



a consultation on the next generation of national qualifications in Scotland

ATL's response to the Scottish Government's consultation document

31 October 2008

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), as a leading education union, recognise the link between education policy and our members' conditions of employment. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate from a position of strength. We champion good practice and achieve better working lives for our members. We help our members, as their careers develop, through first-rate research, advice, information and legal support. Our 160,000 members – teachers, lecturers, headteachers, support staff and students – are empowered to get active locally and nationally.

ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). The union is a member of the Social Partnership – working with the UK Government, employers and other unions on education issues. ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

PROPOSAL 1

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

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

YES

ATL believes that it is right and proper that with the forthcoming introduction of a *Curriculum for Excellence* there is a review of the national qualifications system in Scotland. The outcome of the review must be to ensure a coherent approach is taken and that the portfolio of national qualifications in Scotland matches the aims and ambitions of the new curriculum. That said we do wish to take this opportunity to raise a number of general issues regarding the proposals within the consultation paper which are not covered within the consultation paper's set questions:

- How will the costs involved in setting up the new proposals be funded? At a time of budgetary constraints for local authorities, the funding settlement under the Concordat between CoSLA and the Scottish Government cannot be expected to meet these costs without additional monies.
- Will additional resources be offered to the college sector to ensure that it is able to continue its partnership with schools?
- What arrangements will be made for the additional CPD requirements of teachers in respect of the proposed new qualifications? We do not believe that the current arrangements for CPD should be adversely impacted by the new qualifications. It is important that teachers play an active role in becoming knowledgeable in the new qualifications; however, these should not form the bulk of their CPD activity.
- We are concerned about the potential workload impact on teachers of preparing for the new qualifications at the same time as the new curriculum is bedding in.

PROPOSAL 2

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

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

YES

Explanation

Grading is more inclusive. ATL believes that Pass/fail is only appropriate for a threshold qualification e.g. competence

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

YES

Explanation

We agree that graded units should count towards final award on the basis it would reflect a variety of assessments. It does however raise the issue for teachers of time needed to grade assignments/assessments and other concerns about recognising plagiarism.

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

Explanation/other suggestion

Option A - extend the range of grading in course awards to grade E

Q6. The proposed name for the new award is General (SCQF4) and Advanced General (SCQF5). Please indicate if you are content with this suggestion. If not please offer an alternative and explain your choice.

NO

Explanation/other suggestion

ATL would prefer to retain current names of Standard Grade and revamp within the principles rather than rename for the sake of change alone. An information awareness campaign amongst pupils, parents, employers, colleges and universities would help alleviate any potential confusion regarding the new system. A new name is not necessarily required, after all the Scottish Government rejected the OECD's proposal for a new Scottish Certificate of Education citing the advantages in stability and public perception.

PROPOSAL 3

New awards in literacy and in numeracy will be available at SCQF levels 3 to 5.

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

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

NO

Explanation/other suggestion

ATL does not believe that it is necessary to introduce new national qualifications in Literacy and Numeracy at a range of SCQF levels. We believe that the proposed new national qualifications should bring enough credibility in respect of literacy and numeracy, particularly with respect to the cross-curriculum emphasis contained within Curriculum for Excellence.

We do not believe that parents nor pupils will value the new awards and instead will, like the current core skills awards, continue to concentrate on the Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications.

We would need more information on the exact nature of the proposed awards before being able to comment further. Should the Scottish Government decide to proceed in this manner, we would wish to be consulted further, in order to ensure that members are not disadvantaged by such developments.

PROPOSAL 4

Increased flexibility to better meet the needs of young people. Suggestions include:

- studying National Qualifications over 18 months (or 2 years) as well as one year;
- introducing a winter diet of examinations; and
- encouraging the most able young people to bypass lower level qualifications and to study Highers from S4 onwards.

Q11. Do you agree with the proposal to allow the study of Highers and Advanced Highers over 12 months, 18 months and 2 years?

NO

Explanation

We would see merit in pupils being able to study Highers and Advanced Highers over 12 months and 2 years. We have doubts as to the merits of being able to study over an eighteen month period. The potential benefits to the individual student cannot be discussed out-with the context of their school's ability to timetable such opportunities.

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

NO

Explanation

ATL does not support the proposal for a winter diet of examinations. Smaller schools may not be able to offer a winter diet of exams and timetable a full portfolio of qualifications. How will the Scottish Government ensure that pupils in such schools are not disadvantaged?

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

NO

Explanation

ATL has reservations regarding the impact on teacher professionalism of the proposals to allow students to bypass qualifications at lower levels and begin study for Highers from S4 onwards. Who would decide whether a qualification at a lower level should be bypassed – the pupil, their parents or their teacher? Furthermore would the lower qualifications become seen as stand-alone for those who can't achieve higher? If they are, in fact, lower levels of a higher qualification, then you still start with the lower in terms of curriculum.

TIMELINE

Q16. It is intended that planning for the new curriculum should commence in 2008/09, with approaches based on the new curriculum introduced from school year 2009/10. This suggests that the new and revised qualifications and any increased flexibilities would be required from 2012/13 onwards to ensure smooth progression between the curriculum and qualifications. Is this indicative timeline realistic? Please comment on any implications to be considered.

NO

Comment

ATL believes that there would be wider benefits from a delay in the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. This would have the knock-on effect of requiring a subsequent delay in the introduction of new qualifications.

**This submission was prepared on behalf of
ATL Scotland
CBC House
24 Canning Street
Edinburgh, EH3 8EG**