Qualifications & Assessment Review: Consultation Analysis

Final Report

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Contents

List of abbreviations

- AI – Artificial Intelligence
- ASN – Additional Support Needs
- BGE - Broad General Education
- BME – Black and Minority Ethnic
- CCG - Collaborative Community Group
- CfE – Curriculum for Excellence
- CLD – Community Learning and Development
- GME – Gaelic Medium Education
- IRG – Independent Review Group
- OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PSE – Personal and Social Education
- SCQF – Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
- SME – Small and Medium Enterprises
- SNSA – Scottish National Standardised Assessments
- SQA – Scottish Qualifications Authority
- STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
- UNCRC – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Executive summary

In October 2021, the Scottish Government announced the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment. The aim of the Review is to ensure that all Senior Phase learners in Scotland - predominantly learners aged 15-18 - have an enhanced and equal opportunity to demonstrate the width, depth, and relevance of their learning.

The Review is led by Professor Louise Hayward and supported by an Independent Review Group (IRG) which include learners, teachers, employers, universities and colleges. Following the first phase of consultation on vision and principles via schools and colleges and Collaborative Community Groups (CCGs), a second phase began in October 2022, including a public consultation hosted on the Scottish Government's Citizen Space portal between October 2022 and January 2023.

Containing 11 questions, and attracting 708 responses, the consultation allowed learners, parents, teachers and stakeholders to express their views on how the vision and principles established in Phase 1 might be implemented. Questions covered: what information about achievements might be gathered and how; the best balance for a future assessment system; proposals for introducing certification at different stages of learning; the potential role of technology; and ensuring the achievements of all learners are recognised.

Overview

Overall, there is clear support for the reform of Scotland's qualifications and assessment system; however, views about how the system should look in the future varied.

Some themes were mentioned by a large proportion of respondents at multiple questions, often highlighting issues to consider if the proposals were to be implemented. The potential negative impact on teachers' workload was the most common recurring theme, followed by a concern that gathering information on achievements outside school and college could discriminate against those who cannot easily access extra-curricular activities to the same extent as others for reasons including cost, time limitations, parental support, local availability, health issues and caring responsibilities. Other common themes included calls for consistent, standardised approaches to recording achievements to be used across Scotland, and for parity of esteem for academic and vocational or skills-based qualifications.

Options for qualifications and assessment

Just over three-fifths (61%) agreed that information should be gathered across all four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens. Respondents felt that Successful Learners is the easiest capacity to measure, mainly through attainment in qualifications. The other three capacities were seen as more challenging to gather information about due to their subjective nature, but coursework, practical exercises and extra-curricular activities were identified as important sources of evidence.

Many respondents felt that information about participation in out of school or college activities including sports, music, drama, art and youth organisations such as Scouts and Guides should be collected. There were differing opinions as to whether only activity accredited by an official body, such as [Duke of Edinburgh Awards](), should be included, or if wider, non-certificated, participation should also be included. Some felt this information would provide evidence of learners' skills and achievements and would help strengthen applications for employment or university. However, several respondents warned that gathering information about achievements outside school or college could discriminate against those who may be unable to access extra-curricular activities.

Strong support (75%) was recorded for the proposal to gather information on learners' skills and competencies as part of the Senior Phase. Many respondents felt that skills and competencies should be embedded and evidenced through subject-based qualifications, with meta-skills built into learners' existing classes.

There was a clear preference among many for coursework and continuous assessment to capture evidence of skills and competencies, rather than formal, high-stakes end-of-year exams. However, respondents also identified challenges with this proposal. Several warned there is a lack of time and resources available for teachers if they are expected to support information gathering alongside their already heavy workload, while some identified challenges in collecting this information consistently and objectively across different schools.

Gathering evidence on achievements, awards and qualifications

Respondents were asked what a 'better balanced' assessment system would look like but there was no clear consensus. There was debate over the role of external exams, with many favouring a mixture of continuous assessments or smaller, more regular tests and external exams. Many requested eliminating end-of-year exams entirely, regardless of whether they are internally or externally assessed; however, some others supported the current exam structure. There were also differences in opinion regarding the relative merits of internal and external assessment, with several calling for a combination of the two.

How evidence should best be presented

There was no clear consensus on the proposal to introduce an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE. Several respondents felt this could incentivise more focus among BGE learners and noted this would give every learner evidence of their skills, which could be especially beneficial for those likely to gain fewer academic qualifications.

On the other hand, several respondents pointed to the pressure this proposal could put on teachers to achieve attainment targets in the BGE, particularly if results are compared with other schools. Some also mentioned a lack of time and resources among teachers and the strain that being assessed could put on learners' mental health.

Recognising achievement in the Senior Phase

There was consensus in favour of the proposal to introduce a type of leaving certificate in the Senior Phase. Several respondents said they would welcome a leaving certificate that recognises a broader range of learners' achievements, skills and competencies than are evidenced through the current qualifications and assessment system. Respondents noted a leaving certificate would provide a more holistic record of learners' achievements including classroom achievements, hobbies and extra-curricular activities.

Respondents, however, also noted some disadvantages of this proposal including added time pressure on school staff if they were expected to compile evidence for the certificate. There were also doubts about the value of such a certificate for employers and further education providers unless it was clear that it was providing information which is helpful to them.

Technology and assessment

Overall, respondents were in favour of making better use of digital technologies in Scotland's qualifications and assessment system. Suggested uses of digital technologies included online approaches to exams and assessments, a digital platform to record learners' skills and achievements, and enabling learners to submit coursework online. Some highlighted the potential for technology to make the qualifications and assessment system more efficient. However, there were also concerns, with many highlighting infrastructure constraints such as the availability of suitable IT equipment for schools and learners, and inequalities in access to digital devices.

An approach to benefit all learners

Respondents were strongly in favour of ensuring that a future qualification and assessment system upholds the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements. Many suggestions to achieve this were made. Most notably, many respondents felt that flexible teaching and assessment approaches, tailored to individual needs, would better satisfy different learning needs and styles among all learners. Another suggestion was to enable learners to select different forms of assessment based on their preferences. The importance of providing support for learners who need additional support or alternative arrangements, was also highlighted by several respondents.

Beyond Phase 2

The range of views identified in this consultation provides an essential evidence base for the Scottish Government to draw on when planning the future qualifications and assessment system in Scotland. While there is broad support for reform, the nuance in respondents' perspectives means it is unlikely the proposals will fully satisfy all stakeholders. Phase 3 of the Review will therefore help to refine and clarify the finer details of the proposals.

Introduction

Background to the Review

In October 2021, the Scottish Government announced the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment. The aim of the Review is to ensure that all Senior Phase learners in Scotland - predominantly learners aged 15-18 - have an enhanced and equal opportunity to demonstrate the width, depth, and relevance of their learning.

The Review, led by Professor Louise Hayward and supported by an Independent Review Group (IRG) including learners, teachers, employers, universities and colleges, embodies an inclusive approach to policy design and will contribute to the development of final recommendations which are both principled and practical. Following the first phase of consultation on vision and principles via schools and colleges and CCGs, a phase began in October 2022, including a public consultation hosted on the Scottish Government's Citizen Space portal between October 2022 and January 2023.

Containing 11 questions, the consultation allowed learners, parents, teachers and stakeholders to express their views on how the vision and principles established in Phase 1 might be implemented. Questions covered: what information about achievements might be gathered and how; the best balance for a future assessment system; proposals for introducing certification at different stages of learning; the potential role of technology; and ensuring the achievements of all learners are recognised.

This report provides a thematic analysis of responses to the Qualifications & Assessment Review. Our approach to the analysis and report structure are outlined below.

Respondent profile

This report presents an analysis of 708 consultation responses, which contained over 5,500 open-ended comments. Within this sample, there were 526 responses from individuals and 182 from various organisations, including many schools.

The analysis also included notes from 22 CCG discussions facilitated as part of the Independent Review. These discussions typically considered the same questions as the consultation but focused on how the proposals could impact different stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, parents, colleges, trade unions, education bodies, and employers. We have also reviewed data from a survey of parents and carers, with 164 responses.

Individual respondents were not asked if they were learners, teachers or parents, but the analyst team created a separate category of learner/teacher/school responses, where the respondent type was clearly identifiable, for analysis purposes. The 262 responses in the learner/teacher/school category include responses from schools and individual responses from email addresses with a Glow or sch suffix. As we cannot be certain of the status of other individual responses, they remain classed as individuals.

A number of consultation responses were based on discussions with, or submitted on behalf of, multiple individuals. Very few responses, however, specified the number of individuals they represent, so we cannot be certain of the total number of people reached by the consultation or represented by each response.

In particular, different approaches were taken by individual schools and colleges to completing the consultation. For example, learners in one school may have submitted their own individual responses as part of their lesson. Whilst in another school, a single response may have been submitted which incorporated the feedback obtained through multiple classroom discussions and potentially included the views of hundreds of learners and teachers. Similarly, responses from trade unions and professional associations were prepared by multiple individuals and are intended to represent the view of their membership. The Collaborative Community Groups involved discussions with many individuals but a single response was submitted on behalf of the group.

While responses have come from various individuals and organisations, it is unclear how many people are represented by each response. For example, a class from one school may have discussed the questions and submitted one response, whereas learners from another school may have submitted their own individual responses as part of their lesson. For analysis purposes, each submission has been treated as a separate response, and all views are included in this report regardless of whether a large or small number of respondents raised them.

The profile of the respondents is shown below:

Respondent classification	N=	%
Individual – unclassified	372	53%
Learner/teacher/school response	262	37%
Post-school sector – Colleges and University	10	1%
National Agency or Public Body	15	2%
Trade Unions and Professional associations	13	2%
Young person's organisation	9	1%
Other non-education	8	1%
Local Government and Local Authorities	7	1%
Other education	7	1%
Parent body/group	3	<1%
Unknown	2	<1%

The table above shows the percentage and number of respondents along with their classification

Analysis approach

The Lines Between was commissioned to provide a robust, independent analysis of the responses to the public consultation. Public consultation of this kind means anyone can express their views; individuals and organisations interested in the topic are more likely to respond than those without a direct or known interest. **This self-selection means the views of Respondents do not necessarily represent the views of the entire population**. The main purpose of consultation analysis is not to identify how many people held particular views but to understand the full range of views expressed.

The analyst team coded responses using a coding framework which was developed following an initial review of a sample of responses. Through an iterative coding process, new codes were created if additional themes emerged, depending on the breadth of the discussion. Notes from the CCG discussions were reviewed to identify any differences in opinion compared to the main sample and to identify any new themes. The themes evident in the CCG discussions typically aligned with those evident in the main sample, but any additional relevant points have been noted in this report.

Where appropriate, quotes from respondents are included to illustrate key points and provide useful examples, insights and contextual information. Reflecting the large number of people who took part in the consultation, there is no scope to detail every response in this report; some respondents shared lengthy submissions which reflect their specific area of interest or expertise. All responses to the consultation, where permission for publication was granted by the respondent, can be found on the Scottish Government's website.

Report structure

This **introduction** explains the analytical approach and details the profile of respondents. The remainder of the report presents a question-by-question analysis:

- **Chapter 2** summarises the cross-cutting themes evident in multiple questions. These themes are also noted in the subsequent question-by-question analysis to explore the nuance in responses to each question.

- **Chapter 3** presents an analysis of Q1 to Q3. These asked if and what information about learners should be gathered across all four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), whether information on achievements outside school or college should be included, and if learners' skills and competencies should be recorded in their Senior Phase.

- How best to evidence achievements, awards and qualifications are considered in **Chapter 4**, which presents the analysis of Q4 and respondents' views on the balance between exams and other forms of assessment.

- The advantages and disadvantages of recognising achievement at the end of Broad General Education (BGE) and the Senior Phase are presented in **Chapter 5**, which considers Q5 and Q6.

- **Chapter 6** presents an analysis of Q7, which considers how Scotland's qualifications and assessment system could make the best use of digital technologies.

- Ensuring a future qualification system upholds the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements is the focus of Q8 in **Chapter 7**.

- **Chapter 8** presents the analysis of Q9, where respondents were able to express their views on any other aspects of reform.

- A summary of responses from different sectors is included in **Chapter 9.**

- **Chapter 10** presents the conclusions from the analysis.

Weight of opinion

Throughout this report, the themes evident in each question are typically listed from most to least commonly mentioned. All themes, including those mentioned by a small number of respondents, have been included.

Qualitative analysis of open-ended questions does not permit the quantification of results; an insightful view expressed by a very small number of respondents is not given less weight than more general comments shared by a majority. However, to assist the reader in interpreting the findings, we have developed a framework to convey the most to least commonly identified themes across responses to each question:

- Many respondents, more than one in five, a prevalent theme.
- Several respondents, between one in 10 and one in five, a recurring theme.
- Some respondents, fewer than one in 10, another theme.
- A few / a small number; fewer than one in 20, a less commonly mentioned theme.

Overarching themes

Given the broad nature of the Review, many themes were evident in each question. There was, however, also significant overlap in responses, with some themes mentioned by a large proportion of respondents at multiple or most questions. This chapter presents an overview of these overarching themes from most to least commonly mentioned.

Time and resources

The most prevalent overarching theme was concern about the time and resources needed to implement proposals put forward in the consultation. This issue was raised in response to every consultation question. Several respondents noted teachers' existing heavy workload, which could be exacerbated if they are expected to implement proposals, and there were concerns that this additional role could detract from teaching curricular content.

Respondents often felt the proposals were unrealistic given the current workload and curricular demands; however, others called for teachers to be given time and support to implement the proposals. For example, if teachers are expected to play a role in recording learners' achievements outside school and college (Q2) then they will need time allocated for this task. Similarly, if they are required to play a greater role in assessing learners' work, they will need training and time to fulfil this role (Q6).

"This would be more information and data gathering that would land at a teacher's desk at the expense of delivering high-quality lessons in class." - Individual

"For this to be done well, teachers need development time to think about how best to address this, and there needs to be time in the curriculum to give this real value. Teacher time to work on this should be future-proofed, so not only to set this up, but sustained over time." - Scottish Universities Inclusion Group

"There has to be appropriate training and time for staff to ensure they understand the nature of the changes and prepare for these changes." - Shetland Islands Council Children's Services Directorate

Other suggestions included ensuring that teachers' role in implementing the proposals, for example recording out of school or college achievements and gathering information on learners' skills and competencies in the Senior Phase, is as quick and easy as possible. A few called for the Community Learning and Development (CLD) workforce to support teachers.

"The assessment should not be onerous and time-consuming." - Individual

"A fully funded CLD workforce, recognised with a parity of esteem alongside other professional educators, such as teachers. Discussions were had regarding the benefits of this, including how it may ease pressure on teachers." - CLD Standards Council Scotland

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Inequalities

Socio-economic inequalities were a recurring theme across many questions. Most notably, respondents were concerned the proposal to gather information on learners' achievements outside school and college (Q2) could discriminate against those who cannot access extra-curricular opportunities easily due to financial pressures, caring responsibilities or a lack of parental time. This was also a prevalent theme at Q7, where investment was called for to address inequalities in access to digital devices. Respondents identified this as a barrier to making greater use of technology in the qualifications and assessment system.

"Many families will not have the funds that allow them to participate in activities that more affluent peers have. There is a danger that inequality will be accentuated and entrenched." - Individual

"Equality of access to broadband/wi-fi and IT equipment must therefore remain a continuously high priority for Scotland's families and young people, so that this ambition could be achieved." – Scottish Funding Council

"You can't expect someone to learn the same on a device that is outdated, breaks down and doesn't produce what is needed, when the person next to them has all the best gear." – Learner/teacher/school

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Racial inequalities were mentioned by a few respondents and more details of this are provided at our analysis of Q2 and Q4.

Additional support needs

The potential for the consultation's proposals to help learners with additional support needs was a recurring theme across several questions. In particular, respondents felt digital approaches to qualifications and assessment could support learners who find traditional handwritten exams difficult (Q7). There is also the opportunity to use adaptive technologies such as screen readers to support learners with sensory impairments or physical disabilities. Similarly, several respondents emphasised the need to support learners who qualify for additional support, including those with English as an Additional Language to help uphold the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements (Q8).

> "Many MSYPs shared their experiences of technology as learners with additional support needs and felt that the use of laptops was extremely helpful." – Scottish Youth Parliament
>
> "It may be more inclusive to allow students with special educational needs to use digital devices to give their answers rather than traditional paper-based examinations." – The Institute of Physics
>
> "The qualifications and assessment system must provide support to learners with learning or language difficulties, or disabilities, by offering, for example, assessment methods adapted to their needs and exams in other languages." - Enginuity

Consistent and standardised approaches

There were repeated calls to ensure consistency and standardisation when implementing the consultation's proposals. Respondents emphasised the need for a consistent approach across Scotland to, for example, gathering information on the four capacities (Q1b), collecting details of learners' achievements outside school and college (Q2), compiling data on learners' skills and competencies in the Senior Phase (Q3b), the balance of internal and external assessment (Q4), and using digital technologies in qualifications and assessment (Q7). Offering a consistent range of qualifications and subjects across different schools and local authorities was identified by some respondents as an important part of upholding the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements (Q8).

> "Consistent approach and embedded within the curriculum." – St Andrew's RC High School, Kirkcaldy
>
> "It would have to be collected in a fair, transparent, reliable, verified, and consistent manner." – University of St Andrews

Respondents called for consistency to be achieved through investment and guidance from the Scottish Government.

> "There needs to be a national drive (and follow-through on previous commitments) to ensure all pupils have access to the resources to enhance their learning in courses, as well as in how courses are assessed." - Calderglen High School
>
> "Must be national guidelines if this is to be formalised." - Individual

Celebrating and recognising each learner's achievements

The importance of celebrating and recognising the achievements and progress of all learners was another recurring theme. Several respondents highlighted that introducing an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the Broad General Education (BGE) phase (Q5) would help to recognise achievement among all learners, including those less suited to traditional academic learning. Similarly, respondents noted gathering information about learners' achievements outside school or college (Q2) would allow all learners to recognise and celebrate their achievements. This could help learners to feel valued and is particularly important for those with fewer academic achievements.

"This would allow pupils to draw and reflect on these experiences from a young age giving pupils a sense of achievement which is not solely qualification driven." – National Parent Forum Scotland

"Allow a pupil to acknowledge their skills and qualities for their future workplace. Demonstrates a pupil's skills in a range of subject even if not related to their future career." – Girvan Academy S6

Parity of esteem for skills-based qualifications

Across many questions, some respondents felt traditional academic subjects have a higher profile and priority in school and that more should be done to raise the profile of skills-based vocational qualifications such as Foundation Apprenticeships. This theme was most prominent in Q8, where respondents called for these qualifications to be given greater recognition to uphold all learners' rights.

"Make skill-based achievement have the same value as exam-based. Give more schools access to skills-based learning." – Individual

"Deliver academic content as well as broader skills acquisition." – Universities Scotland

"The system will need to ensure parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications." – Youth Scotland

Options for qualifications and assessment

This section of the consultation invited respondents' views on options for qualifications and assessment. Chapter 2 presents an analysis of responses to Q1a-Q3b:

- Q1a asked respondents if information should be gathered across all four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens.

- Views on the kinds of information that should be gathered on learners' progress and achievement in each of the four capacities were collected in Q1b.

- Q2 explored what, if any, information on learners' achievements obtained outside school and college should be gathered.

- Q3a asked if information should be collected on learners' skills and competencies in their Senior Phase; how this could be done in practice was the focus of Q3b.

Curriculum for Excellence – four capacities

Q1a: Should information be gathered across all four capacities?

The first consultation question was a closed question which asked if information should be gathered across all four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens. Almost all (96%) respondents answered Q1a. Among those who answered, there was clear support for gathering this information: 61% agreed, 23% disagreed, and 17% were unsure.

Q1a: Should information be gathered across all four capacities?				
Base	n=	% Yes	% No	% Not sure
All answering	*681*	**61**	**23**	**17**
Individual – unclassified	*366*	57	29	14
Organisation responses	*62*	73	11	16
Learner/teacher/school response	*253*	63	16	21
Post-school sector – Colleges and University	*8*	63	25	13
National Agency or Public Body	*14*	79	0	21
Trade Unions and Professional associations	*10*	60	30	10
Young person's organisation	*8*	88	0	13
Other non-education	*7*	57	14	29
Local Government and Local Authorities	*7*	86	0	14
Other education	*5*	80	20	0
Parent body/group	*1*	100	0	0
Unknown	*2*	50	0	50

The table above shows the number and percentage of respondents answering Question 1Half or more of all sub-groups supported the proposal.

Support was highest among organisations (73%), followed by learner/teacher/school respondents (63%) and unclassified individuals (57%). However, levels of support varied by type of organisation, from high levels among young people's organisations (88%) and local government (86%) to lower levels among non-education organisations (57%).

> Q1b: Please consider each of the capacities in turn. What kinds of information should be gathered on learners' progress and achievements in each capacity?

Overview of responses

This question was answered by 590 respondents. While responses to Q1a highlighted majority support for collecting information on the four capacities, open comments reflected a more nuanced consideration of the breadth and ease of collecting this information across the four capacities. Comments included suggestions for the types of information to gather about learners' progress and achievements in each capacity and reflections on the challenges involved in collecting information. Each of the four capacities is covered below.

Successful Learners

Several respondents noted that progress in this capacity could be evidenced through achievement and attainment in subject qualifications. A few stated this makes it easier to measure this capacity than the other three; very few respondents identified any significant challenges with measuring this capacity.

Some acknowledged the role of formal exams in assessing this capacity. However, another theme was the negative aspects of exams, such as their reliance on rote learning and the stress they can cause for learners. Several highlighted the importance of coursework and continuous assessment in collecting information about progress and achievements.

> "Not everyone is suited to one-off exams and as such the ongoing assessment and staggered submissions should be recognised more than they currently are." - Individual

A few proposed that extra-curricular activities and contributions in class should be considered when gathering information.

Some respondents suggested skills that could be evidenced as part of this capacity. These included critical thinking, literacy, numeracy and the ability to work with others.

Confident Individuals

Respondents gave various suggestions about how to gather information related to this capacity. Several said it could be evidenced through coursework, most notably delivering presentations and working as a group. Some commented that information about learners' contributions to class discussions could provide evidence of their confidence.

According to some other respondents, extracurricular activities can also provide information about learners' confidence. These activities are wide-ranging and include family and caring responsibilities, sporting activities, volunteering, participation in award programmes such as Duke of Edinburgh Awards, and contributions to wider school life such as performances and roles such as house captains.

Another common theme, however, concerned challenges around assessing and evidencing this capacity. Some respondents pointed to the subjective nature of confidence, difficulties in finding measurable metrics of confidence, and the wide range of factors that can influence an individual's confidence. A few expressed concerns about how to evidence confidence among quieter, introverted learners who may find tasks like presentations difficult but display confidence in other ways.

> "I am unsure as to whether information on the three unreported 'capacities' (Confident Individual, Effective Contributor and Responsible Citizen) can be quantified and verified to a national standard." – Learner/teacher/school

Effective Contributors

As with Confident Individuals, several respondents suggested that Effective Contributors could be evidenced through coursework, especially group tasks and presentations. Several felt information about extra-curricular activities could be gathered. They highlighted how learners' contributions to wider school activities, such as concerts and community and voluntary pursuits, can provide valuable evidence of contributing. However, some respondents again highlighted the challenges of gathering objective and measurable information about this capacity.

> "Take a broad view of what effective contribution looks like. This might be in an academic sense or might be the classic pupil leadership role, but more likely it will be largely uncelebrated but equally important ways. For example, a kid who is a good friend and helps others who are struggling is a true contributor. Or maybe they contribute outside of school, for example by being a young carer or helping out an elderly relative, or by helping out with their football team or being involved in their community in some way. There ought to be a better way of gathering information about the richness of young people's lives, particularly for those whose families cannot afford to send them to all the expensive clubs and classes." - Individual

Responsible Citizens

Responsible Citizens was viewed as the most challenging capacity to gather information about. Some respondents noted this is another subjective principle, with some uncertainty about what measures should be used to identify a Responsible Citizen.

However, several suggested that extra-curricular activities within and outside school could provide evidence, and some highlighted the importance of positive contributions and behaviour in class. However, only a small number said this capacity could be evidenced through coursework or exams.

Other themes

Some respondents commented on the importance of considering a learner's strengths, weaknesses, and circumstances as an individual, including any additional support needs, learning difficulties and socio-economic background. These respondents emphasised the importance of recognising all learners' achievements and acknowledging that progress will look different for some learners than others.

> "The capacities (specifically confident individuals) look different for each individual in each subject, so how do we effectively collect information on this?" – Kilwinning Academy (staff)

Several respondents used this question as an opportunity to critique the four capacities and CfE more generally, with issues including the limitations of the four capacities as a structure to record evidence of achievements and skills development.

As discussed in the overarching themes section, another issue raised by some respondents was a concern about the workload implications if teachers were expected to devote additional time to collating information related to the four capacities beyond what is already collected for subject qualifications.

Other themes, each identified by a few respondents, included:

- While a few felt that Successful Learner is the most important capacity, a small number highlighted a risk that the other three capacities could be neglected at its expense and called for parity of esteem across all four.

- Considerations around how to record the information, with ideas including a national online portfolio of achievements or digital skills passport. A few compared this to the previous National Record of Achievement but noted a need to learn lessons from that initiative.

- Ensuring the information gathered is meaningful, useful and not a tick-box exercise.

- Evidence should be collected across a learner's life and educational career, including achievements in the early years, BGE and post-school, not just the Senior Phase.

- Who should provide evidence of a learner's achievements, with small numbers calling for learners' self-reflections to be used along with teachers' observations and feedback from parents, carers, peers and others in the community.

- Challenges around socio-economic inequalities restricting access to extra-curricular activities among some learners.

- Suggestions for interdisciplinary approaches including the potential of a baccalaureate-type qualification in contributing to the four capacities.

- The need for enhanced status and parity of esteem for practical skills alongside more traditional academic learning.

- The importance of recognising the distinctive approaches to Gaelic Medium Education and of measuring learners' progress in these settings appropriately.

Out of school and college achievements or awards

Q2: What, if any, information on learners' achievements obtained outside school and college should be gathered? Please explain your response.

Overview of responses

Responses to this question were provided by 617 respondents. Responses included suggestions for the types of information that should be gathered on learners' achievements obtained outside school and college. Comments also covered how this data could be gathered and the benefits and challenges associated with collecting it.

Information that should be gathered

Many respondents called for information about learners' participation in extra-curricular activities to be gathered. This included participation in a broad range of clubs and hobbies, including sports, music, drama, art, baking, youth organisations such as the Guides, Scouts and Cadets, religious organisations and learning opportunities outside school, including lessons in modern languages and City & Guilds qualifications.

Among these respondents, opinion was evenly split on whether only accredited activities should be recorded. Some felt only activities recognised or certified by an official body should be included, such as Duke of Edinburgh Awards, Dynamic Youth and John Muir Awards, graded musical exams, martial art belt rankings, cycling qualifications, first aid training, college courses or national or regional sports representation.

"Any such achievement should be those achieved through recognised national bodies. Otherwise, such 'achievements' are worthless." - Individual

However, some others argued any participation in a club or hobby, regardless of certificates or proficiency gained, should be considered.

"Whether the achievements are personal and individual or in formal organisations, they should be discovered and acknowledged." - Individual

The importance of collecting information about volunteering with local charities and community groups, especially where learners have achieved a Saltire Award, was a recurring theme.

Other types of activity which some respondents felt worth recording included:

- Work experience and employment.

- Caring and family responsibilities.

- Evidence of meta-skills[1] including teamwork, public speaking and critical thinking.

- Some others were less specific but felt all achievements and experiences should be included; however, a few commented only information relevant to potential employers, universities or colleges should be recorded.

A few respondents proposed accrediting achievements outside school or college through the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). A small number proposed introducing a baccalaureate-style award, or emphasising the existing Scottish Baccalaureates, where academic achievements and other experiences can be recognised.

How the information could be gathered

Some respondents said learners should record their activity and achievements themselves. Another common theme was the importance of supporting learners to do this: some requested a national online portal where learners could record this information, while another idea was for schools to help learners record their achievements by, for example, providing time in school to reflect on and note down their activities.

A few respondents put forward other individuals who could provide information about learners' achievements outside school or college, including parents and carers, teachers, community members, and tutors or coaches from extra-curricular activities. One advocated considering peer feedback.

Benefits of collecting this information

The main benefit of collecting this information, identified by some respondents, is that demonstrating learners' achievements and skills outside school or college could strengthen their applications for employment or university.

> "This would allow future employers to also look and see someone's additional achievements." – Craigmount High School

Some acknowledged the importance of recognising all learners' achievements, including those who do not obtain national qualifications. Another theme was the importance of this information in providing a clearer picture of each learner as an individual, encompassing their interests, hobbies and achievements in extra-curricular activities.

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[1]Skills Development Scotland defines meta-skills as "innate, timeless, higher-order skills that create adaptive learners and promote success in whatever context the future brings". They include self-management, resilience, independent thinking, social intelligence, communication, team working and collaboration, leadership, innovation, creativity and critical thinking.

Other advantages, each described by a few respondents, included:

- Its potential as evidence towards a qualification or achievement of CfE capacities.
- Helping teachers better understand their learners' strengths and weaknesses, thereby devising strategies to teach them more effectively.
- Inspiring or incentivising further engagement in extra-curricular activities.
- Providing information to help employers, universities and colleges consider applications from learners.
- Helping learners to decide future career or study plans.

Challenges

Several respondents pointed out that gathering information about achievements outside of school or college could discriminate against those who may be unable to access extra-curricular activities to the same extent as others for various reasons, including cost, time limitations, parental support, local availability, health issues and caring responsibilities.

> "Learners' achievements and opportunities outside of school are highly dependent upon parents and carers capacity to transport their children, afford to pay for these activities or, in some cases the learners individual needs so we must be careful not to prejudice against those learners who are vulnerable or disadvantaged." – Dumfries and Galloway Council, Education and Learning Directorate
>
> "Teachers were worried that the finances of individual families would overly influence outcomes, and that some pupils would be able to secure the relevant badges of attainment while others would have fewer opportunities to accrue the needed cultural capital." – NASUWT

A higher-than-average level of poverty among Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, as well as instances of racism, were identified by a small number as barriers to individuals from these communities accessing out of school or college activities.

> "A range of known barriers impact Black and Minority Ethnic learners' access to opportunities to gain awards and achievements outside of school. Racism within mainstream services targeted at young people is one such barrier... Black and Minority Ethnic households are twice as likely to experience poverty... Activities with a cost, including basic costs such as travel, may be inaccessible for many. Allied to this, the parents of Black and Minority Ethnic learners are more likely to be working in occupations with long or non-standard hours, making the practicalities of getting to and from clubs and activities more difficult." - Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER)

A few respondents noted that schools can help to address these socio-economic disadvantages by ensuring there are equitable opportunities for all learners to take part in extra-curricular activities regardless of socio-economic background. Other suggestions by a small number included: recognising a broad range of activities, including caring responsibilities, part-time work and volunteering, when collecting information on achievements outside school and college; and introducing a mandatory requirement for school learners to take part in voluntary work.

> "It should be noted that there are potentially significant equity issues around extra-curricular activity, including e.g. affordability and geographic inequality of access. These can to a limited degree be ameliorated through strengthening youth work and school partnership." – Awards Network
>
> "Not every family can afford to take classes outside school, not just money wise but also time wise. If school can provide different activities to pupils, and encourage all to join, that would be great!" – National Parent Forum of Scotland

Some argued the proposal is unnecessary because the information is already being collected. For example, the bodies that govern extra-curricular achievements gather information about the awards achieved through their programmes for example the John Muir Trust records information about young people achieving the [John Muir Award](#), while sporting governing bodies hold details of young people's achievements in their sports. Respondents also pointed out that learners can include the information on their CVs, LinkedIn profiles and employment, university and college applications, and teachers can refer to it in written references, without it being collected elsewhere.

While the consultation paper does not detail any role expected of schools in gathering this information, some respondents pointed to challenges around teachers' time and resources to support information collection.

Other themes related to difficulties ensuring a consistent approach across schools and colleges; and the importance of data protection and privacy, with some respondents emphasising learners' right to keep their extra-curricular activities private.

Small numbers referred to uncertainty around who should gather the information and how it should be collected, and the risk that learners may engage in extra-curricular activities primarily to improve their CV rather than to enjoy the activity itself.

Skills and competencies

Q3a: Should information be gathered on learners' skills and competencies as part of their Senior Phase?

Q3a was answered by almost all respondents (96%). Among those answering there was strong agreement that information about learners' skills and competencies should be gathered in their Senior Phase: 75% agreed, 11% disagreed and 14% were unsure.

Q3a: Should information be gathered on learners' skills and competencies as part of their Senior Phase?				
Base	**n=**	**% Yes**	**% No**	**% Not sure**
All answering	*678*	**75**	**11**	**14**
Individual – unclassified	*368*	72	14	14
Organisation responses	*56*	84	2	14
Learner/teacher/school response	*254*	77	8	15
Post school sector – Colleges and University	*8*	75	0	25
National Agency or Public Body	*11*	91	0	9
Trade Unions and Professional associations	*9*	78	11	11
Young person's organisation	*7*	86	0	14
Other non-education	*6*	83	0	17
Local Government and Local Authorities	*7*	71	0	29
Other education	*5*	100	0	0
Parent body/group	*1*	100	0	0
Unknown	*2*	100	0	0

The table above shows the percentage and number of respondents answering Q3a about learner skills and competencies

Over seven in ten of all sub-groups supported gathering additional information as part of the Senior Phase. Support was highest among organisations (84%), followed by learner/teacher/school respondents (77%) and unclassified individuals (72%). While there was some variation, most organisations supported the proposal with only one anonymous professional body not giving their backing. There was also some evidence of uncertainty, particularly from the post-school and local government sectors.

Q3b: If you have views on how this might best be done please provide them here.

Overview of responses

Q3b was answered by 513 respondents. Comments focused on how information on learners' skills and competencies could be gathered in the Senior Phase and the benefits and challenges of collecting this information.

Information gathering

The most prevalent suggestion from many respondents, was for skills and competencies to be embedded and evidenced through subject-based qualifications, with meta-skills built into learners' existing classes. On the other hand, a few respondents felt there should be separate classes or qualifications explicitly focused on skills for life, learning and work.

> "I can only see this being viable if all courses offered in schools in the Senior Phase had built in acknowledgement of the skills and competencies necessary to successfully pass the courses/award." – Learner/teacher/school
>
> "Pupils should be able to demonstrate how they combine skills in a groupwork task and be assessed on how well they improve and work with others. This should be part of N4/5/H in every Secondary Subject." - Fife Council, QAHS

There was a clear preference among many for coursework and continuous assessment, rather than formal end-of-year exams, to capture evidence of skills and competencies. However, a few suggested exams could gather evidence; another less common idea was a combination of continuous assessment and final exams. Some, however, made negative comments about end-of-year exams, noting they encourage rote learning rather than demonstrating skills and competencies. The balance between internal and external exams is covered in more detail at Q4. The key point raised in these comments was the move away from an end-of-year exam, regardless of whether it is internally or externally assessed

Another issue was who should provide evidence of learners' skills and competencies. As in Q2, several felt learners should provide self-reported evidence of their skills and competencies, with some calling for teachers' observations to be considered too. Gathering evidence from external organisations such as extra-curricular activity leaders, learners' peers, and parents and carers were advocated by a few respondents.

Also similar to Q2, several respondents called for an online portal where learners could record evidence of their skills and competencies, with a few proposing time in PSE classes or with pastoral care staff for learners to collate this information.

Challenges

A recurring theme among several respondents was the lack of time and resources available for teachers if they are expected to support information gathering alongside their already heavy workload. However, a few respondents suggested this issue could be addressed by integrating the information gathering into curricular time for Senior Phase learners.

Some respondents identified challenges in gathering objective, fair, accurate and consistent information about learners' skills and competencies across different schools, particularly regarding the types of information that should be recorded. Respondents felt Scottish Government guidance would support consistent application of this proposal.

> "There needs to be a level of consistency across the system. Gathering the information needs to be managed carefully." - Midlothian Primary and Secondary HTs and QIOs

Doubts over how far these skills and competencies can be measured or assessed were also expressed by some. Respondents noted that some soft skills are difficult to assess in a subjective and quantifiable manner.

> "These skills are very difficult to measure - how do you measure resilience (particularly without taking account of background)?" - Individual

Other challenges, each mentioned by a few respondents, included:

- Gathering information on skills and competencies should not be a tick-box exercise but rather should collect robust evidence based on learners' performance.
- Evidencing skills and competencies should not detract from academic learning.
- Learners with additional support needs or learning preferences that make them less suited to group tasks may find it challenging to evidence some meta-skills.

Benefits

Although the question did not ask specifically about the proposal's potential benefits, a few respondents noted that an enhanced understanding of their skills and competencies could help learners to decide on future study or career choices. A small number felt gathering this information could improve learners' job applications.

Other themes

Some respondents emphasised the need for a clear skills and competencies framework for Scotland to show the links between curricular classes, skills and competencies, and which subjects develop which skills and competencies. A few said schools could do more to help learners recognise the skills and competencies they gain through their studies through, for example, teachers giving learners information about the skills each qualification aims to develop.

Less commonly mentioned themes, each raised by a few respondents, included:

- The potential of interdisciplinary learning approaches to develop and gather information about skills and competencies.
- A need to ensure the skills and competencies evidenced match what is required in the labour market by, for example, consulting with employers and universities.
- The importance of recognising skills and progression in Gaelic Medium Education.
- Skills and competencies should have more parity of esteem with more traditional academic learning in schools.
- Evidence of skills and competencies should be collected throughout a learner's school career, not just during the Senior Phase, and throughout their life after they have left school.

Gathering evidence on achievements, awards and qualifications

Section 3 of the consultation outlined the variety of learning and assessment experiences involved in Senior Phase qualifications. Topics presented include the balance between internal and external assessment, final or end-of-year exams, and continuous assessment.

Exams and other forms of assessment

Q4: Please share your thoughts on what a 'better balanced' assessment system would look like. As well as considering the balance between external examination and internal assessment you may also wish to comment on the frequency of examinations.

Overview of responses

Many respondents (660) answered Q4 with their views on creating a better balanced assessment system. Responses mainly focussed on two facets of the current assessment system: the emphasis on a final exam and the use of external examination.

While some respondents noted that the terms 'exams' and 'external assessments' are not interchangeable, it is unclear if all respondents used the terminology this way, or to mean the same thing. For consistency, we have treated the two terms separately.

Types of assessment

There was no clear consensus on what a better balanced assessment system would look like. Many respondents favoured a mixture of continuous assessments or smaller, more regular tests and exams. This included mixed views on the weighting between regular assessments and final exams, including the need for different weightings to be used depending on course level, e.g. Higher vs Advanced Higher. There was acknowledgement that some courses currently take continuous assessment into consideration alongside exams, such as Higher and Advanced Higher English, and there was mixed preference without clear consensus as to whether those courses should be kept as is or changed.

Eliminating end-of-year exams entirely was also requested by many, who supported more regular or continuous assessment as an alternative. Others supported more, smaller tests, occurring at regular intervals, such as end of term, end of topic, monthly or weekly. Others advocated for assessments based on alternative formats, as described below.

Several respondents argued that exams are a poor measure of learners' abilities. They pointed out that there was potential to underperform on the day or that learners may be affected by anxiety that hinders their performance. Others also mentioned wellbeing and were concerned that the weight of final exams may cause undue stress on learners. The negative impacts of teaching learners with the sole aim of passing the exam, rather than developing a deep understanding of a subject, were also raised.

> "Having that amount of stress and pressure means that it hinders some students and the way they answer the questions." – Learner/teacher/school

Conversely, the current exam structure was supported by some respondents who felt exams are fair, that qualifications are valued, and that final exams allow students to gain a recognised qualification. A few others noted that exams prepare students for university, test memory and provide an experience of stress that reflect real life experiences.

> "I think external exams maintain credibility and equity." - Individual

Suggested assessment improvements

Several respondents suggested or recommended using a variety of alternative types of assessment. These included: open book exams, oral exams, practical assessments, group projects, longer-term projects, multiple choice assessments, and support for creating portfolios to assess work produced over extended time periods. Digital or online exams were highlighted as a way to manage workload and ensure consistency in marking.

The idea that assessment type should depend on the course, subject or the learner's educational pathway was suggested by several respondents. This included alternative assessment such as project-based for specific courses including practical subjects like STEM, arts, or home economics, or entirely exam based for others such as maths. A few respondents noted this would aid transition to higher education, as university courses tend to mark based on a few factors, including but not limited to exams. In contrast, a few respondents mentioned wanting all courses to follow the same assessment procedures.

> "More ongoing assessment - particularly in practical subjects would ease the pressure of the one-day exam system and perhaps demonstrate abilities and skills in a more relevant way." - Individual

The frequency of exams was mentioned by some respondents. This included a preference for less frequent exams over S4-S6, i.e. two rather than three exams over the three years, as highlighted in Professor Gordon Stobart's 2021 OECD report. A few highlighted the intensity of the exam diet, suggesting there was insufficient time between exams, whether internal or external, to allow students to learn, study or have moments of less stress.

The lack of a Nat4 exam was highlighted by some respondents as especially problematic. They expressed a preference for an exam, suggesting that the lack of an exam has devalued the course in the eyes of employers and left students unprepared for Nat5 if they were to continue. This was mentioned most often in relation to Nat4 Maths.

Internal or external assessments

A combination of internal and external assessments was supported by several respondents. Although there was no clear preference for any one weighting, respondents provided a range of ideal weightings between the two assessment types.

Some respondents supported external assessment in general, and for a variety of different external assessment types, such as exams, projects, and portfolios. This was primarily because external assessments were seen as unbiased and help to uphold national standards.

Several respondents highlighted concerns about the consistency and equity of using internal assessments alone. Some felt it devalued a qualification as it would mean marking lacked national consistency and was open to marking bias.

> "Assessment should be a good balance of continuous internal assessment and external assessment." – Windsor Park School and Sensory Service
>
> "Internal assessment can be effective, but as Covid demonstrated can result in significant inconsistencies and is incredibly time consuming." - Individual

A small number of respondents highlighted the impact of internal assessment on particular groups, such as BME learners, due to the possible biases of teachers and racial stereotyping. Comments cited the review of predicted grades in Scotland during the Coronavirus pandemic which showed that BME learners had lower levels of over-estimation than peers from white ethnic groups.

> "Teacher involvement in the setting of predicted grades in Scotland during the Coronavirus pandemic provides some insight into this. Learners from every ethnic group, on average, experienced over-estimated grades compared with actual performance within their group in previous years. With the exception of African, Caribbean and Black young people, however, every BME group of learners had lower levels of over-estimation than peers from white ethnic groups. This puts those from white ethnic groups at a relative advantage, as their attainment has been artificially raised to a greater extent." - Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER)
>
> "If Scotland is to move forward with more formative assessment relying on coursework marked by teachers, how will we ensure that racial bias (and other forms of bias) does not affect grades? Estimated grades for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners are often lower than actual grades for blind-marked exams." - A working group of anti-racist organisations and education stakeholders: Education Leadership and Professional Learning subgroup of the Scottish Government's Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme.

Regarding internal assessments, some were concerned about the extra pressure it would put on teachers in terms of time and resources required to mark assessments.

Some respondents highlighted the importance of consistency when using internal assessments and provided best practices and opinions on how to ensure equity in marking. These included external moderation, SQA training for teachers, anonymised assignments, and national/standard resources for all assignments. A few supported internal assessments as they rely on teachers' professional judgements, with others noting that we should trust teachers.

Other themes

Themes mentioned by a few respondents each included:

- General suggestions to improve exams, such as having greater flexibility with resits, allowing students to decide when to sit the exams, and providing more 'exit points' for qualifications to increase inclusivity.

- Disadvantages using a portfolio or coursework for assessment, particularly that it might not be the work of a learner who could have been assisted by technology, parents, or tutors.

- Disadvantages of exams on specific groups, such as neurodiverse students, and that exams may increase the poverty-related and gender-related attainment gaps.

- A recommendation to include non-academic skills and attribute in assessments, such as class participation, social skills, and behaviours.

- A suggestion to bring back the Standard Grade exam structure.

How evidence should best be presented

Respondents' views on how best to present evidence of learning and achievements were sought in this section.

Q5 explored the idea of introducing an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the Broad General Education (usually S3), possibly in the form of a digital profile that lists learners' skills, experiences, learning and qualifications.

Q6 invited respondents' comments on a leaving certificate in the Senior Phase that could include evidence of a broader range of achievements beyond subject-based qualifications, such as achievements in individual curriculum areas, skills and competence development and contributions to communities.

Recognising achievement at the end of the Broad General Education (BGE)

Q5: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE.

Overview of responses

Over nine in ten respondents answered Q5. There was no clear consensus among respondents, with comments evenly split between arguments for and against the proposal. Some also discussed what would need to happen for the achievement, award or qualification to be introduced successfully.

Arguments for the proposal

Several respondents suggested this proposal could incentivise more focus among BGE learners; learners might work harder at this stage if they know it will lead to an achievement, award or qualification. Similarly, a few felt it could enhance teachers' focus on BGE if learners are working towards an achievement, award or qualification.

"Qualification from the BGE is a great idea that will aid student motivation and educational staff's attention given to the BGE." – Individual

"Provides more motivation for those in BGE." – The High School of Glasgow

Another recurring theme was the opportunity to give every learner evidence of their skills, which could be especially beneficial for those likely to gain fewer academic qualifications. Respondents emphasised the positive effects on learners' confidence and self-esteem if their achievements are recognised and celebrated.

Some respondents felt this proposal could prepare learners for the Senior Phase by providing experience of working towards an award. At the same time, some suggested it could inform learners' study and employment choices by giving them and their teachers a better understanding their strengths, weaknesses and interests.

Arguments against the proposal

The most common argument against the proposal, put forward by several respondents, was the pressure it could put on teachers to achieve attainment targets in BGE and to have results compared with other schools via league tables. Similarly, some referred to teachers' lack of time and resources to administer an achievement, award or qualification amidst an already busy curriculum. Another theme mentioned by some was the strain that the pressure of being assessed could put on learners' mental health.

> "Learners' and teachers' workload is already at critical. Who is going to design, implement and mark all these assessments?" – Learner/teacher/school
>
> "The Review has set out no evaluation of the balance of costs and benefits of this proposal, including how it might impact adversely on the already unsustainable workloads teachers and leaders face." – NASUWT
>
> "It is not clear what the purpose of such an achievement, award or qualification would be. The EIS would have concerns around any significant addition to the BGE at a time when de-cluttering the curriculum is an urgent priority." – Educational Institute of Scotland

Other arguments against the proposal, each identified by some respondents, included:

- Schools already track achievements in BGE, through methods including SNSA.
- The achievement, award or qualification would not be useful because it would quickly be superseded for most learners by Senior Phase qualifications in S4.
- BGE should be about learning rather than working towards formal qualifications.
- Learners are already formally assessed enough in school; there is no need to begin the process earlier.

A small number warned this proposal could disincentivise learners from further study. Learners may be deterred from continuing to attend school if they find BGE difficult or demoralising, or if they see this award as satisfying the minimum requirement of education and lose focus or do not consider continuing past this point.

> "The worry is that more young people/families will see this as fulfilling a basic requirement of education and not entertain the idea of continuing past this" – Individual
>
> "We have some concern over the terminology and language used here in that 'culminate' does not sit well with 'progression in learning' or 'lifelong learning'. Furthermore, there is a danger that the existence of such a certificate might result in inappropriate gaming and target setting." - School Leaders Scotland

A few pointed out learners do not have enough academic experience or evidence to achieve an award by the end of BGE. A lack of maturity among learners to cope with being assessed at this age was another less common concern.

What would need to happen to introduce the achievement, award or qualification

Several respondents emphasised that this achievement, award or qualification would need to be equitable, with provision made to recognise the accomplishments of learners with additional support needs and other challenges, including neurodiverse individuals, that may hinder their performance at school.

> "Equity is an issue again. Less affluent young people will not get as many opportunities." – Kyle Academy Extended Leadership Team
>
> "Only if there is a chance for students with poor executive skills and chronic ill health to be given proper learning support. Otherwise, they will still get nothing, doesn't matter when or what you call it." - Individual

Other themes, each mentioned by a few respondents, included:

- Learners should be involved in selecting and recording evidence contributing to their achievement, award or qualification so they can showcase what they see as their most significant skills and achievements.
- A profile of learners' skills and achievements should be produced with no formal assessment or exams.
- If implemented, this idea should not add to teachers' workloads.
- A few respondents felt this proposal indicated learners may be allowed to leave full-time education at the end of the BGE. They requested greater clarity around this.

Recognising achievement in the Senior Phase

Q6: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing a type of leaving certificate in the Senior Phase.

Overview of respondents

Responses to this question, which was answered by 625 respondents, focused on the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal to introduce a leaving certificate in the Senior Phase. There was also some discussion of issues that would need to be considered for the certificate to be introduced successfully.

Advantages

The consensus was in favour of this proposal. Several respondents would welcome a leaving certificate that recognises a broader range of learners' achievements, skills and competencies than are evidenced through the current qualifications and assessment system. Respondents noted a leaving certificate would provide a more holistic record of learners' achievements. It could include: skills and competencies developed in the classroom; through out of school hobbies and activities like volunteering; contributions to wider school life such as participation in performances; and other extra-curricular activities

delivered in school such as the [Youth Philanthropist Initiative](#) and [Mentors in Violence Prevention](#).

> "More personalised recognition of achievement is required. Allow room to show exactly where pupils have excelled across the school e.g. digital skills, communication, contribution to wider school activities." – Individual
>
> "This would provide a more accurate picture of their school experience and related learning/achievement than is currently provided by the SQA certificate awarded in August each year." – Learner/teacher/school

Another recurring theme, mentioned by several respondents, including universities and colleges, was that a leaving certificate would provide useful information for employers and universities about learners' skills, competencies and achievements. Similarly, several respondents felt it would help learners to identify achievements to include on their CVs and UCAS applications.

> "A leaving certificate is very common in many international and comparable education systems, and they are regularly used in our admissions process to assess wider skills and competencies of applicants." - University of St Andrews

Some noted that a leaving certificate would formally mark the end of a learner's school career, providing an overview of their achievements and a sense of closure.

Other arguments for the proposal, identified by some respondents, included its value in celebrating all learners' achievements, especially those who lack formal qualifications, and to enhance learners' confidence and motivation to work hard at school by formally recognising a broader range of achievements.

> "We welcome the consideration of a leaving certificate available as part of the Senior Phase, potentially include a broader range of evidence of achievements than subject-based qualifications." – Children in Scotland

Disadvantages

Again, as noted in the overarching themes section, several respondents argued that this proposal could put added pressure on time among school staff if they were expected to compile evidence for the certificate.

> "Potential benefits to this but what would the workload implications be for staff, and would there be an impact on teaching time for existing qualifications?" – Maths Department, Ardrossan Academy

Other recurring themes mentioned by several respondents included doubts over whether a leaving certificate would be of value to employers and further education providers unless it provides information that is helpful to them - for example in making recruitment and admissions decisions - and is not available elsewhere.

> " Consideration of the purpose and objectives need to be clear and widely understood for this to be of value to external settings such as colleges, universities, and employers. May not be suitable for use in university admissions as could only be issued at the end of the Senior Phase." – Universities Scotland

Several respondents noted a view that information about learners' skills and competencies is already captured in various ways including subject qualifications, individual CVs and teacher references. Respondents felt that a leaving certificate is not required because it would duplicate this information.

> "This doesn't seem necessary and is irrelevant for school leavers as they already have a certificate of academic achievements from the SQA." - Braes High School Captains

Similar to the discussion around the pros and cons of considering learners' achievements outside school and college in Q2, some respondents warned this proposal could discriminate against those less able to take part in extra-curricular activities due to time or financial pressures.

A few respondents warned that the requirement to work towards a leaving certificate, as well as formal qualifications, could add to the pressure and stress on learners. A small number noted this certificate should not be seen as marking the end of an individual's learning, as learning continues throughout life.

Considerations for introducing the leaving certificate

The main issue to be considered when introducing a leaving certificate, identified by some respondents, is how to ensure consistency across Scotland in terms of the information to be included on the certificate and methods for verifying it.

> "Who would validate and authenticate this certificate and find out whether indeed a learner had achieved what they claimed?" – Individual

Some respondents requested more clarity about the status of the leaving certificate compared to more formal qualifications. In particular, a few respondents were concerned there could be a two-tier system where some learners achieve formal qualifications and others leave school with only their leaving certificate.

When to award the certificate was also considered by a few respondents. Comments highlighted the importance of recognising that different learners leave school at different points, so the certificate should be awarded at a time suitable for each learner.

> "When would this certification take place? Many of our pupils leave at the end of S5 to take up apprenticeships so could potentially leave without any qualifications if this is an S6 certification." - Individual

A few respondents noted that learners should be involved in developing their own certificates so they can select examples of their achievements and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses.

Technology and assessment

Section 5 of the consultation paper examined how digital technologies could best be used in Scotland's qualifications and assessment system.

The potential of technology

> Q7: How should Scotland's qualifications and assessment system make best use of digital technologies?

Overview of responses

Responses to this question were received from 602 respondents. Comments included suggested uses for digital technology and considerations for its successful use. Many comments were nuanced, with individuals providing balanced answers covering positive and negative aspects of technologies. However, the balance of opinion is in favour of its use with most respondents suggesting uses for digital technologies in qualifications and assessment. Some highlighted the potential of technology to improve efficiency, but there were also concerns, particularly infrastructure constraints such as the availability of suitable IT equipment for schools and learners.

Below, we summarise the suggested uses of technology as well as issues to be considered and the advantages and barriers associated with digital approaches.

Suggested uses of digital technology

Many respondents advocated greater use of digital and online approaches to exams and assessment. Ideas included online written exams, the option for learners to respond to questions verbally, and the potential of incorporating online simulations, video and/or audio recordings and elements of gamification into assessments. Several respondents proposed creating a digital platform to record learners' skills and achievements, possibly using existing resources like Glow and My World of Work. Enabling learners to submit coursework online was another idea put forward by several respondents.

> "We have long argued in this faculty that more of the exams or coursework assessment should be completed and submitted digitally. The technology exists to allow pupils to log into a portal using their candidate number and complete assessments there." – Learner/teacher/school

Considerations

A hybrid system with both digital and non-digital methods was advocated by several respondents. For example, some felt there should always be a paper-based alternative for assessments. A few others said digital technologies should only be used when necessary, for example where learners have difficulty writing.

> "A mix of digital and non-digital assessments would provide a more accurate picture." - Individual

Some respondents highlighted a need for national guidance to promote consistency in the use of digital technologies across Scotland. A few suggested schools and local authorities should pool resources and share learning in using digital technologies, such as the creation of online assessment banks that all schools could draw on.

Advantages

Advantages of using digital technologies were noted; several highlighted the benefits for learners with additional support needs who may find handwritten exams challenging. Respondents felt digital technologies would make it easier for these learners to access exams and assessments. There could be benefits for learners with other challenges associated with traditional exams including those with physical disabilities, and those in remote areas who may benefit from taking part in exams from home rather than travelling to a central location. Other benefits included the ability to upload revision and class materials online for learners to access from home.

> "As a parent of a child with dyslexia, using digital technology would put her more on an equal ground." – Individual
>
> "We feel that digital technologies should be used to 'level the playing field', via the likes of Immersive Readers, etc." – Inverkeithing High School
>
> "I think technology can be very useful for people who have writing, reading and or communication issues as it can be easier on a computer." - Individual

Some comments focused on how technology could make the qualifications and assessment system more efficient. Respondents gave examples of where technology could reduce the workload involved in the system, including using technology to:

- Verify candidates' word counts in assessments rather than teachers or markers.
- Allow for typed exam scripts, which are easier to read than handwriting.
- Enable learners to submit assessments online rather than using printed copies which need to be posted to markers.
- Automatically mark multiple choice assessments rather than teachers.
- Reduce the time between submitting an assessment and receiving the results.
- A few respondents also highlighted the cost savings and environmental benefits of reduced printing and postage.

> "Exams should be digitally produced, and the pupils should type their answers. This would remove many issues like scanning exam scripts and trying to read pupils' writing." – Individual
>
> "One obvious example is the new Higher Applications of Maths course. Students learn on computers, and the assessment is done on a computer... then printed, scanned in, and marked by the SQA just like a paper assessment. It would be better for files to be sent directly to the SQA." - Individual

Some reflected on the increased use of digital technologies in everyday life and the world of work and commented that using digital technologies in assessment would help learners to enhance digital skills that will be useful in later life.

Barriers

While the consensus was largely in favour of using digital technologies, respondents identified several barriers they felt must be addressed.

Most commonly, many respondents identified unequal access to digital devices as a barrier to using digital technologies in qualifications and assessment, particularly among learners from less affluent backgrounds.

> "The EIS recognises the important role digital technologies can play in Scotland's qualifications and assessment system. We would preface any input by noting that digital inequity remains a serious issue for many learners, who lack access to IT devices and to wireless/broadband connectivity. We would further note that digital poverty can be hidden and is easily overlooked." – Educational Institute of Scotland
>
> "It would be unfair to do assessments online as not everyone has equal access to this. A good start would be to ensure all students in Scotland have access to a school iPad." – Learner/teacher/school
>
> "Equality of access should be fully considered, alongside a national standard, to ensure every young person can benefit from these developments." – Learner/teacher/school

Another theme among many respondents, including in CCG discussions, were the infrastructure constraints associated with digital technologies. Several described IT equipment in schools as old, slow, inadequate or unreliable. Some said there was not enough equipment available in schools. Variations in access to technology across schools and local authorities were highlighted by some, and a few noted differences between state and independent schools. Other ideas for addressing these barriers included investing in the equipment available to schools and learners.

Slow or unreliable internet connection was another issues calls for the Scottish Government to act on broadband connectivity across the country.

> "School infrastructure needs to exist and be reliable to sustain any system. In effect, the infrastructure needs to be able to handle the demands. This Is not always the case." – Lasswade High School Staff
>
> "It should not be forgotten that a necessary condition of online assessments is that all schools need to have reliable Wi-Fi provision and sufficient bandwidth for all candidates at all times. This is certainly not the case at present." – Broughton High School, Edinburgh
>
> "The MSYPs explained that the thorough roll out of devices and internet access, particularly to those from low socio-economic backgrounds, would lessen the digital gap." – Scottish Youth Parliament

"Scottish Government as part of a long-term plan must commit now to guarantee broadband connectivity across all of Scotland." – School Leaders Scotland

"In order to maximise the use of technology, there would have to be significant upgrading of equipment, internet access and knowledge with concomitant financial implications." – Scottish Network for Able Pupils

Several respondents noted that teachers' ability to implement any new digital approaches could be constrained by a lack of time to make the changes required. Another recurring theme among several respondents was concern around lack of digital skills among learners. Some respondents also emphasised the need to ensure that all teaching staff have adequate skills to use digital technologies in the classroom.

Other barriers, each identified by some respondents, included:

- A view that digital approaches are inappropriate for some subjects. Subjects including maths, science, and subjects that require performances were identified as unsuitable for assessment via technology.

- A recognition that digital approaches will not suit all learners and that some will require additional support to use digital devices. For example, learners with visual impairments may need access to screen reading software.

- The potential for learners to cheat in online exams by, for example, plagiarising online material, using AI to create answers for them, hackers obtaining and passing on information about the content of exams, or someone else completing the exam on behalf of a learner.

A small number of respondents mentioned: concerns about security, including the privacy of learners' personal information recorded online; the negative impact on spelling and handwriting that could arise from regular use of digital devices; the limitations of digital approaches compared to face-to-face contact; and the importance of learning from other countries' use of digital technologies in qualifications and assessment.

An approach to benefit all learners

This section of the consultation sought views on how a future system of qualifications and assessment should fairly reward learners regardless of their age, disability, gender identity, race, religion/belief, sex, sexual orientation or socio-economic background.

Equity

Q8: How can we make sure that proposals for a future qualification system will uphold the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements?

Overview of responses

The consensus among respondents was heavily in favour of ensuring that a future qualification system upholds the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements.

"Yes, no matter who you are, you should be graded fairly and it should be about your learning abilities." – Individual

Responses to this question, answered by 550 respondents, included a wide range of disparate suggestions to achieve this aim, such as: flexible approaches to teaching and assessment; providing additional support for learners who need it; involving learners, parents and other stakeholders in designing the qualifications system; greater standardisation and consistency in subject and assessment options across schools and local authorities; taking measures to reduce bias in the system; and the importance of recognising a broader range of skills.

Approaches to teaching and assessment

Most commonly, many respondents highlighted flexible teaching and assessment approaches as a means to better satisfy different learning needs and styles among all learners. Proposals included enabling learners to select different forms of assessment, for example, verbal or written, digital or paper-based, depending on their preferences.

"A range of assessment opportunities which reflect all learning styles. Learning which is delivered using a blend of all learning styles." – Individual

"By understanding and accommodating different learning styles." - Individual

"We should have a wide variety of options that are meaningful. A 'one size fits all' approach (which is what we have at the moment) is only a 'one size fits a select few' at most." - Individual

There was some disagreement about the importance of exams. Some respondents called for reduced focus on high-stakes end-of-year exams, regardless of whether they are externally or internally assessed, and more focus on coursework or continuous assessment. However, a few felt externally assessed exams are more likely to uphold learners' rights by removing any potential for conscious or unconscious bias in marking.

Support for learners with additional support needs

In addition to providing flexible teaching and assessment methods for all learners, as discussed above, several respondents emphasised the importance of providing support for learners who need additional support or alternative arrangements. Examples of learners who might need additional support include those physical disabilities, sensory issues, mental health conditions, neurodiverse learners and individuals for whom English is a second language. Respondents emphasised that different groups require different support, but examples of measures called for included additional time in exams, coloured paper or backgrounds, exam papers translated into other languages, flexibility around the need for learners to perform with a backing track in expressive arts qualifications, and more generally providing more Support for Learning resources in schools.

"Qualifications should be accessible to all our young people and learners, with in-built capacity to adapt to accommodate specific student needs or disabilities so that all qualifications are within reach to those who would like to earn them." – Scottish Funding Council

"Making sure anyone with additional support needs get the support needed for them." – Notre Dame Primary

"Special arrangements would need to be made in some cases, e.g. some disabilities. This is already being done, for example for children with dyslexia." - Individual

Co-design

Several called for learners, teachers, parents and carers, and other stakeholders with expertise in specific areas to be involved in co-design of the qualifications system to identify their needs and how to embed them into the system.

"Achieving this aim will require substantial, meaningful collaboration with practitioners and stakeholders who understand how equality can be effectively embedded, including those whose expertise is informed by lived experience." - Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER)

Greater standardisation and consistency

Another suggestion made by several respondents was the need for more standardisation and consistency across schools and local authorities, regardless of their size, location and socio-economic profile. This mainly focused on consistent availability of subjects but also included standardisation in terms of resources and options for assessment.

"Learners should have access to a wide range and levels of qualifications in a more consistent way across Scotland, because the range of subjects that may be available to some groups of learners may advantage or disadvantage some groups over other groups depending upon the level of deprivation in their catchment and where it is located." – University of Glasgow, School of Education

Measures to reduce bias

Some comments included suggestions for reducing the potential for conscious or unconscious bias in any future qualifications system. The importance a credible and transparent new system, with rigorous quality assurance and moderation, was emphasised by some. A few noted that the current practice of anonymous marking of exams helps to uphold learners' rights and reduce any bias. A small number called for regular training for teachers, including those involved in setting and marking exams, to avoid any potential conscious or unconscious bias. Calls were also made by a few for the qualifications system to be culturally sensitive by, for example, not scheduling exams during Ramadan.

> "If Scotland is to move forward with more formative assessment relying on coursework marked by teachers, how will we ensure that racial bias (and other forms of bias) does not affect grades?" - Anti-Racism in Education - Curriculum Reform Sub-Group

Recognise a wider range of skills

Some proposed greater recognition of learners' skills and achievements gained outside formal qualifications. This would allow all learners, including those with fewer academic qualifications, to celebrate their achievements. Some called for more provision and recognition of practical and skills-based courses in school and non-academic routes after S4 such as apprenticeships. This would be beneficial for learners less suited to more traditional academic subjects.

> "At its centre, it must uphold the rights of all learners to recognise and celebrate all achievements that are valuable to them." – YouthLink Scotland

Other themes

Several respondents discussed the need for greater time and resources to be made available to teachers and schools to allow them to meet the needs of all learners, while some others called for more use of digital technologies, as discussed in Q7.

Another idea from some was for education staff to have greater awareness of children's rights and the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). A few reflected on the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law and the need to ensure the qualifications and assessment system is aligned with its principles, particularly in terms of equitable access to qualifications and out of school opportunities as well as the need to consider young people's views on the education system.

> "Many learners noted feeling like their education was happening to them rather than with them and called for constant evaluation and consultation to uphold Article 12 of the UNCRC (the right for children and young people to have their views heard and taken seriously)." – Scottish Youth Parliament

> "As Scotland moves to incorporate the UNCRC into Scots Law, The Prince's Trust believes an equitable and rights-based offer for all learners around education must include access to youth work opportunities. Our vision for Scottish education is that every young person can experience their right to an education which helps them to develop their personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential (UNCRC Article 29)." – The Prince's Trust

A few respondents commented on a gender imbalance in certain subjects; for example, an under-representation of girls in STEM subjects but an over-representation in languages and expressive arts. These respondents called for all qualifications to be accessible and inclusive for all learners regardless of their gender identity.

Another theme raised by a small number of respondents is the need to recognise the distinctive nature of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and to increase the qualifications available in Gaelic.

> "This is a great opportunity to work towards a system that is more equitable and inclusive. At the moment pupils in GME are unable to access a full Gaelic medium curriculum, 3-18. The majority of GME pupils still do not have the opportunity to continue to develop their language skills in secondary education. This is an essential area for development relating to GME pupils. The rights of GME pupils to gain awards and qualifications through Gaelic must be guaranteed in any system and evidence provided that these rights are safeguarded." - Comann nam Pàrant (Nàiseanta)
>
> "The concept that Scottish Education is provided in the medium of English or Gaelic should permeate all strategic thinking and development planning." - Bòrd na Gàidhlig

Other themes, each identified by a few respondents, included:

- Ensuring employers, colleges and universities understand and value the new qualifications system.
- Addressing inequalities is an issue that cannot be addressed by schools alone.
- Support for learners exceeding expectations and those with additional support needs.
- Flexibility around the age at which learners can sit qualifications and leave school.
- The continued need for the appeals system.
- Reducing pressure on teachers from attainment targets and school league tables.
- The importance of learning from approaches in other countries.
- A few respondents in CCG discussions raised issues around access to National Qualifications among home-educated learners.

Have we missed anything?

The consultation's final question invited respondents to raise any other comments about qualifications and assessment not previously covered in the consultation.

> Question 9: Is there anything else in relation to the reform of qualifications and assessment which is not covered in this consultation which you would like to raise?

This question was answered by 373 respondents. Most comments re-iterated themes that have been addressed in previous questions; this chapter therefore presents themes raised in response to this question that have not been covered elsewhere in this report.

Some respondents discussed the approach that should be taken to establish a vision for Scotland's qualifications and assessment system. However, opinion was split between those who felt there should be immediate radical change, and those who advocated a more gradual, incremental approach.

Those who called for a gradual, incremental approach did not detail precisely how they would like change to happen. However, they emphasised the need to consider and reflect on both the current system and forecasted future digital, environmental and economic challenges before making an informed decision about reform. One called for adaptations to take place in stages in contrast to the rapid introduction of CfE.

"I think we need to talk about adaptation of our current system in stages rather than a CfE style 'big bang' change." – Boroughmuir High School

"We need to consider the purpose of education when considering both the review of qualifications and assessment; and the wider, system-wide reform as outlined in the National Discussion on Education. If we are truly 'putting the learner at the centre', then we need to design and provide an educational system that supports and enables them to develop the competencies, skills, values and attributes – as well as knowledge – that will enable them to thrive in an increasingly challenging future – as well as seize the opportunities that this presents." – Learning for Sustainability Scotland

A few called for more collaboration among schools, colleges and universities. Ideas included co-designing subjects' curricula to ensure they meet the needs of further education, more alignment between the evidence collected in both schools and colleges, and creating more flexible links between schools and colleges to assist learners interested in a vocational pathway such as Foundation Apprenticeships.

A small number discussed teachers' pay and working conditions such as the bureaucracy and paperwork involved and concerns around poor learner behaviour. A few comments mentioned buildings and infrastructure that support the system including room capacities for exams.

Differences by respondent group

There was a high degree of consistency in the themes evident across the consultation responses and the Collaborative Community Group (CCG) discussions facilitated as part of the Review, but also little divergence of views between different types of respondent.

Differences by respondent type to the consultation's two quantitative questions are presented as part of the analysis of Q1a and Q3a. This chapter focuses on differences evident in the other qualitative questions. While responses to these questions are nuanced and not quantifiable, the analysis below outlines a few points where views were more or less prevalent among respondents from different categories or sectors: learners and teachers, employers, public bodies and organisations in the post-school sector and trade unions and professional associations. This section also includes a summary of responses to the survey of parents and carers conducted as part of the consultation, which received 164 responses.

This section is based only on comments from individuals and organisations who responded to the consultation, and is not intended to be representative of a sector or category as a whole.

Learner, teacher and school responses[2]

As the largest group of respondents, the views of this audience are largely aligned with the overall weight of opinion expressed across the total sample. There are very few notable divergences in views, but these respondents were more likely than respondents in general to recognise the benefits of an achievement, award or qualification at the end of BGE in giving every learner evidence of their skills, progress and achievements (Q5). Overall, however, and similar to the overall responses, there was no clear consensus among this group concerning this proposal.

Employers

There were three CCG discussions with employers: one each for private sector; public and third sector; and SME employers. Challenges around recruitment and workforce shortages were discussed to a greater extent by employers than other groups. Employers gave examples where it was difficult to find the right person to fill vacancies due to shortages in the labour market.

However, the themes raised frequently by employers reflected themes covered elsewhere in this report, with employers in the CCG discussions having a particular focus on:

- Ensuring learners gain the skills needed for the workplace through school and college qualifications.

- Promoting parity of esteem among traditional academic subjects and skills-based vocational qualifications.

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[2] The learner/teacher/school category was created by analysts and it is not possible to distinguish between learners' and teachers' responses. While they have been grouped together for analysis purposes, we recognise that they may hold different views about some of these issues.

- Ensuring a closer link between schools and industry so teachers can provide accurate information about the types of roles available in different sectors.

- The importance of lifelong learning, including using micro-credentials that offer short-term learning opportunities focused on skills for certain workplaces and industries.

- The benefits of a blended approach to assessment, including coursework and practical activities, to reduce focus on final exams. Respondents highlighted a need for adequate teacher training so ensure assessment takes place consistently.

- Support for a digital profile of learners' skills and achievements, including non-academic experiences, so employers have information about individuals' wider achievements. However, it was acknowledged that care needs to be taken to ensure the information is verified and accurate.

- Employers highlighted that qualifications are not all that matter in recruitment decisions; they are also interested in an individual's wider skills, achievements, values and competencies.

- The potential of digital technologies in learning, qualifications and assessment, such as online simulations.

- There is a need to recognise there is no 'one size fits all' approach and, while schools focus on channelling learners into positive destinations, there perhaps needs to be more of a focus on ensuring individuals reach the right destination for them.

Public bodies

Twenty-two respondents were categorised as a public body, including national agencies, public bodies, local government and local authorities.

The themes raised by respondents in this category largely aligned with the overall responses. While it should be noted that this sector represents a small number of respondents, a few examples where the views of this group diverged slightly from the overall sample are outlined below.

Concerns around ensuring consistency across schools and colleges in recording learners' achievements outside education were more pronounced among public bodies than respondents overall. Similarly, this group was more likely to raise concerns about learners who cannot access extra-curricular activities outside school or college due to financial or other pressures being at a disadvantage.

Other themes which were more likely to be mentioned in responses from public bodies than respondents more generally included:

- Warning BGE should be about learning rather than ticking boxes which could be the result of introducing an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE.

- Describing both the benefits of online exams and expressing concern about digital skills among teachers.

- Concerns about consistency and standardisation, particularly in terms of subject access and choice across schools and local authorities.

Public bodies were more supportive of a combination of coursework and small tests and exams than other audiences, and were more likely to recognise benefits for learners in gaining skills for the real world through using digital technologies.

Universities and colleges

Ten respondents represented organisations in the post-school sector including universities and colleges. Again, this is a small proportion of overall respondents and their views largely aligned with overall responses, but there are some notable comparisons between the views of this group and those of respondents more generally.

For example, organisations in the post-school sector were more likely to comment on the benefits for employers and universities of a leaving certificate at the end of the Senior Phase than respondents in general. They felt a nationally recognised system would provide helpful information for employers and universities when considering applications from learners, as well as providing an opportunity to recognise a broader range of skills and competencies.

In CCG discussions, universities and colleges confirmed the value they place on learners' skills, in addition to their academic achievements. Participants voiced their support for recognising learners' contribution to society and achievements out of school and college, commenting that while qualifications are a stepping-stone, skills are of value for an individual's lifetime.

In common with public bodies, respondents in the post-school sector were more likely than respondents in general to emphasise the importance of ensuring consistency across schools and colleges in recording learners' achievements outside education, and to raise concerns about learners who cannot access extra-curricular activities outside school or college due to financial or other pressures being at a disadvantage.

Post-school sector respondents were also more supportive of a combination of coursework and small tests and final exams than other audiences, and were more likely to recognise benefits for learners in gaining skills for the real world through using digital technologies.

Trade unions and professional associations

Thirteen responses were submitted by trade unions and professional associations, and there was a CCG discussion involving teachers' unions.

Again, there was little divergence between views among this group and responses more widely. However, trade unions and professional associations were more likely to express concerns around time and resources than other respondents, noting that a heavy workload leaves teachers with little time to focus on anything other than course content.

In the CCG discussions, teachers' unions shared reservations about the proposed achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE, although there was more support for a leaving certificate at the end of the Senior Phase.

Other issues highlighted by trade unions and professional associations, in line with other respondents, include inequalities in access to extra-curricular activities and digital

technologies, and, when considering a 'better balanced' assessment system, the importance of flexibility to recognise that different subjects may require different forms of assessment.

Survey of parents and carers

A survey of parents and carers was conducted as part of the work of one of the CCGs; 164 responses to the survey were received. One notable area of divergence between parents and carers and the main consultation sample was the proposal to introduce an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE. In general, there was no clear consensus about this proposal. However, the survey asked a similar question about recognising the learning of all young people when they finish the BGE, and respondents were broadly supportive. Seven was the average response on a scale of one (disagree) to ten (agree).

Otherwise, parents and carers were generally aligned with the views expressed by consultation respondents overall. There was broad support for the proposals, with respondents commenting on their benefits such as recognising a broader range of learning, celebrating all learners' achievements including those less likely to be successful with traditional academic subjects, reducing the focus on traditional exams and rote memorisation, and a greater availability of skills-based subjects.

Parents and carer survey responses also raised concerns similar to those identified overall. These included the potential impact on teachers' time and workload, difficulties in ensuring consistency across schools, inequalities in access to extra-curricular activities and digital devices, the risk of overlooking or diluting core academic subjects, and warnings around cheating and dishonesty if there is less focus on traditional exams.

Conclusions

The range of views identified in this consultation provides an essential evidence base for the Scottish Government to draw on when planning Scotland's future qualifications and assessment system. Overall, there is clear support for reform, demonstrated by:

- Just over three-fifths (61%) agreed that information about learners should be gathered across all four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence.

- Many felt information should be collected about learners' achievements outside school and college, for example participation in extra-curricular activities including sports, music, drama, art and youth organisations such as Scouts and Guides.

- Strong support (75%) for the proposal to gather information on learners' skills and competencies as part of the Senior Phase, with a clear preference for this to be captured using coursework and continuous assessment.

- Support for improved use of digital technologies including online exams and assessments, a digital platform to record learners' skills and achievements, and enabling learners to submit coursework online.

- Clear backing for ensuring a future qualification and assessment system upholds the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements.

Respondents were in favour of introducing a leaving certificate in the Senior Phase to provide more holistic recognition of learners' achievements, skills and competencies. However, there was no clear consensus on the proposal to introduce an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE.

There was no clear consensus on what a 'better balanced' assessment system would look like. Many favoured a mixture of continuous assessments or smaller, regular tests and exams. Many requested eliminating end-of-year exams entirely, regardless of whether they are internally or externally assessed; however, some others supported the current exam structure. There were also differences in opinion regarding the relative merits of internal and external assessment, with several calling for a combination of the two.

Some themes were mentioned by a large proportion of respondents at multiple questions, often highlighting issues to consider when implementing the proposals. Most common was the potential negative impact on teachers' workload, followed by a concern that gathering information on achievements outside school and college could discriminate against those who cannot easily access extra-curricular opportunities. Calls were also made for consistent, standardised approaches to be used across Scotland, and for parity of esteem for academic and vocational or skills-based qualifications.

This report provides a high-level analysis of the range of respondents' experiences, expertise and views[3]. While there is broad support for reform, the nuance in respondents' perspectives means it is unlikely the proposals will fully satisfy all stakeholders. Phase 3 of the Review will therefore help to refine and clarify the finer details of the proposals.

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[3] For more detail, readers are encouraged to look to individual responses where permission was given for publication via the Scottish Government's consultation website.