibility of National 4 through various stakeholders' communication channels (social media, print, online, leaflets, events etc). Further detail to be provided in due course and once evidence base enhanced.	Scottish Government, CAB members, others as required.

ANNEX A

NATIONAL 4: CURRENT EVIDENCE BASE

A variety of work already exists which provides evidence of opinions on the National 4 qualification. This includes:

- SQA's fieldwork visits to 40 centres (conducted between 2016 and 2017)
- NPFS survey of 70 parents on the value of National 4 which was undertaken as part of the ANQ Groups previous considerations of the qualification (conducted between Nov 2016 and Jan 2017)
- SG-led evidence gathered from ANQ group members (including NPFS, EIS, SLS, ADES, GTCS, academics and others) in 2016.

The feedback from these exercises has been consistent in terms of the views being expressed. A short summary of the themes emerging from the discussions is attached below.

SQA field work

- Centres continue to use National 4 Added Value unit in very different ways and at different times for candidates.
- A clear majority of teachers and senior managers expressed the opinion that National 4 learners needed an examination at the end of the course. Teachers commented about the need for an exam to motivate learners.
- The majority of S4 learners took a different view, and this view was echoed by many learners in S5 and S6. Learners judged that they were working hard or very hard and were motivated.
- Both staff and learners felt that National 4 needed differentiation beyond a straightforward pass/fail.
- Some form of grading for National 4 was discussed in various centres and with many of the focus groups. It seemed incongruous to a number of staff that there was no differentiation between learners who put in considerable effort and achieved well and those who made minimum effort.
- It is evident that there is no consensus on the format of National 4 course assessment by stakeholders in the various focus groups included in the fieldwork visits and that further consideration of the purpose and philosophy of National 4 is required. The views on the approach to assessment varied across the country, within local authorities and also within individual centres.

National Parent Forum Scotland survey

There was a general consensus that the National 4 qualification was perceived as not being valued by employers due to no external assessment. The survey also highlighted concerns that National 4 did not adequately prepare learners for progression to National 5. It was highlighted that National 4 is equivalent to Standard Grade General, but unlike SG General, it does not specify a grade and there was a feeling that this is a negative aspect of National 4.

ANNEX B

STAKEHOLDER GROUPINGS

Learners

Young Scot's Communic18

Employers

Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI)
Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)

Colleges

College Development Networks
Colleges Scotland