

The Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment: The Review and its Key Recommendations

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1. What was the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment?

An Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment was announced by The Scottish Government in October 2021. The Review was initiated in response to:

- recommendations in the OECD's Independent Review of Scotland's school curriculum (2021)
- the COVID-19 pandemic and a renewed debate around assessment following the cancellation of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams in 2020 and 2021
- Professor Gordon Stobart's OECD paper setting out possible options for Scotland's future approach to assessment and qualifications (2021)
- Professor Ken Muir's report (2022) – Putting Learners at the Centre

Professor Louise Hayward was appointed to lead the Review and began work in Spring 2022.

2. Why does this Review matter?

“Qualifications and assessment are important to learners, to educational establishments and to society. They provide information to learners, and as appropriate parents/carers, on progress and achievements. Colleges, employers and universities use them to decide who to admit to which course or who to interview. They are used as evidence of the quality of schools. Thus, qualifications and assessment matter to individuals, communities and wider Scottish society. Every learner deserves the best possible life chance and qualifications and assessment have a key role to play in making that a reality” - Professor Louise Hayward, University of Glasgow

3. What was the aim of the Review?

The aim of the Independent Review was to ensure that all Senior Phase learners have an enhanced and equal opportunity to demonstrate the width, depth, and relevance of their learning.

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

The Review's Terms of Reference can be found [here](#).

4. How was the Review undertaken?

Professor Hayward developed an innovative model of engagement, designed to seek views on key issues from a wide range of participants including learners and teachers.

An Independent Review Group (IRG) was established including a range of participants with an interest in qualifications (learners and, as appropriate, parents/carers, those who design, develop and offer qualifications, from classroom teachers to national bodies, and those who

use qualifications, colleges, employers and universities). To extend and deepen the range of those involved each IRG member led a Collaborative Community Groups (CCG). You can find out more information about the IRG and CCGs [here](#).

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

4.1 Phase One: Summer 2022

The Review began by working with the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children's Parliament to ask what the future should be for Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland. From there a draft statement of Vision and Principles was developed.

Views were sought via the CCGs and invited from every secondary school and college in Scotland. An independent analysis of the responses from Phase One can be found [here](#).

The evidence from the Phase One engagement found support for the ideas in the draft Vision and Principles statements. However, there was advice to simplify and sharpen the language. The Vision and Principles were re-drafted accordingly and can be found [here].

4.2 Phase Two: October 2022 - January 2022

In the second phase of engagement the Review asked questions about what the future qualifications and assessment system would be like if consistent with the Vision and Principles. This included seeking views on whether or not evidence should be gathered across all four Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) capacities, whether information should be gathered on learners' skills and competencies, the balance between internal and external assessment, the use of technology, wider in and out of school activities, and the introduction of a leaving certificate at the end of the Senior Phase. Phase Two sought views from the CCGs and all schools and colleges and also involved a 12 week public consultation.

There was clear support for reforming Scotland's qualifications and assessment system. Respondents were in favour of introducing a leaving certificate in the Senior Phase to provide more holistic recognition of learners' achievements, skills and competencies. There was no clear consensus on what a 'better balanced' assessment system would look like. Some favoured a mixture of continuous assessments or smaller, regular tests and exams, others requested eliminating end-of-year examinations entirely. There was a strong desire to see recognition of achievement going beyond individual subjects/curricular areas. For example, learners should have opportunities to demonstrate skills as they use knowledge and to include information on in or out of school activities. Many raised practical issues that would have to be addressed.

The independent analysis of Phase Two can be found [here](#).

The feedback received from Phase Two led to the development of a high-level Diploma model which was tested during Phase Three.

4.3 Phase Three – High-level Diploma Model

During Phase Three the Review invited views on a high-level Diploma model with three mandatory elements and on practical implications. You can see the first iteration of this

model [here](#). Views were again sought via the CCGs and invited from every school and college in Scotland.

While many respondents were positive about the objectives underpinning the Diploma and its three components there were concerns voiced in respect of equality, particularly in relation to the Personal Pathway component. Respondents also sought detail on the practical implications. The model was revised, and the report of the Review includes recommendations on the practical steps needed to put the Diploma into practice.

5. What did the final report recommend?

Professor Hayward submitted her final report to The Scottish Government on 5 June 2023 and it was published on 22 June.

Recommendations in the final report focus on the introduction of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA) with three elements: Personal Pathway, Programmes of Learning and Project Learning.

The Review recommends that the Diploma should be the graduation certificate offered in all settings where Senior Phase education is provided. All learners should be offered the chance to experience learning in all elements of the Diploma and that these should be entitlements.



5.1 'Programmes of Learning'

The final report states that learners would continue to study in-depth individual areas of the curriculum, general subjects and vocational, technical and professional qualifications. These would remain a fundamental part of qualifications. Where currently qualifications are graded, e.g., Highers, Advanced Highers, they would continue to be graded.

Courses would be designed in modules. As learners complete modules, they would build credit. Where a qualification has an examination, the credit learners have built through the course would be combined with result from the final examination to obtain the final grade. This would reduce the risk for learners of performing only a single day event.

A wider range of methods of assessment would be used and methods would be appropriate to the individual programme. The number of examinations in the Senior Phase would be reduced.

5.2 What is the 'Personal Pathway'?

The central focus of the Personal Pathway is reflection on learning, whether that be learning in school, in college or in the community. The purpose of the Personal Pathway is to give learners the opportunity to personalise their qualification profile by selecting aspects of their experiences that reflect their interests, the contributions they make to society and their career aspirations in employment and to discuss these in a reflective way.

The focus of the Personal Pathway is not on the number of experiences but on what an individual has learnt through an experience. The Personal Pathway would not be graded but would be subject to authentication processes. The Personal Pathway would be owned by the learner.

5.3 What is 'Project Learning'?

In Project Learning, learners would have the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills they have developed in their Programmes of Learning to tackle a significant question or problem that is important to them by undertaking a Project. For some learners, the focus could be on a global challenge, for example, climate change, migration or social justice. Projects may be undertaken individually or in groups, but assessment would be individual. Project Learning would not be graded but will be linked to SCQF levels each with a different number of credit points.

5.4 What else does the Review Recommend?

- The Review also recommends that there should be a digital profile for all learners which allows them to record personal achievements, identify and plan future learning.
- In a bid to strengthen parity of esteem between different types of qualifications there should be a move to use the terms 'SCQF level' as the key descriptor followed by type of qualification. E.g. SCQF Level 6 – Higher.
- The information on learners' achievements within the SDA, courses and projects should be aligned in Scottish Statistics on Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations and INSIGHT data.
- There are a number of recommendations on the change process and what has to happen if the Scottish Diploma of Achievement is to be developed successfully.

6. Why would the SDA be better?

6.1 Better for learners

The SDA would transform the Senior Phase experience. Learners would experience a Senior Phase better aligned with the original vision of CfE. Learners would have greater choice and opportunity to personalise their Senior Phase. They would provide better support for learners as they move beyond school into college, employment, university or the voluntary sector.

“We have spent a year working on the proposed models for change and the new Scottish Diploma of Achievement; a model which I truly believe will keep the UNCRC at its heart as it supports the young people of the future on their own learner journeys.” - Beinn Grant (SYP)

6.2 Better for teachers and lecturers

The SDA would remove the two-term dash which results in continuous cycles of examination rehearsal and preparation. Teachers and lecturers will have more time to focus on high quality, rich learning experiences.

“At last, we have an opportunity, through the Scottish Diploma of Achievement, to better reflect the broader purposes of education in positively shaping people and lives, not simply measuring or counting learners’ achievements but fully recognising and valuing them. We need to grasp this opportunity with both hands.” - Andrea Bradley, (EIS)

6.3 Better for universities, colleges, employers and those who use qualifications

The wider, more personalised information provided through the SDA would provide colleges, employers and universities with a better evidence base to inform their decisions about which students or employees are best suited to which course or job.

“As society changes, university study changes with it, and the university students of the future will need to master not only specialist subject knowledge, but also weave together that knowledge in increasingly uncertain, changeable and complex contexts. Above all they will have to master the art of learning itself, so as to be effective contributors to Scottish society, industry, our professions, culture and polity. The proposed Scottish Diploma of Achievement will provide an excellent foundation for learners as they complete the university degrees of the future.” - Professor Jonathan Powles (Universities Scotland)

6.4 Better for Scotland

Society is changing fast. Many countries internationally are seeking to adapt and modernise their qualifications and assessment system. Scotland’s system must keep pace with this change.

“We live in a rapidly changing world. Education systems are having to adjust to this, and internationally we are seeing changes to the way students learn and what they learn. While Scotland has led the way in this with its Curriculum for Excellence, its historic assessment system has limited the changes in senior secondary education. Professor Hayward’s

Independent Review Group has sought to better align the Scottish examination system with these contemporary needs. It offers a powerful way forward for assessment in Scotland.”
Professor Gordon Stobart (IoE, UCL)

7. Planning for Change

The report notes that one of the most important lessons from the introduction of CfE is how important it is to have a clear plan to put ideas into practice. The plan for the introduction and development of the SDA will require major cultural change throughout the educational system. In addition.

- Investment would be required for professional learning, time for collaboration and for moderation (including avoiding bias) to ensure fairness for every learner and public confidence in the system.
- All change must be carefully planned in phases and resourced.
- The process of change should be inclusive building from and extending the collaborative processes developed during the Review.

8. Where can I find out more?

You can read the [full report](#) on the Scottish Government website.

9. What happens next?

The Scottish Government is considering the report and recommendations and will respond in due course.



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