

## DRAFT PAPER FOR MANAGEMENT BOARD – NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

### Background

1. A *Consultation on the Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland* was launched on 10 June and runs until 31 October. It has four main proposals:

- (1) Access, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications will be retained as points of stability and updated in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*;
- (2) A new qualification will replace Standard Grade (General and Credit) and Intermediate 1 & 2;
- (3) New awards in literacy and numeracy will be introduced;
- (4) Increased flexibility when taking qualifications – ideas include opportunities to study qualifications over 18 months or 2 years as well as 1 year; introducing a winter diet of examinations; and encouraging the most able pupils to bypass lower level qualifications and to study for Highers from S4 onwards.

2. Copies of the consultation document were issued to schools, colleges and other interested bodies and it was also published on the Scottish Government's website. Arrangements were made to underpin the consultation with engagement events and to recruit social researchers to analyse responses.

### Where we are in the process

3. There are a number of strands to our engagement strategy, designed to encourage the education, business and wider community to discuss and respond to the consultation:

- (1) We have commissioned Ipsos MORI to undertake a series of in-depth interviews and focus groups with key stakeholder groups (ie young people, parents and carers, employers, school and college staff).
- (2) We are holding meetings with national representative bodies in order to clarify issues and identify opportunities for engaging their members on consultation issues.
- (3) We are covering the next generation of NQs at a wide range of conferences, including a series of area events on *Curriculum of Excellence*, to be held in August/September and the Scottish Learning Festival.
- (4) We have organised five national consultation workshops (to take place in Inverness, Edinburgh, Dundee, Clydebank & Ayr) in late September/early October.

4. To date, we have received approximately 80 responses to our on-line consultation questionnaire. Whilst we are trying to encourage early engagement with the proposals (eg we undertook some of the parental focus groups during the Summer holidays), we are conscious that September/October will provide the best opportunities for face-to-face contacts and, like most consultations, the majority of written responses will arrive in the final weeks of the consultation.

### **What happens next**

5. At the end of the consultation period, Ipsos MORI will analyse all responses and will produce a draft report on its findings shortly before Christmas 2008 (the final report is due in late January 2009). Following discussions with Management Board and Ministers, this will provide a basis for a Cabinet paper on the way forward. Cabinet are due to consider these issues on 24 March 2009. This timescale should allow for an announcement in April. This ties in with SQA's plans for the qualifications development programme and will follow the publication of Building the Curriculum 4 (Assessment Framework 3-18) in March.

### **Key issues to be addressed**

6. Below is the flavour of the issues which Management Board may need to tackle in the short, medium and longer term.

#### **Issues for the policy development phase (ie in the run-up to April 09)**

- Timetable for introduction of new and revised qualifications. There are decisions to be taken based on feedback from the consultation and latest thinking on the extent to which those entering S1 in 2009/10 are likely to experience a sufficiently transformed curriculum in S1-S3 (allowing study for the new and revised qualifications from 2012/13 onwards). Clearly, the final timetable must be dictated by the needs of learners.
- Other consultation proposals. Advice to Ministers on a wide range of issues covered by the consultation (eg which broad aspects of Standard Grade and Intermediates will be reflected in the new qualification at SCQF levels 4 and 5; will units be graded and, if so, will they contribute to final awards; what compensatory arrangements should apply; what will be the strategy for assessment of the new literacy and numeracy awards; if/when to introduce a winter diet). We anticipate a range of reactions to these proposals.
- CfE vision of broad general education, with qualifications largely beginning in S4. The consultation paper sets this out as background rather than a proposal for formal consultation. It is therefore interesting that it is this idea – which demonstrates how thinking on qualifications is being driven by thinking on the curriculum, in keeping with most commentators wishes – that may be most contentious. We are aware of a number of concerns. First, it is unlikely to be popular amongst those schools who have adopted early presentation for qualifications. Second, there is a fear that there will be insufficient challenge if pupils are not able to study for qualifications in S1-S3. Third, some fear that it will lead to a narrowing of choices (given that young people will have the opportunity to study for 5 rather than 8 subject-based qualifications in S4). Given the numbers of young people staying on at school beyond S4, such concerns may be alleviated if people think in terms of a rich S1-S3 experience with opportunities for challenge, personalisation and choice followed by a flexible senior phase (S4-S6), with varied opportunities for attaining qualifications over a longer period.
- Consistency with emerging Assessment Framework 3-18. For example, some have argued that the qualifications system should be largely based on external assessment, with SQA marking (and potentially grading) all units assessments in order to remove the assessment burden from teachers (or at least those who are not SQA appointees). However, this raises issues of consistency, given the focus on empowering teachers and promoting teacher-based assessment 3-18. There could

be a danger of undermining confidence in teacher judgement if this not viewed as appropriate in 'high stakes' areas.

### **Issues for the implementation process**

- Qualifications development programme. Challenges for SQA, LTS and others in undertaking the necessary development work in the time available.
- Monitoring underlying systems development. For example, are software suppliers to SQA's centres able to develop, test and introduce revised systems by August 2012 if necessary.
- Decisions to be taken on the scale of changes to be introduced in the first year of implementation. For example, do we take a pragmatic decision that revised Highers are not introduced until the second year of implementation in order to reduce dual running requirements in the first year?
- Awareness-raising and CPD. An effective communications and development programme is essential to ensure all stakeholders have an appreciation of the new arrangements for qualifications (and their role in ensuring their smooth implantation).
- Further advice on senior phase. We may need to offer further advice on entitlements within the senior phase – including possible exemplification of the need to balance qualifications with opportunities for wider achievement; how entitlements might be interpreted in non-school settings etc.

### **Issues that relate to the system once it is implemented**

- Extent to which schools and colleges are embracing the vision of greater flexibility in the way qualifications are managed – eg offering qualifications over different timeframes, utilising a winter diet, encouraging the most able learners to bypass lower level qualifications.

### **Links**

7. The list of key issues gives a brief flavour of the many linkages between qualifications and other parts of the CfE programme, including assessment 3-18, curriculum structure and literacy and numeracy strategy. Other important links exist with work on recognising achievement (particularly the S3 profile), skills development (including thinking on the core skills framework) and MCMC strategy. These will all impact upon future developments on National Qualifications. Management Board will also be kept informed of relevant developments on Scottish Science and Languages Baccalaureates.

### **Governance**

8. Work to develop thinking on NQ issues has been overseen by the Assessment & Qualifications Task Group (comprising representatives from the Scottish Government, SQA, LTS, HMIE, school and college sectors). We may want to revisit the remit of that group as we move from policy development to the implementation phase but there may well be a need for a "hands on" group to handle related issues and feed advice to Management Board. We will continue to update Management Board and Ministers on advice provided by the National Qualifications Steering Group.

**Management Board Action**

9. Management Board is invited to:
- (1) Note plans for engagement on the consultation proposals (para 3 refers), offering any ideas on how we might promote a good response; and
  - (2) Note issues that are likely to require Management Board advice in the short, medium and longer term (para 6 refers)

Schools Directorate  
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