Findings from the school and college teacher consultation on the recommendations of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment and National Discussion on Education

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Contents

Executive Summary

The Scottish Government published the National Discussion on Education in May 2023 and the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment in June 2023. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills consulted with the school and college teaching profession to seek their views on the recommendations. An online survey, which ran between July and November 2023, received 2,152 responses - 61% were from individuals and 39% (835) were from groups. In total, the group responses represent the views of around 9,300 people.

Priorities for short-term, medium-term and long-term action

Based on the recommendations of the National Discussion for Education, respondents were asked to list their top priorities for short-term, medium-term, and long-term action. Responses were extremely varied and, thus, there was little consensus on what the top priorities should be at each stage.

Short-term priorities

The most common answers for short-term priorities were funding, qualifications and assessment, and clarity on how education reforms will be implemented.

- Funding: Around 15% of responses said that education reform needs to be underpinned by adequate and sustained funding to: increase teaching and support staff; address teacher workload; support pupils with additional support needs; and improve curricular and technological resources.

- Qualifications and assessment: Around 11% of responses listed qualifications and assessment as a priority. Respondents want to see parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications, but opinion was split between those who think examinations should be reduced in the senior phase and those who think examinations should be retained as is. Those in support of a reduction believe it will improve pupil wellbeing and will provide a fairer measurement of ongoing achievement. Those who oppose a reduction have concerns as to how internal assessment can be standardised across the country.

- Clarity on education reform: Around 10% of responses said that clearer guidance on what education reform will look like and how it will be implemented is needed. It was felt that the recommendations are too vague and further information is needed on: the timetable for implementation; key actions for teachers and schools; the content of the Scottish Diploma of Achievement; curriculum design; and internal assessment methods.

Medium-term priorities

The most common answers for medium-term priorities were qualifications and assessment, learning and development, digital skills and infrastructure, and curriculum.

- Qualifications and assessment: Around 15% of responses listed qualifications and assessments as a priority. Respondents think a broader range of vocational pathways should be developed but opinion was, again, split between those who think examinations should be reduced and those who think they should be retained as is.

- Learning and development: Around 11% of responses said teachers and support staff need more learning and development opportunities. Specific training needs include: digital skills, Additional Support Needs, and pupil mental health and wellbeing. Professional development will also be required to support teachers to understand, implement, and deliver the proposed changes.

- Digital skills and infrastructure: Around 10% of responses identified digital related issues as a top priority. Primarily, responses referred to digitally upskilling teachers and pupils, investing in digital infrastructure, and addressing digital inequity, both at a local authority level and pupil level.

- Curriculum: Around 10% of responses said the curriculum was a priority. Respondents said the curriculum should be simplified and delivered more consistently across the country. They saw the Scottish Diploma of Achievement as an opportunity to develop a new curriculum which should be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure it meets the needs of pupils.

Long-term priorities

The most common answers for long-term priorities were qualifications and assessment, curriculum, and funding.

- Qualifications and assessment: Around 20% of responses said that qualifications and assessments were a top priority. Similar to the responses for short-term and medium-term, responses can broadly be divided into three sub-priorities: reducing the number of examinations in favour of ongoing assessment; ensuring that pupils can access a range of pathways; and retaining examinations in the senior phase.

- Curriculum: Around 12% of responses said the curriculum was a top priority. This can be, again, divided into three sub-priorities: simplifying the curriculum, curriculum design and development, and ongoing review.

- Funding: Around 8% of responses said that funding was a priority. It was noted that the success of education reform is reliant on sufficient, long-term funding for the staff and resources that will be needed to successfully deliver the proposed changes. Many respondents were concerned that funding will be insufficient.

Views on the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment recommendations

Respondents were asked to select which recommendations from the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment are the most important and which, if any, they disagreed with.

Most important recommendations

The five recommendations that respondents thought were most important are outlined below:

- Workforce and professional learning: 68% of responses said that this was one of the most important recommendations They believed that teachers would need time to undertake an extensive programme of professional learning and development to deliver the changes and that the other proposals cannot be achieved without this.

- Modularised courses: 43% of responses said that this was one of the most important recommendations. They liked the flexibility and possibility of personalisation which would allow pupils to work at their own pace. They also felt that modularising would support learner motivation as pupils will have more opportunities to demonstrate achievement and to study the aspects of courses at which they are strongest.

- Digital profiles and assessment methods: 43% of responses said that this was one of the most important recommendations. Respondents thought that digital profiles are a good idea as they would allow pupils to easily record all their achievements in one place and ensure that achievements are not forgotten. There were concerns about the feasibility of digital profiles and assessment methods, given digital inequities across the country.

- Parity of esteem: 32% of responses said that this was one of the most important recommendations. Respondents emphasised the need for equal recognition of academic and vocational qualifications. They called for a cultural shift to eliminate biases against vocational qualifications, advocating for standardised qualification levels and a more equitable acknowledgment of alternative pathways.

- Assessment (Reduce the number of external examinations in the Senior Phase; increase the breadth of assessment methods including digital

assessment methods and remove external assessment up to SCQF level 5.): 31% of responses said that the proposed changes to assessment were one of the most important recommendations. Respondents supported reducing the number of high-stakes examinations, citing the detrimental impact on students' mental health. Continuous assessment throughout the year was considered a more comprehensive demonstration of attainment.

Disagreement with recommendations

The five recommendations that respondents most disagree with are outlined below.

- Assessment: 57% of responses disagreed with this recommendation. Respondents are concerned that pupils will struggle with the transition to Highers if examinations are removed at SCQF Level 5. They also had questions about how internal assessments can be marked fairly and consistently across the country and whether internally assessed qualifications will be seen as credible by employers and Further and Higher Education institutions. Respondents also noted the workload implications for teachers if they are to be responsible for internal assessment.

- Project Learning: 44% of responses disagreed with this recommendation. Respondents did not feel sufficiently informed on the details of Project Learning and were, thus, concerned about the practical logistics of delivering it. They were strongly opposed to the group-based element as they believed that not all pupils would take equal responsibility for the project. There were also concerns that Project Learning would disadvantage pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds who have fewer resources and less support.

- Personal Pathway: 39% of responses disagreed with this recommendation. Respondents were concerned that it would disadvantage pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds and widen the poverty-related attainment gap, given that pupils from wealthier backgrounds have greater access to extra-curricular activities. They thought it may also disadvantage pupils living in rural areas, looked after children, young carers, and disabled pupils. Some respondents also argued that pupils should be free to pursue interests and hobbies without the expectation that it will become a measure of attainment.

- Adopt the Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA): 36% of responses disagreed with this recommendation. Respondents expressed concerns about insufficient information on the SDA's structure, assessment, and curriculum. Concerns were also raised regarding the practical challenges of implementing the SDA, including issues related to teacher workload, resources, and funding. Additionally, worries were voiced about its potential to widen the attainment gap, and scepticism about the diploma's academic rigor and perceived value in comparison to other qualifications.

- Digital profiles and digital assessment methods: 28% of responses disagreed with this recommendation. Concerns were raised over unequal access to

devices/internet and inadequate IT infrastructure in some schools, potentially widening socio-economic inequalities. Questions were raised about the purpose of digital profiles, with concerns about their unclear value in further education and employment and ethical considerations, including plagiarism, data security, and over-reliance on technology.

Introduction

On 31 May 2023, the Scottish Government published ["All Learners in Scotland Matter"](#), the final report of the National Discussion on Education, facilitated by Professor Carol Campbell and Professor Alma Harris. This report outlines the Vision, Values and Call to Action for the future direction of Scottish education.

On 22 June 2023, we published ["It's Our Future"](#), the final report of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment which was led by Professor Louise Hayward. Recommendations in this report centre around the introduction of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA) in the Senior Phase, with three mandatory elements: Personal Pathway, Programmes of Learning and Project Learning.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills committed to seeking views from the teaching profession and others across the system before responding to these reports.

An online survey was created to enable teachers and college teaching staff to provide views on these reports. Supporting materials and a link to the online survey were sent to all schools via Directors of Education, and to all college Principals at the end of July 2023. Views from the independent school sector were sought via the Scottish Council of Independent Schools who were asked to share the survey with their members. The survey was open for 13 weeks and closed on the 1st November 2023.

The consultation received 2,152 responses. 61% (1,317) of responses were from individuals and 39% (835) were from groups. In total, the group responses represent the views of around 9,300 people. Almost all respondents were from schools, a small number were from the college sector and a handful of responses were received from the Community Learning and Development and Youth Work Sector.

Since respondents were self-selected, they may not be representative of teachers across the entire education sector. The sample may be skewed towards teachers who have a particular interest or perspective on the proposals for education reform. This could mean that certain viewpoints are either overrepresented or underrepresented, making it difficult to draw generalisable conclusions.

What is your top priority for a short-term action?

Respondents were asked what their top priority for short-term action is, in relation to the National Discussion on Education report. Responses were extremely varied and, thus, there was little consensus on what the top priority for short-term action should be. However, the most common answers are set out below.

Funding

Around 15% of responses, said that funding should be the top priority for short-term action. Of those responses, around a third quoted from the National Discussion on Education report, stating that the top short-term priority was to ensure "adequate sustained funding to provide staffing and specialist resources to achieve commitment to inclusivity and meet the needs of each learner, including those with additional support needs."

Over half of the responses mentioned that more funding is needed for staffing, specifically to increase the number of teachers and support staff in classrooms. Some respondents were concerned about the implications of the proposed education reforms on the workload, wellbeing and learning and development needs of teachers. They stressed that staffing levels will need to increase for the proposed reforms to be successfully implemented.

> "…I currently teach so much, that I frequently have days with no free periods; cover requirements for absent colleagues are high, because of the stress levels people are experiencing. Classes are full, and the marking from 32-pupil classes is incredibly time-consuming. It would be nice to have time to even think about this report, and its consequences. The reality is that most teachers won't have this time. So: more teachers, and smaller classes. I.e. more money is needed." – High school teacher

Many of the responses noted that that funding to support pupils with additional support needs (ASN), in mainstream education, needs to be increased. Specifically, respondents argued for more trained specialist support staff to support pupils with ASN in the classroom.

> "Greater funding and resourcing for ASN provision. The number of pupils presenting with high levels of need is not being matched by funding. We urgently need a dramatic increase in funding if inclusivity is to be more than a political buzz word." – High school teacher

Particular concerns were raised by a few respondents about the impact that increasing levels of ASN have on teachers' ability to meet the needs of not only pupils with ASN, but all pupils in the classroom.

"Year on year cuts to PSAs [Pupil Support Assistants], ASN teachers, and specialist settings mean that we are now not getting it right for any child in the education system. Unsupported young people with ASN are not having their needs met and this is also impacting on those in the classroom who do not have any additional needs." – Primary school ASN teacher

Some respondents also highlighted the need for additional funding for the curricular and technological resources that will be needed to deliver the proposed new courses. This was seen as particularly pertinent for practical or vocational courses which are often more costly to deliver.

"Better funding and resource provision to schools. Cost of running courses are increasing significantly while budgets are being continuously reduced. Vocational subjects for example practical woodworking, metalworking and cookery are struggling due to funding." - High school teacher

Qualifications and assessment

Around 11% of responses said that qualifications and assessments were a top priority for short term action. This can broadly be divided into three sub-priorities: reducing the number of examinations in the senior phase; parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications; and retaining examinations in the senior phase.

Some respondents said that reducing the number of examinations in the senior phase was an immediate priority. They believed that pupils should be assessed via a combination of external examinations and internal teacher judgement. For some, this was to ensure the wellbeing of young people given the stress that is often associated with high stake examinations. Others felt that more time should be focused on developing pupils' skills and learning, rather than preparing for examinations.

"We believe that a final exam being the only way to determine an overall grade is no longer meeting the needs of our learners. A move to the new idea where learners build credit throughout the session, which then contribute to the final award is more suitable. We see this as a huge priority in Scottish education. The pandemic and the use of the ACM [alternative certification model] highlighted this, and how it gave our learners a better opportunity to succeed." – High school teachers (group response)

"Remove external assessment in S4 to allow more time to focus on learning, developing skills, knowing themselves as learners, planning own pathway." – Headteacher

Many of the respondents wanted to see an immediate move towards the promotion of alternative pathways. This included ensuring there is parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications and increasing access to, and funding for, existing vocational courses.

> "Improve existing vocational qualifications. Fund them properly and make them equal with academic achievements. Provide resources for teachers to deliver vocational courses." – High school teacher

> "Improve access to existing qualifications in school and/or promoting college options to suitable students in S3/4." – High school teacher

Some respondents stressed their disagreement with the proposal to reduce examinations. Concerns were raised about: whether internal assessments are robust, credible and can be standardised nationally; how to mitigate bias in internal assessment; the impact of internal assessment on teacher workload; and the perceived lack of consultation with teachers and other stakeholders.

> "Abandon any attempt to remove external assessments from National 5 courses. Examinations are the most equitable way of assessing pupils, and should stay." – High school teacher

> "Further reflection is needed before serious changes are made to the Scottish education system which will have a lasting and negative impact on generations of pupils to come. Greater consultation is required with both employers and further education bodies, to ensure that the removal of National 5 qualifications is in the best interest of ALL of our young people. In my opinion these examinations should be retained, however schools and centres should not be 'forcing' all students to attempt them." – High school teacher

Clarity on how education reforms will be implemented

Around 10% of responses said that a top priority for short-term action was to receive clearer guidance on what education reform will look like and how it will be implemented. Overall, these respondents felt that the current recommendations are too vague in explaining how the reforms would work in practice. That said, they believe there is an immediate priority to provide more detailed information on the proposals.

This included a clear timeline for implementation which should set out key milestones and deadlines for any actions required by schools and teaching practitioners, and which should be clearly communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

Respondents also said that they need clear examples of what the three pathways of the Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA) would look like in practice, as this is currently hard to envision.

> "Significantly more information for school staff - show us what this potentially looks like in practice. Give a specific and concrete subject example of each of the three elements of the Diploma, including teaching resources, assessment and verification procedures." – High school teachers (Group response)

> "Full examples of what an SDA may look like for different students including different subject areas." – High school teachers (Group response)

Similarly, respondents wanted clarity on how the proposals will impact on curriculum design, with clear examples of how it will look for specific subjects across the curriculum. There was also confusion on how Project Learning and the Personal Pathway will be integrated into the curriculum.

> "Need to know much more detail about what this implies for curriculum design & delivery in a practical sense, for both learners and teachers." – High school teachers (group response)

> "As teachers we need VERY clear guidance on the project learning - we need to know if this will be timetabled separately from the programmes of learning and who will be responsible for guiding, assessing the project learning, what will course looks like and will there be national resources"– High school teachers (group response)

Respondents also wanted clear guidance on what assessments will look like, particularly how internal assessments will be designed and who by, and how the credibility and impartiality of internal assessments will be maintained.

> "Exemplar/Clarification document that is a clear and robust guide to: what will the certificates entail in the teaching, assessing and implementation; how will each modules be created, assessed and verified; how will there be a unified standard set for each subjects with a wealth of support materials, a la Understanding Standards on the SQA site and; how the new qualifications will be promoted to pupils, parents, third party agents and employers, unis and colleges." – High school teacher

Other short-term priorities

A range of other short-term priorities were identified in fewer numbers. This included:

- Digital skills and infrastructure – around 7% of responses noted the need for digital upskilling of teachers and pupils; upgrading digital infrastructure; and ensuring all pupils have access to a device.

- Learning and development – around 7% of responses stressed that teachers and support staff will need adequate time to participate in learning and

development opportunities as the recommendations are developed and implemented.

- Ongoing consultation - around 5% of responses argued for further consultation with teachers, pupils, parents, employers, and higher and further education institutions throughout the planning and development of the proposed reforms.

- Behaviour and attendance – around 4% of responses wanted to see clear actions put in place to tackle poor behaviour, violence, bullying and low attendance.

- Pupil and teacher wellbeing – around 4% responses wanted to see a greater focus on, and more support for, the physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing of pupils, and action to reduce teacher stress and workload.

What is your top priority for a medium-term action?

Respondents were asked what their top priority for medium-term action is. Responses were again varied and, thus, there was not strong agreement on what the top priority for medium-term action should be. However, the most common answers are set out below.

Qualifications and assessment

Around 15% of responses said that qualifications and assessments were a top priority for medium-term action. These responses were broadly similar to those given by respondents who said examinations and assessments were their top priority for short-term action. Responses can be divided into three sub-priorities: ongoing assessment; developing alternative pathways; and retaining external examinations.

Some respondents, again, argued for the reduction of external assessments and for teacher judgement to be given greater importance in assessment. However, responses had a greater focus on the importance of ongoing assessment of pupils throughout their educational journey, rather than just in the senior phase.

> "That the current system of exams changes so that teacher input/observations is given more weight. An exam only provides a glimpse into what a pupil knows on that current day and can be influenced by so many variables. Exams cause so much stress and anxiety and don't give a full picture into the skills and experience that a pupil has." – Primary school teacher

"To assess Pupils throughout their academic career rather than wait until the senior phase. It is important that ongoing individual assessments take place throughout pupils educational journey to prepare them fully for the senior phase and further education." – High school teacher

However, respondents also recognised the workload implications this may have for teachers and the need for robust standards.

"Working on standards for internal assessment at senior phase level, and how this will be managed and maintained across Scotland." – High school teacher

"End exams and external assessment but only with proper time and resourcing in schools to manage the increased workload of internal assessment." – High school teachers (group)

The promotion of alternative pathways was, again, considered a priority. Responses indicated, however, that in the medium-term the focus should be on developing a broader range of vocational pathways. Respondents noted the need for vocational qualifications to have parity of esteem, with some respondents arguing that vocational subjects should be fully embedded within the curriculum for *all* pupils, including those who take an academic pathway.

"Create more vocational pathways for young people with equal standing as academic assessments." – Primary school teacher

"More vocational course with a higher status- all children take some vocational courses, so has same status, this should be mandatory alongside English and Maths to develop a wider set of skills and a more resilient workforce." – Primary school teachers (group response)

Some respondents stressed the importance of also building relationships with colleges, employers, and industries to provide a broader range of vocational opportunities, work experience, and employability skills.

"Development of more vocational subjects and stronger links with different industries to provide all learners, whether academic or not, with life-long opportunities." – Primary school teacher

"In the medium term, establish partnerships with local businesses and industries to create opportunities for students to gain practical experience and develop employability skills, bridging the gap between education and the workforce." – Independent school rector

Some respondents were, again, critical of the proposal to reduce examinations. The responses to this question, however, had a greater focus on arguing for the reintroduction of National 4 examinations. Respondents argued that National 4 qualifications lack credibility due to the absence of external assessment which puts pupils at a disadvantage. For this reason,

they have concerns about the removal of external assessment at National 5 level.

> "Not remove exams at Level 5. Review National 4 course programmes and assessment to ensure they are fit for purpose. e.g. regarding National 4 - internally assessed qualifications don't have the credibility or rigour and can lead to inequality with regards to success and achievement for learners." – High school teachers (group response)

> "…the current internal assessment model at National 4 level is inadequate and does not prepare those wishing to follow on with their studies at N5 level." – High school teacher

Learning and Development

Around 11% of responses said that learning and development opportunities for teachers and support staff was a top priority for medium-term action. More generally, this referred to greater national investment in training opportunities for teachers and protected time for professional development. Respondents listed some specific training needs, including digital skills, ASN and inclusivity, and pupil mental health and wellbeing.

> "Huge investment in upskilling staff, providing infrastructure, equity in training (i.e. rural areas included, not just the central belt)…" – High school teachers (group response)

> "All teaching staff have the opportunity to participate in high quality training courses to ensure that they provide high quality learning experiences for their children." – Primary school teachers (group response)

A more specific priority was the various learning and development opportunities that will be needed to support teachers to understand, implement and deliver the proposed changes to the curriculum and assessment and qualifications. Respondents stressed that teachers would need to be granted sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the changes and related guidance, and to access any training they will need to deliver the proposals. Many respondents said they are anxious that they will be unable to balance their learning and development needs with their workload and/or that the changes will be implemented too quickly.

> "Staff are anxious and curious in equal measure about their professional learning time to prepare for change and where this will come from, and when." – High school head teacher

> "Based on what changes are coming it could be a considerable change for many teaching staff. For any changes to be successful and effective then ensuring all teaching staff have had the time to engage with the documentation around changes, what that means and have access to any upskilling or training is essential." – High school teacher

Digital skills and infrastructure

Around 10% of responses identified digital related issues as a top priority for medium-term action. Primarily, responses referred to improving digital skills, investing in digital infrastructure, and addressing digital inequity.

Respondents said that digital upskilling is a priority for both teachers and pupils, particularly given the proposal to introduce digital profiles. The respondents identified a need to improve the digital literacy of teaching staff and to fund and expand the digital training offer. At the same time, it was noted that many pupils also lack digital skills and that a digital curriculum should be developed.

> "Progression of Digital Training for staff and Digital Education for children and young people. There is no doubt that the world has changed and there is no going back on the digital revolution…
> compulsory training needs to be given to every staff member to ensure they are digitally proficient to teach the next generation." – High school teachers (group response)

> "Further guidance needed on how to develop digital curriculum in school. Staff need further training and support on using the digital technology." – Primary school teacher

Respondents also pointed to, what they consider, inadequacies in digital infrastructure in schools. There were concerns that the proposals to use digital profiles and digital assessments are unrealistic given that some schools lack adequate numbers of computers or reliable internet connectivity. They stressed the need for funding for digital technology and infrastructure.

> "Many schools across the country do not have the ICT infrastructure to cope with the need that this new model would demand. Again, in theory the ideas behind this new model sound good but we have genuine concerns that schools do not have the infrastructure to support this. In my current school there is no Wi-Fi, no phone signal, ICT is extremely limited and is not fit for purpose." – High school teachers (group response)

> "We need to see schools which are better funded and better equipped digitally. Local Authorities need to be able to upgrade their infrastructure in order to be able to cope with the volume of digital traffic across school establishments. ICT needs to be well funded. There needs to be good quality hardware in place. Devices need to be made available for every pupil AND for every staff member in order to be able to plan and prepare for their work." – High school teachers (group response)

Respondents highlighted inequity in digital access, both at a local authority level and pupil level. They argued that digital funding needs to be equitable across all local authorities and that all pupils should have access to a digital device. They

suggested that digital inequity contributes to educational inequity, with some pupils unable to access online learning resources or develop their digital skills.

> "Access to digital resources and Wi-Fi is essential in allowing equitable access to learning but currently nowhere near the level needed in may schools. Many pupils still have no regular access to learning key resources which are entirely online (Teams, Scholar, Achieve etc.). Additionally, there is a severe lack of hardware and software available to pupils in school and at home to cope with the evolution of new and increasingly computer based subjects (e.g. Higher Applications of Maths)." – High school teacher

> "Medium-term it is vital that we look at providing schools with digital technologies. Currently, there is a vast difference in the access to digital technology. For example, schools in Edinburgh have a 1-1 device policy, and at my school we have a set of 30 Chromebooks between 5 subjects. It is vital we address this quickly in order ensure there is parity in the new system." – High school teacher

Curriculum

Around 10% of responses said the curriculum was a priority for medium-term action. This can be divided into three sub-priorities: simplifying the curriculum; curriculum design; and ongoing review of the curriculum.

Some respondents were critical of, what they deem, an overcrowded curriculum. This has two elements – the notion that pupils study too many subjects, and the notion that some parts of the curriculum are prioritised to the detriment of others. Largely, these respondents think the curriculum should be simplified, with a greater focus on literacy, numeracy, and Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects. What is more, some respondents argued that Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) promotes skill-based learning at the expense of knowledge-based learning. Respondents also called for greater consistency in the content and delivery of the curriculum across schools and local authorities.

> "Streamlined and standardised curriculum across Scotland with clear expectations of delivery." – Primary school teachers (group response)

> "A refocussing of the curriculum with increased emphasis on knowledge as a core element of learning - the current focus on skills creates fragmented projects which has led to a decrease in literacy and numeracy." – High school teacher

Respondents recognised that a key priority will be designing a new curriculum to deliver the principles of the proposed Scottish Diploma of Achievement. They saw this as an opportunity to develop a curriculum with a greater focus on life skills, employability, and meta skills such as: communication, presentation, and analytical skills; critical thinking; emotional intelligence; and resilience. They also hoped to

see increased inclusion of digital learning, outdoor learning and, in the case of primary schools, play-based learning.

It was important to these respondents that the curriculum is designed collaboratively across the teaching profession, with more national based resources and standardisation across schools.

> "There is a huge need for more collegiate working in all subject areas. Materials need to be available for all to use for every area of the curriculum, that are meaningful, adaptable and help to give teachers the tools to teach areas out with their expertise. Workstreams involving teachers from every local authority from every subject area, who could work together then feedback resources, information and tools to teach courses and create assessment strategies that are meaningful and meet the national standard." – High school teachers (group response)

> "Learning part of the course needs to be developed for the whole of the country with a clear curriculum content resources, exemplars etc. and not rely on teachers having to do their own thing and develop whole curriculums themselves. This would then allow time for teachers to be trained and develop the pathway and project aspects of the qualification which will be a huge thing for staff to take on." – High school teachers (group response)

Respondents also stressed the importance of ongoing curriculum review to ensure that it is fit for purpose, inclusive, and meets the changing needs of young people and the wider world.

Other medium-term priorities

A range of other short-term priorities were identified in fewer numbers. This included:

- Funding – Around 8% of responses stated that funding is needed to support the delivery of the proposals. Specific funding priorities included: recruitment of more teachers and support staff; support for pupils with ASN; digital infrastructure; and learning and development.

- Staffing – Around 8% of responses said that teacher recruitment and retention was a priority, including the recruitment of more specialist teachers for key subjects and more support staff for pupils with ASN.

- Clarity – Around 8% of responses said greater clarity is needed on the details of the proposals and the implications for teachers and pupils. This included: clearer timescales; clear guidance on the content of courses, the different elements of the diploma, and how internal assessment will be carried out; and clear actions for teachers and schools to take.

- Workload – around 6% of responses noted worries about teacher workload. Respondents were particularly concerned that teachers will not be given sufficient time to prepare for the changes or to develop curriculum resources. They are also concerned that a greater reliance on internal assessment will have an adverse effect on workload.

What is your top priority for a long-term action?

Respondents were asked what their top priority for long-term action is. Responses were again varied and did not demonstrate a strong consensus on what the top priority for long-term action should be. However, the most common answers are set out below.

Qualifications and assessments

Around 20% of responses said that qualifications and assessments were a top priority for long-term action. The responses were very similar to those given in question 1 and 2 and can broadly be divided into three sub-priorities: reducing the number of examinations in favour of ongoing assessment; ensuring that pupils can access a range of pathways; and retaining examinations in the senior phase.

Most respondents agreed that there should be a reduction in external examinations at the senior phase. Some respondents suggested that external examinations should be removed entirely –

> "Removal of external qualifications that exacerbate the attainment gap and create a curriculum that teaches young people the necessary skills and knowledge for lifelong success." – High school teacher

However, in this question, more respondents noted the importance of striking a balance between external and internal assessment, and recognised the value that both forms of assessment can bring to measuring the achievement of pupils.

> "Correct balance between teacher assessment and final exam assessment. Both of these are necessary to ensure equity and standards across the country as well as benefiting candidates." – High school teacher

Respondents again stressed the importance of ongoing assessment, with pupils' achievement being measured in a variety of ways across the school year, and throughout their educational journey. It was felt that this would be a fairer way of assessing pupils and would take into account their different strengths and needs.

"I would like to see reduced 'final' exams put in place as soon as possible, ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to succeed. I feel that ongoing assessments throughout the year should count towards final marks and this should also be in place imminently." – Primary school teacher

"That the pupils are fully able to show their learning, skills and knowledge in an assessment environment that works for them and not only those who have excellent English academic skills to be able to show. The form of assessment should form from the way a child can display their learning the best." – Primary school teacher

Similarly, respondents again called for a variety of qualifications to be on offer to pupils, including a good range of vocational qualifications. They again argued the importance of parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications to ensure that all pupils can leave school with a qualification that is considered equally valid.

"Parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications. Academic students to follow traditional exam route to university, less academic students to follow pathways of equal value to college and apprenticeships." – High school teacher

"Adapting the education system to be more inclusive of vocational skills and nurturing these, rather than an education system focused on data and academic capabilities, as this is not the right approach for increasing numbers of learners." – Teacher (school type not specified)

Some respondents, again, noted their disagreement with the proposals to reduce external examinations. Of greatest concern is whether the Scottish Diploma of Achievement will be considered credible by universities, colleges, and employers, and stand up to international scrutiny. These respondents felt that internal assessment is not robust enough and will be difficult to standardise across the country. A few pointed to, what they consider, the "inflation" of grades during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, in which a model of teacher judgement was used in lieu of external examinations.

"That all courses, especially Mathematics (my own subject) can deliver courses and prepare pupils for assessments which require external examinations. Internal assessments are not robust enough - regardless of the measures centres put in, or will put in, place." – High school teacher

"While some balance of internal and external assessment could provide a more accurate portrait of learners in the round, the preponderance of internal assessment outlined in the review is unworkable from the point of view of class teachers and easily open to abuse (divergent standards between practitioners; schools; and authority areas could easily conspire to create a playing field that would be far from level)." – High school teacher

Curriculum

Around 12% of responses, again, said that the curriculum was a top priority for long-term action. This can be divided into three sub-priorities: simplifying the curriculum, curriculum design and development, and ongoing review.

Some respondents, again, stated that simplifying, or "decluttering", the curriculum was a top priority. Again, literacy, numeracy and STEM were mentioned as particularly important elements of the curriculum.

They also stated their preference for a more nationally standardised curriculum. They saw value in a more structured and prescriptive curriculum that can be delivered more consistently across schools. They had concerns about the workload implications if teachers are to develop new curriculum content individually and would prefer national resources.

"The curriculum should be streamlined/decluttered and there should be national planning documents that all teachers can access so that all teachers at the same stage across the country are not all creating planners for the same topic." – Primary school teachers (group response)

"Prescribed courses from the SQA or equivalent body, so that all schools across Scotland know we are meeting the same target. For example, there are currently 350 high schools in Scotland teaching National 5 maths, without a prescribed curriculum. Teachers are creating course individually when surely a skeleton course should be done centrally, allowing teachers to enhance when appropriate." – Primary school teachers (group response)

Many respondents stressed that adequate time will be needed to design and develop the new curriculum. This includes at the national level, where teachers and subject experts should be further consulted so that they are at the forefront of the development of the new curriculum, and at the school level where sufficient time will be needed to develop new materials and lesson plans. It was emphasised by many respondents that teachers will need time, between the curriculum design and implementation stages, to familiarise themselves with the new curriculum in order to feel confident to deliver it to pupils.

"Ensure that teachers are sufficiently knowledgeable and comfortable with the new curriculum to ensure parity between schools nationally." – High school teacher

In terms of curriculum content, some respondents, again, suggested that the new curriculum should be more skills based with a focus on areas such as life skills, digital skills, and meta-skills.

Once implemented, many respondents noted the need for ongoing review of the curriculum to ensure it remains fit for purpose, inclusive, and reflective of contemporary learner needs.

Funding

Around 8% of responses, again, said that funding was a top priority for long-term action. One of the most common questions asked in the responses to the consultation was "how will this be funded?". Many respondents noted that the success of education reform is reliant on sufficient, long-term funding for the staff and resources that will be needed to successfully deliver the proposed changes. Many respondents were concerned that funding will be insufficient given, what they perceive as, continually decreasing school budgets.

"Continued funding - this must be sustainable. Schools budgets have shrunk so much since the introduction of CfE and this is having a massive impact on attainment. We have larger classes, less support and limited resources. How can any meaningful changes be made and sustained if the money runs out?" – High school teachers and support staff (group response)

"The adequate, sustained funding needs to be put in place and it needs to be transparent. I feel this is a long term priority as it needs to be a long term commitment." – Depute head teacher

Respondents identified particular areas in need of additional funding. The recruitment of more teachers and support staff was mentioned by many respondents as a key priority for funding. This included staff to support pupils with ASN and subject specialist teachers. Respondents stressed that more teachers are needed to reduce class sizes and workload. Many respondents also specifically mentioned funding for digital infrastructure and for learning and development opportunities for teachers and support staff.

"Sustained funding for more general staffing and specialist support. Unless the government follow through on their funding promises, the needs of our learners cannot be adequately met. Class sizes are getting bigger and support is being reduced." - Primary school teacher

Other long-term priorities

A range of other long-term priorities were identified in fewer numbers. This included:

- Learning and development – Around 6% of responses said that learning and development will be a long-term priority. This was largely in relation to the implementation and delivery of the new curriculum and understanding the new assessment and qualification process. Other specific areas included mental health and wellbeing, digital skills and ASN.

- Digital skills and infrastructure – Around 6% of responses said that investment in the digital infrastructure and training was needed to support both teachers and pupils, particularly in relation to digital profiles and digital assessment.

- Engagement with employers and Further and Higher Education – Around 6% of responses said a key priority would be engaging with employers, colleges, and universities to ensure that they understand the new forms of qualifications and assessment. They said that this should include consultation with these stakeholders during the development of the new approach to ensure that the new qualifications will meet entry requirements and will not put Scottish school leavers at a disadvantage.

- Teacher workload – Around 5% of responses said that reducing teacher workload should be a long-term goal. There were concerns that internal assessment methods will increase teacher workload. Respondents stressed that they are already struggling balancing contact time with lesson planning, marking, and learning and development.

Which recommendations in the final report do you believe are the most important?

Respondents were asked to select which recommendations from the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment are the most important. Respondents were allowed to select as many recommendations as they wanted. The recommendations are ranked from most to least important, according to the responses, in Table 1.

Table 1. Which recommendations in the final report do you believe are the most important?

Recommendations	Response percent	Response total
Workforce and Professional Learning (An expanded programme of professional learning should be developed to support the changes to qualifications and assessment)	68.1%	1324
Modularised courses	43.3%	843
Digital profiles and digital assessment methods	40.1%	780
Parity of esteem (Qualifications at the same level in Scotland, should use the SCQF Level followed by the name of the qualification)	32.6%	635
Assessment (Reduce the number of external examinations in the Senior Phase; increase the breadth of assessment methods including digital assessment methods, and remove external assessment up to SCQF level 5.)	31.4%	610
Programmes of Learning (Should remain an important aspect of the Senior Phase and will be a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. There should be a reduction in external assessment across the Senior Phase.)	28.3%	551
Adopt the Scottish Diploma of Achievement	23.5%	458
Personal Pathway (Include the Personal Pathway element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners.)	23.5%	455
National Monitoring and Accountability systems (Require national monitoring and accountability systems to gather information on the breadth of achievements recognised within the Scottish Diploma of Achievement)	23.3%	454
Project Learning (Include the Project Learning element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners.)	16.8%	326

Below, further detail is provided on the reasons why respondents found the recommendations important.

Workforce and Professional Learning

Recommendation: An expanded programme of professional learning should be developed to support the changes to qualifications and assessment. Time should be made available for staff in Education to access professional learning, to collaborate and to engage with the changes being proposed. Build a national strategy for standards.

68% of responses said that workforce and professional learning was one of the most important recommendations. Primarily they chose this recommendation because of the extent of the proposals. They said that the proposals will substantially change the Scottish education system and that teachers will need to undertake an extensive programme of professional learning and development.

There were concerns, however, that teachers will not be given sufficient time to do so. Some respondents referred to the introduction of previous reforms – for example, Higher Still in 1999 and Curriculum for Excellence in 2010 – where it was felt that learning and development was insufficient. They, thus, stressed that time for professional learning and development is paramount.

> "This is the only recommendation that I support as it will be impossible to implement such a fundamental change without significant, specific and detailed CLPL [Career Long Professional Learning] for all teachers and school leaders." – High school teacher

> "When CfE was brought in, there was not enough detail about content, expectations, standards, assessments and so on. Years were spent writing courses then changing courses and assessments. Teachers need time before a new curriculum/assessment is introduced." – High school teacher

Modularised Courses

Recommendation: Programmes of Learning should be organised into modules to allow learners maximum flexibility to build credit as they progress through courses. SCQF Level 6 Higher courses should be progressive allowing learners to build credits over two years.

43% of responses said that modularised courses was one of the most important recommendations. Respondents liked the flexible nature of modularised courses which would allow for greater personalisation to meet the individual needs of pupils and allow pupils to work towards qualifications at a pace that works for them. They thought that this would be particularly beneficial for pupils who struggle with traditional examinations or with certain aspects of subject courses, and pupils who face barriers to learning such as ASN or attendance.

> "Modularised courses would allow pupils to build up an credits across a breadth of areas. This means that if pupils can't achieve in every aspect of a subject, they still gain credit for the bits they can. When added together they may be equivalent to qualification so pupils who just fall short in all subjects, but do well in certain aspects of all subjects, can still walk away with something. The focus being on what they can do rather than what they can't." – High school teachers (group response)

> "Modularised courses allows for flexibility and pacing which could better meet individual needs and attainment can be achieved when the learner is ready to demonstrate the acquisition of this knowledge or skills." – College Supported Learning Team (group response)

Respondents believed that a particular strength of modularised courses is the move away from high stake final examinations. They felt it supports the notion of ongoing assessment and gives a more accurate picture of a pupil's overall skills and achievement, which they said cannot be captured in a single exam. Respondents noted that this will be beneficial for the wellbeing of pupils, reducing the stress related to traditional examinations.

> "Modularised courses: encourages more continual learner engagement rather than last minute "cramming"; avoids learner failure because of nerves/one bad day" – Primary school teacher

> "Modularised courses as this allows learners to build up their result over time rather than the focus being on one exam at one moment in time. Progressive learning over time leads to better retention of knowledge." – Primary school teachers (group response)

Respondents also suggested that modularised courses would support learner motivation as pupils will have more opportunities to demonstrate achievement, identify their strengths, and study the aspects of courses at which they are strongest.

Digital profiles and assessment methods

> Recommendation: All learners should have a digital profile to allow them to record achievements in Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and Personal Pathway. The profile will be owned by the learner. Digital technologies should be used to expand assessment methods.

43% of responses said that digital profiles and assessment methods was one of the most important recommendations. Generally, respondents thought that digital profiles were a good idea as they would allow pupils to easily record all their achievements in one place and ensure that achievements were not forgotten.

Respondents said that digital profiles will be especially beneficial for school leavers. They felt that they can be used to help pupils with applications for Further and Higher Education and showcase their skills and achievements to employers, particularly if the profiles are sharable.

> "Having a digital profile is important for learners because it can help showcase their skills, achievements, and educational background to potential employers, educational institutions, and peers. It allows for easy access to information about one's capabilities and accomplishments, facilitating networking and collaboration. Additionally, in today's digital age, having a well-maintained digital presence can enhance visibility and credibility, aiding in personal and professional growth." – Primary school teacher

Respondents had concerns, however, about the feasibility of rolling out digital profiles. They said that a national system for digital profiles would need to be developed so that records were standardised across the country. What is more, they stressed that schools do not currently have the digital technology and infrastructure that is needed to allow fair and equitable delivery of, and access to, digital profiles.

> "To allow the Digital Profile to be rolled out immediately, time and money must be invested in both software and hardware within each school. Current systems are not coping with the day-to-day teaching and learning at the moment, so in order to ensure that all learners start off on a level playing field throughout Scotland, money must be invested in systems that can match the expectations of the Digital Profiles." – High school teacher

Some respondents also noted their support for digital methods of assessment. It was felt that this would allow for faster evaluation of progress and reduce teacher workload. Many felt that digital assessment is a particular important priority in an increasingly digitised world. Again, however, it was stressed that digital methods of assessment cannot be rolled out until there has been significant investment in digital infrastructure.

> "…using more digital assessments would only be possible if more funding was provided so that every pupil has access to digital resources (e.g. laptops or tablets). As highlighted by Covid, there was an inequality in online teaching as many pupils did not have the resources or family environment to allow them to learn from home or an online environment." – High school teacher

Parity of esteem

Recommendation: Enhance parity of esteem between types of qualifications by recognising as equal all qualifications at the same SCQF level with the same credit points. Qualifications at the same level in Scotland, should use the SCQF Level followed by the name of the qualification in promotional literature and in recording of results for example, Chemistry - SCQF level 6 – Higher.

32% of responses said that parity of esteem between different types of qualifications was one of the most important recommendations. These respondents noted that, under the current qualifications system, academic and vocational courses are not considered equal.

Respondents wanted to see greater acknowledgement of alternative pathways, in which vocational qualifications are viewed as legitimate and viable alternatives to academic qualifications. Respondents highlighted the need for a cultural shift to eliminate biases against certain qualifications. Concerns were raised, for example, about the negative perception of some qualifications (such as National 4) and the way in which academic attainment (particularly in numeracy and literacy) is valued more highly than attainment in vocational subjects.

> "Parity of esteem has long been needed, particularly surrounding the negative perception of National 4." – High school teacher

> "For decades the assumption has been that university is just better. It isn't…vocational apprenticeships…need to be properly valued and seen as a viable and legitimate pathway. This needs a change in attitude at a society level. Putting Higher in front of all SCQF level 6 qualifications would be a good start." – High school teacher

They felt that standardising and making qualification levels clearer would contribute to transparency and fairness across different subjects and pathways. Consistent and accessible language was considered important in describing qualifications to provide clarity for pupils, parents, employers, and society in general. Respondents also noted that vocational qualifications need rigourous assessment to ensure that they are perceived to be as equally challenging as traditional academic courses.

Support from universities, colleges, and employers was identified as a key factor in achieving parity of esteem. Respondents emphasised the importance of buy-in from these institutions if the recommendation is to be successfully implemented.

> "True parity of esteem where employers, colleges and universities recognise the different pathways available to young people are integral to young people having appropriate recognition for their time at school. This allows them to move into appropriate positive destinations and does not hold them back because they took a slightly different route to a qualification." – High school teachers (group response)

Assessment

Recommendations: Reduce the number of external examinations in the Senior Phase; increase the breadth of assessment methods including digital assessment methods, and remove external assessment up to SCQF level 5.

31% of responses said that the proposed changes to assessment were amongst the most important recommendations. These respondents advocated for a shift in the traditional assessment model - moving away from high-stakes examinations and embracing a more inclusive, flexible, and digitally integrated approach that prioritises the wellbeing and diverse needs of students.

Respondents supported a reduction in the number of external examinations. The stress and pressure associated with high-stakes examinations was highlighted as detrimental to the mental wellbeing of students. They argued that there should be a greater focus on skills development and preparing students for life after school, rather than on assessing rote memory.

> "The current assessment system is too exam focused - our young people in Scotland are incredibly diverse and the opportunities for them to achieve should also be diverse. The mental health of our young people should be our top priority and external high stakes exams only exacerbate the stress on our young people." – Primary school teacher

> "Reducing the number of assessments eases pressure on students and staff and enables greater space and time to be given to different sorts of learning and activity. It is clear that the continued emphasis on assessment and performance has a detrimental effect in terms of mental wellbeing and in terms of detracting from the idea that learning can be beneficial in and of itself." – University academics (group response)

Respondents advocated for a broader range of assessment methods that would recognise the diverse strengths, learning styles, and needs of students and allow them to showcase their capabilities in various ways. This included support for digital assessments, project-based assessments, making formal examinations optional, and allowing learners to build qualifications over time via modular courses. Respondents also called for continuous assessment throughout the year which would allow for a more comprehensive demonstration of a student's learning and attainment over time.

> "Exams are not a fair reflection of someone's abilities; pupils should get more time and have opportunities to develop their skills and talents over an extended period of time." – High school teacher

"I feel final grades based on exams alone are outdated and don't meet GIRFEC [Getting It Right for Every Child]- a combination of exams (if appropriate) and portfolio work is a better approach and allows pupils to showcase their learning continually than in one final piece." – Primary school teacher

Digital assessments were seen as a promising avenue for assessing students in a fair, consistent, and efficient way and preparing students for increasingly digital workplaces and an ever more digital society.

Programmes of learning

> Recommendation: Programmes of learning should remain an important aspect of the Senior Phase and will be a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. There should be a reduction in external assessment across the Senior Phase.

28% of responses said that ensuring programmes of learning remained an important aspect of the Senior phase, with a reduction of external assessment, was one of the most important recommendations.

There was unanimous agreement on the importance of subject-specific learning. Respondents emphasised the fundamental importance of maintaining subject knowledge and skills. There were concerns that the SDA will not be valued if Project Learning and the Personal Pathway are given equal standing to programmes of learning and that students' knowledge, skills and readiness for further and higher education would be greatly limited. Respondents, thus, stressed that subject-specific courses should remain the greatest focus of the Scottish curriculum.

> "Subject knowledge is still fundamental and should be kept, any diploma issued that doesn't cover this will not be valued by anyone in the system." – High school teacher

> "This should still be the majority of the teaching and learning, otherwise there won't be enough time to get through much meaningful curriculum for each subject. In turn the value of the qualifications will be dumbed down and pupils won't be ready for the level of learning and teaching at Uni/college level." – High school teacher

Concerns were expressed by some respondents, about the proposed reduction in external assessments across the Senior Phase. While they agreed with the recommendation on "programmes of learning," they argued that external examinations motivate students, provide external recognition of attainment, and ensure objectivity in assessments. Concerns were also raised regarding the potential impact on teacher workload if the proposed reduction in external assessments was to go ahead. Questions about internal assessment conditions and national quality assurance mechanisms were also raised.

"I believe that programmes of learning are the most important aspect - but I DO NOT agree that external exams should be reduced. I think that this will lead to a lack of motivation for learning at N5 level (as it has currently for N3/4 with no external recognition of success)." – Teacher (school type not specified)

Adopt the Scottish Diploma of Achievement

> Recommendation: Adopt the Scottish Diploma of Achievement as the new approach to qualifications and assessment. The SDA (the Diploma) should contain three elements: Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and the Personal Pathway.

24% of responses said that adopting the Scottish Diploma of Agreement was one of the most important recommendations. These respondents felt hopeful and excited about the potential positive impact of the SDA on education, particularly in recognising and rewarding diverse skills and achievements beyond traditional examinations.

The proposed SDA, as an alternative to traditional examinations, is well-received by these respondents. Many believed that it offers a more holistic approach, allowing for a broader recognition of skills, personalisation, and choice in the learner's journey. The diploma was seen as a way to address the needs of students who may not perform well in examinations or who struggle with the standard curriculum. The SDA was viewed as a means to create a well-rounded achievement that goes beyond academic performance.

> "Almost all staff were in agreement with the Scottish Diploma of Achievement and what it was to represent; there was an acknowledgement that not all students were academic and not all enjoyed academic learning and some were not interested in sitting exams or any form of standardised assessments. But this did not mean that they did not have their own specific skills set - all staff agreed that all children definitely had lots to contribute. Their skills, in the current system, often go unnoticed or unrecognised. This would change with the proposals in the SDA." – Teachers (group response, school type not specified)

Several respondents highlighted the importance of a clear plan for implementation and greater detail on how the diploma would work in practice. Respondents stressed that the adoption of the SDA would require careful planning and consideration as a rushed implementation could disadvantage young people. Some respondents emphasised the need for sufficient learning and development time for teachers to ensure a successful rollout.

> "SDA has the capacity to help fix many of the problems in education, but only if it is properly implemented." – High school teacher

Personal Pathway

> Recommendation: Include the Personal Pathway element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners.

24% of responses said that introducing the Personal Pathway was one of the most important recommendations. The Personal Pathway was seen as a way to provide greater recognition for wider achievements, including work experience, volunteering, extra-curricular activities and community participation. It was considered a step towards a more flexible and tailored approach, accommodating the diverse needs and abilities of learners.

> "I believe that personal pathways…allows for a more tailored approach which celebrates the abilities of all learners and allows a broader focus on the skills that are more valued in the workplace." – Primary school teacher

Respondents highlighted a number of benefits of the Personal Pathway, including its potential for improving learner engagement, giving students greater ownership of their learning, and the development of transferable skills. Improving student motivation was also noted as a key benefit, with respondents suggesting that the Personal Pathway could keep learners interested in their education and reduce learner apathy and dropout. Respondents felt that it would encourage learners to take greater responsibility for their progress and, thus, foster a sense of accountability.

> "A personal pathway allows for pupil led learning, better ownership and deeper engagement." – Primary school teacher

Respondents also believed that the Personal Pathway would foster inclusivity, particularly given its recognition of achievements beyond academic attainment. In this sense, the Personal Pathway was seen as a more holistic approach to education.

> "It is inclusive, allows pupils to be recognised for their wider achievements that are not purely academic and encourages pupils to see value in wider school and community commitments." – High school teachers (group response)

Some respondents expressed concerns about the practical implementation of the Personal Pathway. Questions were raised about the standardisation, monitoring and assessment of Personal Pathways and the potential impact on teacher workload. There was also a call for training for staff and careful consideration of the time required for successful implementation.

National monitoring and accountability systems

Recommendation: Require national monitoring and accountability systems to gather information on the breadth of achievements recognised within the Scottish Diploma of Achievement. Insight and the National Improvement Framework (NIF) should be updated to reflect success as envisaged in the SDA.

23% of responses said that requiring national monitoring and accountability systems was one of the most important recommendations. These respondents argued that such a system is necessary, not only to track and evaluate success, but also to build credibility, trust, and consistency in the education system, both nationally and internationally.

Respondents emphasised the need for consistency across the country. They called for a standardised approach to internal assessments, arguing that national monitoring is crucial to ensure equity and fairness for all learners. Respondents said that teachers will need to be aware of, and adhere to, national standards and be given sufficient time for learning and development.

> "Ensure there is a national standard that is consistent and upheld through all schools to ensure all learners have the same experiences and outcomes and employers/uni/colleges have faith and trust in the new system." – High school teachers (group response)

Some respondents expressed concerns about potential inconsistencies in teacher judgment across schools and the risk this poses to the credibility and validity of the SDA. There was a clear consensus that a national monitoring and accountability system would be crucial to counteract the potential challenges associated with reducing external assessments.

> "Monitoring and Accountability will be essential if these changes go ahead. The alternative certification model used in recent years demonstrated the wildly different judgements being made across the country when external examinations were not used. It will take multiple years of intensive training to ensure all schools are judging to the same standard and if this is not done then we will be left with a system that is inequitable for learners across the country." – High school teacher

Project Learning

Recommendation: Include the Project Learning element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners.

17% of responses thought that introducing Project Learning was one of the most important recommendations. These respondents considered Project Learning as a holistic approach to education that would foster a more collaborative and

interdisciplinary learning environment. They believed it would support students to develop transferrable meta and employability skills, making them better prepared for further and higher education, and the workplace.

Respondents viewed Project Learning as an opportunity for learners to showcase individual skills that might go unnoticed in conventional educational models. Moreover, Project Learning was seen as a fairer and more inclusive way to track and monitor students' progress, particularly for students who struggle with traditional examinations.

> "Project learning will allow pupils to be assessed on skills that can be applied to real life employment opportunities such as communication skills and working with others. It allows those who are not academic to showcase their abilities and talents." – Primary school teacher

> "Project learning is a holistic approach and gives opportunity to develop transferrable skills, essential skills and meta-skills. It naturally blends all of these overlapping skills in a natural way which replicates the use of these skills in real life." - College Supported Learning Team (group response)

Respondents argued that Project Learning could improve student engagement by aligning learning with real-life situations and allowing learners to pursue their own interests and passions. Several primary school teachers noted that children, at this stage, are particularly highly motivated by project-based and interdisciplinary learning.

> "I believe that project learning gives learners more flexibility and leads to motivated learners, driven by their own interests." – Primary school teacher

Despite supporting the recommendation, respondents raised a number of concerns about Project Learning. This included uncertainties around assessment methods, particularly the difficulty in measuring attainment without traditional grading. Respondents also identified a number of logistical complexities, such as embedding Project Learning into the curriculum, and addressing concerns about staffing, workload, and timetabling. Clearer guidelines and detailed information were seen as essential to navigate these challenges and ensure the successful implementation of Project Learning.

Are there any recommendations which you disagree with?

Respondents were asked to select if there were any recommendations from the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment that they disagree with. Respondents were allowed to select as many recommendations as they wanted.

The recommendations are ranked from most to least disagreement, according to the responses, in Table 2.

Table 2. Are there any recommendations which you disagree with?

Recommendations	Response percent	Response total
Assessment (Reduce the number of external examinations in the Senior Phase; increase the breadth of assessment methods including digital assessment methods, and remove external assessment up to SCQF level 5.)	57.3%	719
Project Learning (Include the Project Learning element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners.)	44.0%	552
Personal Pathway (Include the Personal Pathway element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners.)	38.6%	485
Adopt the Scottish Diploma of Achievement	38.2%	479
Digital profiles and digital assessment methods	28.4%	356
Programmes of Learning (Should remain an important aspect of the Senior Phase and will be a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. There should be a reduction in external assessment across the Senior Phase.)	26.5%	333
Modularised Courses	20.6%	258
Parity of Esteem (Qualifications at the same level in Scotland should use the SCQF Level followed by the name of the qualification)	17.8%	223
National Monitoring and Accountability systems (Require national monitoring and accountability systems to gather information on the breadth of achievements recognised within the Scottish Diploma of Achievement	16.2%	203
Workforce and Professional Learning (An expanded programme of professional learning should be developed to support the changes to qualifications and assessment)	7.8%	98

Below, further detail is provided on why respondents disagree with the recommendations.

Assessment

Recommendations: Reduce the number of external examinations in the Senior Phase; increase the breadth of assessment methods including digital assessment methods, and remove external assessment up to SCQF level 5.

57% of responses disagreed with the recommendations made on assessment.

Many respondents argued that pupils will be ill-prepared to study Highers, or to continue into Higher Education, if external examinations are removed at SCQF Level 5. They argued that external examinations support pupils with the transition between National 5 and Highers, and between school and university. They were concerned that pupils will struggle if their first experience of sitting an external examination is at Higher level and that this will cause pupils unnecessary stress.

> "National 5 exams are seen as good preparation for progression to Higher course. Without this level of exam then young people may face Level 6 Higher level exams as their first full exam experience." – High school teachers (group response)

> "Concerned that students will only complete exams in Higher when it matters the most (for uni and college) and will be ill equipped and not ready for that pressure." – High school teachers (group response)

Respondents were also concerned about whether internal assessments can be marked consistently. They questioned whether a standardised and robust marking criteria for other forms of assessment is feasible given that teachers may have bias (including unconscious bias) towards their pupils or be influenced by attainment targets. They feared that this would have the greatest impact on the most disadvantaged children and young people. Many pointed to their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic where a model of teacher judgement was used instead of external examinations. They said that this resulted in inconsistencies between schools, with many pupils receiving, what they consider, "inflated grades". They argued, therefore, that external examinations are the fairest way to measure assess pupils.

> "Reduce external examinations will increase inconsistencies between schools, this will lead to unfairness and the most disadvantaged and those from the poorest backgrounds will be hurt the most. External examinations although are not perfect are still the best and fairest way to assess. This could not have been clearer during the year of results during Covid where there was no exams as scores went through the roof. This is always going to happen with staff under pressure to get good results for various reasons." – High school teacher

"Internal assessment will never be rigorous, especially when there are competitive league tables of schools and pressure from SMT [Senior management team] to maximise 'attainment', even when it is an empty measure. Verification is a bureaucratic nightmare and is never rigorous. It can never replace standardised exams." – High school teachers (group response

Respondents were concerned that the removal of external examinations will devalue National 5 qualifications. They pointed to their experience of delivering National 4 courses. Some argued that pupils feel that National 4 courses lack credibility which has a negative impact on their motivation to study. They suggested that National 4 qualifications are not valued by employers, colleges, and universities due to the lack of external assessment. Respondents were concerned that National 5 qualifications would also lack credibility if external assessment is removed. They argued that Highers will be the only valued qualification, thus disadvantaging pupils who do not study Highers.

"Our current experience of delivering internally assessed courses is not positive - all staff would agree that setting and maintaining national standards is highly problematic and learners often feel under-valued due to the low credibility of the course." – High school teachers (group response)

"National 4 is not valued by students, employers, colleges or universities due to the lack of an external exam. Teachers across Scotland have asked for an external assessment for N4 since its inception but have been ignored. N5 qualification will become worthless if we change this to modular based. We will be left with Highers as the only valued qualification." – High school teachers (group response)

Respondents were also concerned about the impact the reduction of external assessments would have on teachers. They envisaged that the use of internal assessment methods will vastly increase teacher workload and stress. They were not confident that this has been fully considered in the report and suggested that there would need to be a significant decrease in teacher contact time for these recommendations to be feasible.

"…this means that teachers will go back to having to assess and mark and this increases teacher workload, it will then also require moderation, which again increases teacher workload. This needs to be thought about. As it is the teachers that again will be accountable for delivering this. This would be okay, if teacher contact time is reduced." – Teacher (school type not specified)

"The concern that workload will increase due to the burden of assessment falling on classroom teachers who will be expected to undertake this without adequate time or remuneration." – High school teachers (group response)

Among the responses were also some respondents who did not fully disagree with the proposal but did disagree with some elements of it. Largely, these respondents supported a change which would see equal weighting between internal and external assessment, as long as some form of external examination remained.

> "There should be a combination of ongoing and final assessment, to allow for continuous assessment through the year and then a final examination that would sum up all the knowledge gathered during the academic year. The final grade would be made 50% of continuous assessment and 50% final examination, to give the students all the opportunities to show their potential." – High school teacher

Others argued that it would be more appropriate to look at the need for external assessment on a subject-by-subject basis. Teachers of STEM subjects were particularly opposed to reduction of external assessment for their subjects but largely agreed it may be appropriate for other subjects.

> "I am certain there will be some subject areas that will welcome this; but for my own subject area (maths), I am not convinced that removing all external assessment will lead to an equitable and fair process of awarding qualifications." – High school teacher

Project Learning

> Recommendation: Include the Project Learning element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners.

44% of responses disagreed with the recommendation to introduce Project Learning.

The primary issue was that respondents did not feel sufficiently informed on the details of Project Learning. They had numerous questions about how Project Learning will work in practice and need clarity before they can support the recommendation.

> "What subject area is responsible for this? Are all subject areas responsible? Is there one key person responsible for the marking of this - will this be done internally or externally? What time will be given to this? How will staff be trained to deliver this? What resources will be available to support? A lot of this coursework appears to be done electronically - what will be done to improve ICT access in schools where not all pupils have their own devices? At present it is not that there is a disagreement with these areas as such, rather that further information is required in terms of a breakdown of what each element entails before further feedback can be given." – High school teachers (group response)

Relatedly, there were many concerns about the practical logistics of delivering Project Learning – namely staffing and timetabling. There were concerns that the responsibility for delivery will fall on teachers of Social Subjects given that projects are likely to focus on historical, social, geographic, economic, and political challenges. They noted the implications this would have for timetabling and requested clearer information on how this would be managed.

> "For Project Learning, the examples offered are almost all either Social Subjects based or politically driven. Only a small number of staff have expertise in these areas, and you cannot timetable 300 learners in larger schools to all undertake Social studies based IDL [interdisciplinary learning]…There are also major staffing and timetabling implications…" – High school head teacher

Many respondents also said they needed clarity on how Project Learning will be assessed. There was confusion over whether the project would be marked or graded and, if so, how this would be measured and assessed fairly and consistently across schools. If the project is not graded, respondents argued that Project Learning would become a "tick-box exercise" with little credibility.

> "If it is ungraded as well but is essential to pass - it could manifest in schools as a tick the box course that staff have to 'get pupils through' to get their certificate. This then robs it of the purpose of which it is intended." – High school teachers (group response)

> "This has the potential to be a mess. It needs to have clear parameters for success that can be measured otherwise many projects will be highly unfocused. This would make it a very poor candidate to form part of a qualification that has any integrity." – High school teacher

Many respondents strongly opposed the group-based element of Project Learning. They were concerned that not all pupils would take equal responsibility for the project. This would mean that some pupils would inevitably take on a greater share of the work but would receive the same credit as pupils who did less work.

> "Group based learning is open to inconsistency in workload. External issues such as absence, peer relationships and available resources could have a potential negative impact on an individual's achievement." – High school teachers (group response)

Finally, respondents also outlined their concerns on the implications for pupil equity. They argued that Project Learning would disadvantage pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds who have fewer resources and less support. They believed that this could potentially widen the poverty-related attainment gap.

"Project Learning allows an alternative assessment model that must be welcomed but it poses real issues with equity if it is not managed and monitored rigorously. It will be open to abuse and could lead to the widening of the attainment gap. Children and young people from privileged backgrounds could be at an advantage if 'controlled conditions' for assessment are not implemented effectively by teachers, PTs [principal teachers], school leadership and the new qualifications body." – Teacher (school type not specified)

Personal Pathway

Recommendation: Include the Personal Pathway element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. It is an entitlement and must be available to all learners.

39% of responses disagreed with the recommendation to introduce the Personal Pathway. The primary reason for this was concerns around how the Personal Pathway can be delivered equitably.

Many respondents pointed out that the Personal Pathway could potentially disadvantage pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds and widen the poverty-related attainment gap. They argued that pupils from wealthier backgrounds have greater access to extra-curricular activities and are already more likely to take part in activities, such as music and sport. They suggested that there are fewer opportunities in disadvantaged areas and, where opportunities do exist, this would place a financial burden on parents and guardians.

"There are concerns about equality of access for the personal pathway - children and young people from middle class families, attending schools in more affluent areas, have a far greater range of opportunities and there will be pressure on teaching staff in schools in deprived areas to offer 'extra-curricular' activities on a voluntary basis." – High school teachers (group response)

"My worry for the personal pathway is that it will increase the gap between the rich and the poor. The ones who have money will have access to any personal pathway they wish. Those who do not may be limited in their choice of personal pathway due to finances." – High school teacher

Respondents also stressed that the Personal Pathway could disadvantage pupils with more difficult home lives, such as looked after or care experienced young people, young carers, young people with Adverse Childhood Experiences, or who have parents who are disengaged with school. It was also noted that it may be more difficult for neurodiverse and disabled pupils to access and participate in extra-curricular activities.

"Personal pathway will exclude huge numbers of students who lack the domestic or social support necessary for this to succeed. It could amount to a middle class monopoly." – High school teacher

"How do we ensure that young people from deprived, care experienced and vulnerable backgrounds have access to opportunities that will provide the same quality of reflection and development as those young people from affluent backgrounds? We see these challenges within the current work experience opportunities within the senior phase and often young people with parental networks will gain access to better quality experiences, which in turn impact upon personal statements for university. Although, not graded, this could become a selection criteria for universities and employers." – Further Education teachers (group response)

Respondents also pointed to the socio-geographical disparities which may disadvantage pupils. It was argued that pupils living in rural areas will have access to fewer opportunities for extra-curricular activities, due to lack of services and transport. They argued that the Personal Pathway favours pupils in urban areas and bigger cities where there a more opportunities and a wider range of activities on offer.

"As with all aspects of education, despite the best intentions of schools and teachers, social, economic and geographical inequalities exist and will continue to exist. Urban schools, and pupils therein, will have different and greater access to services and experiences that rural schools cannot match. Equally, rural schools will have very different opportunities." – High school teacher

Some respondents were also critical of the added pressure that the Personal Pathway would place on pupils. They explained that pupils are already under significant pressure to achieve academically and the added requirement to participate in extra-curricular activities would be detrimental to pupil wellbeing. Respondents argued that National Qualifications should be focused on school-based achievement and that the Personal Pathway would impinge on pupil's home lives and free time. Some respondents also argued that pupils should be free to pursue interests and hobbies simply for enjoyment and without the expectation that this must also be a measure of attainment.
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"…Many young people enjoy sports or hobbies as a leisurely activity. The expectation that they 'have to do it' to achieve their diploma, takes something that should be fun and turns it into another commitment. Furthermore, some young people don't develop a passion for a sport, art, entrepreneurship, until they are older and have had more experience. If it is essential for them to have a personal pathway though, we will force them into something just to 'tick the box'." – High school teacher

> "Formal recognition of achievements outside of school or college has a potential appeal, but it could create additional pressure on learners to take on extracurricular activity, especially the kinds which can be measured and more easily lead to recognition (such as those organised by the uniformed organisations)… It could also extend a pressure to achieve into extracurricular activities, when there are developmental reasons to believe that it is healthy to encourage children and young people to have external pursuits where the principal goals are not achievement but other benefits – health and wellbeing, social interaction, exploration and creativity – which are harder to record and quantify" – High school teacher

Other reasons for disagreeing with the recommendation were largely logistical. Many respondents felt that the recommendation was too vague and lacked the necessary detail of how the Personal Pathway will be delivered in practice. Concerns included: the impact it would have on staff workload; how it would be fitted in to the timetable; whether there are sufficient financial and digital resources to support pupils achieve this element of the diploma; and how the Personal Pathway would be assessed consistently across the country.

Adopt the Scottish Diploma of Achievement

Recommendation: Adopt the Scottish Diploma of Achievement as the new approach to qualifications and assessment. The SDA (the Diploma) should contain three elements: Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and the Personal Pathway.

38% of responses disagreed with the recommendation to adopt the Scottish Diploma of Achievement. These responses highlight a need for more information, clarity, and transparency in the communication of the SDA. They raised a number of concerns related to inequality, teacher workload, practicality, and the perceived value of the diploma.

Many respondents expressed concerns about the lack of clear information regarding the structure, assessment, and implementation of the SDA. Questions were raised about: how the specific components (particularly, Project Learning and Personal Pathway) will be delivered in practice; what the curriculum will look like; who will be responsible for assessment; and how the changes would be communicated effectively to pupils, parents, teachers, Further and Higher Education institutions and prospective employers.

> "Information relating to the structure of Scottish Diploma of Achievement is not clear enough at present for us to be confident that it would benefit all pupils…" – High school teachers (group response)

Respondents were also worried about the practicality of implementing the SDA, noting potential challenges such as lack of time, teacher workload, and insufficient resources and funding. Concerns were also raised about the feasibility of delivering the proposed Project Learning aspect, particularly in relation to staffing and timetabling.

> "These will all result in a significant amount of additional workload for teachers and my own personal feelings would be that I would leave the profession if they come in. It would not be the job I signed up for 8 years ago, I will not be alone in this feeling." – High school teacher

Concerns were raised about the potential widening of the attainment gap, especially with regards to the Personal Pathway, where students from wealthier backgrounds might have an advantage. They noted a number of potential challenges for students from less privileged backgrounds, including limited access to extracurricular activities and resources. A few respondents also argued that independent schools would opt to follow England's National Curriculum and qualifications if the SDA was not considered rigorous enough, putting these students at a further advantage.

> "The SDA sounds good but colleagues are struggling to see impact - again, would those with the most home support not end up more advantaged again?" – High school teachers (group response)

Some respondents expressed scepticism about the perceived lack of academic rigor and value in the proposed diploma, with concerns raised about it becoming viewed as a "meaningless" or "easy" qualification. Respondents, thus, raised questions about the value and recognition of the diploma, both within Scotland and in comparison to other examination systems, when applying to universities or colleges and applying for jobs.

> "I feel the Scottish diploma is a meaningless qualification which will hold no weighting outwith secondary school. Colleges, universities, work places want learners with recognisable qualifications that will lead them into their chosen pathway." – High school teacher

Digital profiles and digital assessment methods

Recommendation: All learners should have a digital profile to allow them to record achievements in Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and Personal Pathway. The profile will be owned by the learner. Digital technologies should be used to expand assessment methods.

28% of responses disagreed with the recommendation to introduce digital profiles and assessment methods. These respondents had a range of concerns relating to digital access, infrastructure, teacher workload and digital ethics.

Concerns were raised about the potential digital divide, with some students lacking access to digital devices and/or internet at home. This was seen as a significant barrier to implementing digital profiles in an equitable way, with respondents emphasising the potential for digitalisation to widen existing socio-economic inequalities.

> "In more deprived communities such as the community I teach in, COVID and lockdown clearly showed the lack of ICT access of a significant proportion of the young people in Scotland." – High school teacher

Similarly, respondents noted the lack of adequate IT infrastructure in some schools which would, thus, hinder the successful implementation of digital profiles and assessments. Issues included unreliable internet, outdated computers, and limited access to devices. It was stressed that there are significant disparities between schools, with many schools and communities not having equal access to digital resources. This was seen as potentially exacerbating existing issues relating to the poverty-related attainment gap. Respondents, thus, called for substantial investment in hardware and software across schools.

> "There is not parity of ICT access across a school, between schools within a Local Authority, or across schools in Scotland. This will require billions of pounds and a robust ICT back-up to protect pupil data." – High school teacher

Many respondents raised questions about the practical use and purpose of digital profiles. It was felt that the value of digital profiles and their application in further education and employment was unclear. Respondents argued that digital profiles would be extremely time consuming for pupils but would deliver very few benefits for them.

> "They often are intended to reduce the workload however they usually end up being paper based and then being transposed onto the digital forum. Who are these profiles intended for? If it is for application to further education, surely the children's achievements can be shared directly from the SQA (or whatever it becomes) and if it is intended for future employers, we have our doubts about how or indeed if, they would ever be accessed." – Primary school teachers (group response)

Some respondents also reflected on the ethical considerations in the use of digital technology, including Artificial Intelligence. Concerns were raised about plagiarism, data security, over-automation, and an over-reliance on technology.

Programmes of Learning

Recommendation: Programmes of learning should remain an important aspect of the Senior Phase and will be a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. There should be a reduction in external assessment across the Senior Phase.

27% of responses disagreed with the recommendation that programmes of learning should remain an important aspect of the Senior phase, with a reduction of external assessment. These respondents were in unanimous agreement on the importance of retaining programmes of learning as an essential component of the SDA. However, they strongly disagreed with the recommendation to reduce external assessment in the Senior Phase for the same reasons set out in the above section on assessment.

> "We agree that 'Programmes of Learning' are an essential, non-negotiable element of the Diploma of Achievement but we have significant concerns about the proposal to reduce external assessment in senior phase, in particular the proposal to remove external assessment up to SCQF level 5 and from S4." – High school teachers (group response)

Some respondents were also concerned about, what they consider, the SDA's lack of focus on learning and teaching. They believe that programmes of learning should be the central focus of the curriculum, with less weight placed on the Project Learning and Personal Pathway elements of the SDA.

> "While we're glad to hear that learning in the normal manner will be retained, it's interesting to see it relegated to a third of what such a diploma would require; one would naturally hope that Learning and Teaching would be at the heart of it all, and would outweigh other factors in terms of achievement." – High school teachers (group response)

Modularised Courses

Recommendation: Programmes of Learning should be organised into modules to allow learners maximum flexibility to build credit as they progress through courses. SCQF Level 6 Higher courses should be progressive allowing learners to build credits over two years.

21% of responses disagreed with the recommendation to introduce modularised courses.

Many respondents were concerned about the potential impact on teacher workload. Continuous internal assessment was anticipated to increase the burden on teachers. What is more, respondents argued that there is a lack of clarity regarding

how modularised courses will be delivered, timetabled, and assessed and how teachers would manage pupils at different stages within the same classroom.

> "The more options and choice available, the more staff hours will be required to make that a viable option. Unless the plan is to vastly increase staff numbers, this will only lead to increased pressure on staff, burnout and frustration, and people leaving the profession after struggling vainly against unreasonable demands." – High school teacher

Respondents also argued that modularisation would increase, rather than decrease, the number of assessments, thus causing undue pressure on pupils and teachers. Several respondents also pointed to the potential for recreating issues that led to the removal of unit assessments in the past.

> "When we previously had "unit passes" when N5/H etc. were brought in many pupils only achieved unit passes and didn't manage a full course award. Since the requirement for unit passes was removed more pupils have achieved a full course award." – High school teachers (group response)

Concerns arose about the uniformity and standardisation of modularised courses across schools and local authorities. Questions were raised about who creates the modules, whether they are consistent nationwide, and how external stakeholders, such as universities and employers, will assess the value of modules if they are not standardised.

Some respondents also questioned the effectiveness of modularisation in ensuring a comprehensive understanding of a subject area. There are concerns that it may encourage short-term cramming and hinder the development of foundational knowledge of the subject.

> "Some staff were concerned that a module approach may lead to the children only being taught modular content with the end of module assessment in mind and so it would be as if they were being 'taught to the test'." – Primary school teachers (group response)

Parity of esteem

Recommendation: Enhance parity of esteem between types of qualifications by recognising as equal all qualifications at the same SCQF level with the same credit points. Qualifications at the same level in Scotland, should use the SCQF Level followed by the name of the qualification in promotional literature and in recording of results for example, Chemistry - SCQF level 6 – Higher.

18% of responses disagreed with the recommendation to enhance parity of esteem between different types of qualifications.

While some respondents did not necessarily disagree with the concept of "parity of esteem", they were sceptical that academic and vocational qualifications would be considered equal by employers, further and higher education institutes and wider society. Respondents believed that this will be a particular problem for non-examined qualifications, such as National Progression Awards (NPA), when they are compared to more academic qualifications such as Highers.

> "A nice idea in theory, but hard to legislate for, as people will make up their own minds on the value of different courses irrespective of what you call them. We would imagine that higher and further education entry requirements will determine the public's view of these." – High school teachers (group response)

Many of the respondents felt it would be challenging to align this recommendation with the expectations of universities, both in Scotland and beyond. They argued that universities were unlikely to change their entry requirements and would still favour Highers over other qualifications. They raised concerns that young people may feel they have been misadvised if vocational qualifications are promoted as equivalent to academic qualifications, but universities do not recognise them in terms of entry requirements. Respondents stressed that this recommendation cannot be implemented without the backing of universities.

> "If we try to elevate non-examined NPAs to the same status as Highers and market them to pupils and parents as such, yet universities don't consider non-examined certificates as working towards university entry requirements, aren't we betraying the trust of our young people? The universities need to be fully on board if we are going to go down this road or we are wasting the time and potential of many of our learners." – High school teachers (group response)

Some respondents called for a clear distinction between academic and vocational qualifications. They questioned whether vocational qualifications can ever truly hold the same academic value as traditional qualifications. It is their opinion that academic qualifications are more difficult to achieve and should, thus, be held in greater esteem.

> "Not all courses are equal currently, e.g. sciences at one level, like National 5 are already harder than other courses such as administration or childcare or PE. Let's not pretend they are. Courses that have no exam and are internally assessed will be easier to achieve than external assessed ones - which are then by definition not equal." – High school teacher

National monitoring and accountability systems

Recommendation: Require national monitoring and accountability systems to gather information on the breadth of achievements recognised within the Scottish Diploma of Achievement. Insight and the National Improvement Framework (NIF) should be updated to reflect success as envisaged in the SDA.

16% of responses disagreed with the recommendation on requiring national monitoring and accountability systems.

Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of current monitoring and accountability systems. The need for accountability is acknowledged, but there was a prevailing feeling that the focus should shift from measuring schools (in a way that pits schools and local authorities against each other) to prioritising outcomes for young people. Respondents argued that outcomes for students vary based on geography and socioeconomic factors and questioned the relevance of such comparisons.

These respondents were worried that increased monitoring and accountability might lead to a data-driven approach detached from the principles of GIRFEC. The potential negative consequences, such as increased pressure on pupils and a focus on data rather than genuine outcomes, were cited as concerns.

> "Although we understand the importance of national monitoring and accountability systems, we believe more focus needs to be placed on ensuring outcomes for young people so that the system doesn't focus on what can be 'measured' rather than focusing on the outcomes first and foremost." – High school teachers (group response)

> "National monitoring and accountability puts pressure on staff and pupils and puts us against other schools who have different contexts and a range of pupils. Every year we have attainment reviews and they do not benefit us and we are questioned if pupils don't achieve highly enough." – High school teachers (group response)

Some respondents were also concerned that monitoring and accountability measures might indicate a lack of confidence in the professionalism and judgement of teachers. They called for greater autonomy for schools and local authorities to monitor progress at a local level.

> "A greater level of trust with the educators in Scotland is required and the autonomy for leadership teams to be able to monitor their own teams through collegiate conversations and a professional trust." – Primary school teacher

Concerns were raised about the potential for an increased administrative burden on teachers if new mentoring and accountability systems are introduced. Respondents

argued that this would have an adverse impact on workload. They fear that teacher's will be overloaded with additional administrative tasks and left to bear the brunt of achieving a workable system.

> "While I agree that standards have to be maintained and monitored there is the danger of building inflexibility into a new system by establishing another monolithic layer of bureaucracy which will stifle any innovation and create additional workload for those tasked with delivering the system at the sharp end." – High school teacher

Workforce and Professional Learning

Recommendation: An expanded programme of professional learning should be developed to support the changes to qualifications and assessment. Time should be made available for staff in Education to access professional learning, to collaborate and to engage with the changes being proposed. Build a national strategy for standards.

8% of responses disagreed with the recommendation to develop a programme of professional learning to support the changes to qualifications and assessment.

These respondents are unconvinced that they would be given sufficient time and funding to attend professional learning opportunities. Additionally, some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the professional learning offer during the implementation of CfE, noting that it largely consisted of navigating through extensive guidelines. They were thus, sceptical, that this recommendation would be delivered effectively.

> "CfE was implemented via a fat folder of guidelines which had to be sifted through and translated into context. This was not efficient or effective. Alternatively, if it will be training, will teachers be released to attend and schools compensated?" – High school teachers (group response)

Next steps

The Scottish Government has been taking forward a detailed examination of the proposals in the Independent Review, ensuring that Parliament and others across the system have the opportunity to engage with and shape our response. The conclusions of this report are being considered as part of this.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills has committed to debating the proposals in the final report in Parliament. Scottish Government will respond to the final report later this year.

List of Acronyms

ACM - Alternative certification model
ASN - Additional Support Needs
CfE – Curriculum for Excellence
CLPL – Career Long Professional Learning
COVID-19 – Coronavirus pandemic
GIRFEC – Getting It Right for Every Child
ICT - Information and communication technology
IDL – Interdisciplinary learning
NPA – National Progression Awards
PSA - Pupil Support Assistant
PT – Principal teacher
SCQF - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SDA - Scottish Diploma of Achievement
SMT – Senior management team
SQA - Scottish Qualifications Authority
STEM - Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics