

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET – 22 OCTOBER 2008

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE: CONSULTATION ON NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS IN SCOTLAND

Report by Executive Director of Educational & Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To advise Cabinet of the consultation taken place in East Ayrshire on the National Qualification proposals published by the Scottish Government.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) was originally published in 2004 by the then Scottish Executive. It has been the major driving force behind educational developments in Scotland since that time. One of the key aims of the CfE programme was to review national qualifications to ensure they remain fit for purpose.
- 2.2** As a result, in April 2008 the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning presented to Parliament detail on the next stage of development within the Curriculum for Excellence which included a consultation exercise on all National Qualifications in Scotland.
- 2.3** The consultation process was structured to take place from June to October 2008. This consultation covered the structure of the senior phase in secondary schools and a set of proposals were issued titled “A Consultation on the Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland”. This document set out the case for change in addition to posing a series of consultation questions. These questions, along with the response from East Ayrshire Council are attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.4** A consultation group of Senior Managers from all East Ayrshire Secondary Schools along with the Curriculum for Excellence Development Officer and the Head of Schools met to discuss the proposals and related questions and construct a response on behalf of East Ayrshire Council. The Curriculum for Excellence Officer also met with a range of Pupil Councils to discuss the proposals with them and in addition this draft response completed by the consultation group was issued to the Parent Council Strategy Group for further comment. The paper has also been issued to members of the Joint Consultative Committee to seek their views.
- 2.5** All schools have received full information on the proposals and individual schools are invited to make their own responses. Head Teachers will formally discuss the responses at the Head Teachers’ meeting on 24 October 2008.

3. CONSULTATION PROPOSALS

- 3.1** The main proposals contained in the consultation paper on national qualifications are outlined below:
- 3.2** National qualifications 'Access, 'Higher' and 'Advanced Higher' will be retained as points of stability and Highers in particular will remain the gold standard of the Scottish Education system. The content of all national qualifications will be updated to reflect the values, purposes and principles of the curriculum for excellence.
- 3.3** A new qualification will replace the present Standard Grade – General and Credit Levels and Intermediate 1 & 2 Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework Level 4 (SCQF4) and SCQF level 5 qualifications. These new qualifications will be available in a wide range of subjects as at present. The aim is to ensure the new qualifications reflect the best features of Standard Grade and Intermediate courses. Standard Grade Foundation level will be removed and Access 3 provide certification at SCQF level 3.
- 3.4** Curriculum for Excellence reinforces the importance of developing literacy and numeracy skills for all young people. To help strengthen this focus the Scottish Government is proposing new separate awards to accredit young people's literacy and numeracy skills – the 'Scottish Certificate for Literacy and Scottish Certificate for Numeracy'. These awards will be available at SCQF levels 3 – 5. The expectation is that all young people will be presented for these awards unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so. The intention is also to ensure that the structure of these awards is flexible enough to be available to adult learners.
- 3.5** Suggestions to increase flexibility to better meet the needs of young people, include proposals to study national qualifications over eighteen months (or two years as well as one year); introducing a winter diet of examination; and encouraging the most able young people to by-pass lower levels of qualification and to study highers from S4 onwards.

4. IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1** The timescale proposed by the Scottish Government could put considerable pressure on schools and local authorities as new examination arrangements are expected to be in place for pupils entering S1 in August 2009. Careful consideration will also be required in relation to transition arrangements, resource developments and timetabling. In addition, care will be needed to ensure that all staff, pupils and parents are aware of the new arrangements. This concern has been echoed in the consultation response.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** There will be financial implications in relation to developing new courses and funding teachers continuous professional development programmes to prepare for the new national qualifications. At this stage it is not possible to quantify the costs.

6. POLICY & LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** The revised National Qualifications Structure will require a new Curriculum Policy for 3 – 18 to be produced by East Ayrshire Council and in place for August 2009.

7. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** The consultation proposals relate to the Community Planning priorities of 'Improving Community Learning'.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** Nil.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1** Members of Cabinet are:
- (i) asked to approve the East Ayrshire Council response to the Consultation on National Qualifications; and
 - (ii) otherwise, note the content of the report.

Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational & Social Services

10 October 2008
AS/SR

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

A Consultation on the Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland
(Available in the Member's Information Point)

Members wishing further information should contact Andrew Sutherland, Head of Service: Schools, Tel: 01563 576126.

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER: ANDREW SUTHERLAND

**EAST AYRSHIRE
COUNCIL**

**RESPONSE
TO THE**

**CONSULTATION ON
NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
IN SCOTLAND**

Proposal 1

National Qualifications at Access, Higher and Advanced Higher will be retained as points of stability. Highers, in particular, will remain the ‘gold standard’ of the Scottish Education system. The content of all National Qualifications will be updated to reflect the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence. Some aspects of the structure of these qualifications will be reviewed.

Q1. Do you welcome the intention to update all qualifications at Access, Higher and Advanced Higher in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*? Please comment on any implications to be considered.

The view of East Ayrshire Council is that we support the aim behind the Curriculum for Excellence (ACfE) to achieve transformational change in Scottish Education. We recognise that the design of a new curriculum will necessitate a review of the existing examination system and current qualifications to reflect the values, purposes and principles of ACfE and to better serve the needs of all our young people. The Authority view is that any new alignments and updates to the system require to be well thought through and fully involve teachers, pupils, parents and other stakeholders. We would welcome support, guidance and realistic timescales to allow the developments to be fully and effectively implemented. The Authority will also be interested in the detailed guidance on how the aims, values and purposes of the CfE will be translated into one external examination system.

Proposal 2

A new qualification will replace the present Standard Grade General and Credit levels and Intermediate 1 and 2 (SQF 4 and SCQF 5) qualifications. The new qualification will be available in a wide range of subjects, as at present. The new qualification will reflect the best features of Standard Grade and Intermediate. Standard Grade Foundation level will be removed and Access 3 will provide certification at SQF level 3

Q2. Early consultation has identified the ‘best’ features of Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications as:

- the ‘inclusive’ approach to certification contained in Standard Grade; and
- the ‘unit based’ structure of Intermediate qualifications.

Are there any other features in the present Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications which should be included in the new qualification at SCQF levels 4 and 5?

East Ayrshire Council believe that a unitised approach is helpful in structuring courses and allowing young people to get a sense of how well they are progressing in their learning. The inclusive approach of Standard Grade was also to be welcomed. It is recognised however that the unitised approach is better suited to some subjects than others; for example subjects such as Mathematics which have a linear approach to learning. It is therefore suggested that some element of flexibility in unitised design should be

considered based on the nature of the course and the learning taking place. In addition, the potential impact of assessment overload must be taken into consideration so that the maximum time is spent on learning and teaching rather than testing.

Q3. One of the proposals is to grade units. Do you agree that units should be graded A-C rather than pass/fail?

There were mixed views within practitioners in East Ayrshire on this question. Some teachers and school managers thought that grading passes would better reward success achieved. On the other hand there were concerns over moderation and consistency across all schools in the country. There was also a concern expressed by some Head Teachers about the potential challenges from some parents to try to pressure schools to grant continual re-sits of Units until grades improved. On balance the view of limiting Units to pass/fail was supported by the majority of those consulted.

Q4. Do you want graded units to count towards the final award?

The view of East Ayrshire Council is that Units should not count towards the final award. This was based on a view that consistency in moderation could not be guaranteed across the country and the examination was therefore a more objective assessment of success. It was also noted that the national assessment bank would have to be updated every year if the Units carried such a weighting and this was a potentially unmanageable workload.

Q5. Which option for introducing compensatory arrangements would you most support?

Please tick one option or suggest an alternative.

- Option A** **Extend the range of grading in course awards to grade E.**
- Option B** **Recognise unit passes only.**
- Option C** **Compensatory award at the level of the course studied with no grade awarded.**
- Option D** **Compensatory grade C award at the level of course below that studied.**
- Option E** **Compensatory grade A award at the level of course below that studied.**

The view of East Ayrshire Council was that course completion awards should be made available and this would remove the need for compensatory awards. This is closest to Option C

Q6. The proposed name for the new award is General (SCQF 4) and Advanced General (SCQF 5). Please indicate if you are content with this suggestion. If not please offer an alternative and explain your choice.

The view of respondents within the Council was that the present titles of 'Credit' and 'General' are known by parents, the public, employers and by the pupils. The recommendation was that these names should remain.

Proposal 3

New awards in literacy and numeracy will be available at SCQF levels 3-5. Curriculum for Excellence brings a sustained focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills in our young people. To help strengthen this focus, the Scottish Government is proposing new separate awards to accredit young people's literacy and numeracy skills – The Scottish Certificate in Literacy and the Scottish Certificate in Numeracy. The awards will be available at SCQF levels 3-5. The expectation is that all young people will be presented for these awards unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so. The intention is also to ensure that the structure of these awards is flexible enough to make them available to adult learners.

Q7. Do you agree with the proposal to offer literacy and numeracy awards at a range of SCQF levels (3 to 5)? If not please offer an alternative.

East Ayrshire Council welcomes this recommendation in principle and it was noted that the introduction of such awards may help to raise the standards in functional literacy and numeracy in all our young people. It was noted that there would be an inevitable impact on English and Mathematics as core subjects and discussion would need to take place about where key responsibility for managing literacy and numeracy were positioned in secondary schools.

Q8. National Qualifications at Access 3 (SCQF level 3) do not have an external examination. Do you agree that any new awards in literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 3 should have an external examination?

East Ayrshire Council's view was that external assessment would not be necessary to validate the certification at SCQF level 3. The present internal assessment systems at Access 3 work very well at this level and could be replicated for literacy and numeracy. In addition, it was noted that pupils sitting courses at this level were often the most vulnerable in society and external examinations could impose additional unnecessary pressure.

Q9. Should the weighting between the internal and external assessments for the literacy and numeracy awards be equal? If not should more weight be attached to the internal or external assessment? Please explain.

Equal weight

More weight to internal assessment

More weight to external assessment

The view of East Ayrshire Council was that there should be equal weighting. Such a model would take account of individual learning styles and performance over the session and not impose an over-weighty burden on internal assessment procedures.

Q10. When should young people be assessed for literacy and numeracy awards?

Please tick one option

Option A *At the end of S3 as part of the summer diet of examinations.*

Option B *In the December of S4 as part of a winter diet of examinations.*

Option C *At the end of S4 as part of the summer diet of examinations.*

The view of East Ayrshire Council was Option A with an opportunity to re-sit and upgrade qualifications at a later stage if require

Proposal

Increased flexibility to better meet the needs of young people.

Suggestions include: Studying National Qualifications over 18 months (or 2 years) as well as one year. Introducing a winter diet of exams; encouraging the most able young people to bypass lower level qualifications and to study Highers from S4 onwards

Q11. Do you agree with the proposal to allow the study of Highers and Advanced over 12months, 8 months and 2 years.

East Ayrshire Council supports this proposal in principle. The opportunity for flexibility will allow challenge, progression and better personal learning planning for individual pupils. It was noted however that there would be organisational and timetabling challenges and as a result time was needed to allow effective planning of the transition.

Q12 Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a winter diet of examinations.

East Ayrshire Council would welcome further discussion on this proposal. The flexibility is welcomed in principle, but the logistical management of the timetable across secondary schools needs further analysis to consider how to best manage courses/programmes in a environment where some pupils will be ending courses/programmes at Christmas and others in the summer term.

Q13 If you agree with the proposal to introduce a winter diet of examinations, what subjects and levels of qualifications might first be offered?

See above response.

Q14 Would you agree with changes to the system which allowed the most able students to bypass qualifications at lower levels and begin to study for Highers from S4 onwards?

East Ayrshire Council welcomes this recommendation in principle as it facilitates a flexible system of study for pupils and maximises the potential for challenge and progression. On the other hand, in an environment of recognition only through national examinations it is essential to have a safety net built in which credits the fact that a pupil may have studied for a year/s and although they fail the examination the course has been covered.

Q15 Do you have any other ideas for increasing flexibility within the senior phases (S4-S6)?

The creation of a S4-S6 timetable which was structured around ability and interest rather than age was deemed as attractive by a number of senior managers consulted. This would maximise choice and flexibility and also create viability in a number of course in a secondary school that presently cannot run due to lack of numbers. There is also the view that such a model would facilitate further developing partnership working with colleges, employers and 3rd sector partners focusing collectively on the 'positive destination agenda'. This could generate scope for extending qualifications, and personal development programmes in, for example, 'Skills for Work' courses to HNC provision.

TIMELINE

Q16. It is intended that planning for the new curriculum should commence in 2008/09, with approaches based on the new curriculum introduced from school year 2009/10.

This suggests that the new and revised qualifications and any increased flexibilities would be required from 2012/13 onwards to ensure smooth progression between the curriculum and qualifications. Is this indicative timeline realistic? Please comment on any implications to be considered.

The view of East Ayrshire Council is that this is an ambitious time frame which requires concerted action at national and local authority level to effectively manage the programme. The proposals necessitate radical change not just to the examination system, but to the delivery of the whole curriculum. Staff in schools, parents, pupils and all partner agencies will need time to understand and buy into all of the changes planned. This will then have to be planned in a way that minimises disruption to the present cohort of pupils in the system. Once the outcomes for the senior phase are clear the Council will be in a better position to judge the practicality of the time scales proposed.

Other Comments

The view of a number of respondents in East Ayrshire was that it was essential not to simply take the present National Qualification system and re-brand it under the CfE banner without making the wholesale changes identified as necessary in earlier consultations and reinforced by the OECD report.

There was an anxiety expressed by a number of teachers as to what the new system of examinations will look like and also about who would write the courses necessary to be prepared. Previous developments such as Standard Grade and Higher Still were centrally coordinated and heavily funded. This has not been evident to date in the CfE programme.

A number of teacher respondents commented on the need for extensive CPD for teachers in the new courses/programmes and in moderation, particularly for cross curricular courses and programmes linked to literacy and numeracy. This was linked to a reference to managing workload in a period of change.