Colleges Scotland Response to Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment Final Report – August 2023

General Comments

Context

Colleges Scotland broadly welcomes the recommendations of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment Final Report. We have previously commented on the Muir Report, and we would agree with the focus of a vision that serves learners and Scotland in a way that creates a culture shift.

Change is Required

The sector would welcome the introduction of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA) pending further dialogue with the Scottish Government on how the SDA will sit alongside and be supported by the existing range of college courses. The SDA allows for an individual's achievements beyond the formal educational framework to be recognised and we welcome an approach based on experience and skills as well as knowledge – colleges have substantial experience in this method of assessment.

The sector also welcomes the introduction of a digital profile. The profile, if appropriately resourced, would work in parallel with the SDA to record not only assessment earned achievements but also on participation, experiences, as well as skills. The digital profile would also aid lifelong learning, as the learner will be able to return to learning at a later date using their profile, furthermore it will allow smoother movements between different institutions.

The recommendations include a move towards using SCQF as standard across the post-school landscape. This would contribute towards an important cultural change by creating much needed parity of achievement across the educational landscape.

Within the review there is a focus on schools which is important, however, we need to ensure that the work and position of colleges is recognised as being vital when elements such as the SDA and digital profiles, are taken forward and developed.

In this paper we provide some initial views from the college sector, along with a RAG status, in order to allow ongoing dialogue with Scottish Government and other key stakeholders. Key for RAG status is as follows:

Red	Do not support the recommendation
Amber	Support the recommendation in principle, whilst acknowledging further details are required
Green	Support the recommendation

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Hayward Recommendations	Comments	Role of the College Sector	RAG status
Recommendation 1: Change Qualifications and Assessment in the Senior Phase in Scotland. Change must be carefully planned and resourced. **Context of recommendation:** The themes from the Muir Report 2022 became the starting point for this Independent Review: the need to identify a future qualification and assessment system that would serve learners and Scotland as a society well and be undertaken in a way that would signal a change in culture. That would mean putting learners at the centre and developing, amongst all stakeholders, a shared Vision for the future of qualifications and assessment.	We have previously commented on the Muir Report, and we would agree with the focus of a vision that serves learners and Scotland in a way that creates a culture shift.	The college sector will provide support for the change to creating a more holistic approach to assessment which has the individual learner and their diverse needs at the centre.	
Recommendation 2: Continue the process of cultural change. Scotland should retain the structure of the IRG and allied CCGs as a key method of engagement, as the country introduces and develops new approaches to qualifications and assessment. It should also build on this Review's attempts to involve every educational establishment in the country, learn from where it worked well and how that learning should influence future consultations.	We support the continuation of these focus groups to ensure all voices are heard. Whilst the focus could primarily be on schools, it is important that colleges continue to be fully involved and cover all levels of senior phase education.	Colleges will continue to support lifelong learning being embedded in our culture.	
Recommendation 3: Work in partnership with countries with similar	Learning from other cultures is important as it helps to create a more outward looking college sector. It would	Colleges will utilise the UK Government's Turing scheme and other available Scottish	

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aspirations to Scotland to develop qualifications and assessment. Learn from experience within Scotland but also be outward looking. Seek to learn with other nations with similar educational ambitions to build a qualifications and assessment system that will remain fit for the future.	be important to include some countries which have good school – college links. The system should also be recognised and respected by other countries, which would enable a smoother approach to skills provision to encourage inward investment.	Government funding to reach out to international institutions.	
Recommendation 4: Adopt the Vision and Principles proposed in this Review into policy and practice. Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland should be aligned with the Vision and Principles.	It will be important during this process that there is a continued checking in with these stakeholders of these visions and principles so that the learner is recognised, valued and promoted.	Colleges will work with Scottish Government and other key stakeholders, to ensure that it delivers for the learner and is consistent with delivery of Scottish Government's Purpose and Principles.	
Recommendation 5: Adopt the SDA 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.	The college sector supports the principle of the SDA as it allows the individual learner to demonstrate achievement outwith the formal education system. By recognising skills and experience, as well as knowledge, it provides the learner with more autonomy over their ability and capacity to learn. Colleges contribute towards a change in culture with their method of assessment placing less weight on an end of year examination and giving more emphasis to continued assessment, highlighting experiential and skills-based recognition.	Colleges will work with SQA to adapt and evolve with the new SDA. Dialogue between the sector and Scottish Government will be vital to understand the details of the diploma and how this would operate with college provision. Colleges will contribute their experience into the new methods of assessment including: qualifications, awards, credit accumulated and learner reflections on their personal learning through the Personal Pathway.	
Recommendation 6: Use the SDA as a graduation certificate for all Senior Phase educational settings. The following criteria should be used as a starting point for further development of the Diploma:	The college sector welcomes the introduction of a digital profile. This would recognise not just assessment earned achievements, but the achievements found particularly on college courses which are continually assessed, as well as being based on student participation, experiences, and accomplishments throughout the academic year. Due	This method will help colleges to support in-work learning, with a modular approach to gaining skills increasing the ability of learners to move between institutions, develop micro-credentials and enhance transferable skills.	

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• All learners must be offered the chance to experience learning in respect of all elements of the Diploma. This should be viewed as an entitlement. • The overall Diploma should not be graded. It should be awarded when achievements are recognised in each element, Programmes of Learning, Project Learning and the Personal Pathway. • The Diploma will be awarded at point of exit and will include achievements gathered to that stage. This will include, qualifications, awards, credit accumulated and learner reflections on their personal learning through the Personal Pathway. • The three elements of the Diploma should not be weighted. All elements are important as evidence of breadth of achievement. • The Diploma, and the evidence within it, will move with the learner to be built on in college, employment, university and the voluntary sector. • If a learner does not show evidence of learning in all three elements, the Diploma will not be awarded. They will leave with a record of what they have achieved. It will be possible to undertake learning at a later stage to allow for the award to be made. • All elements of the Diploma should be accessible to Gaelic Medium Learners.	to how assessments are carried out within colleges, such a method of accreditation would help smooth the transition to the use of this profile. A digital profile will also help towards lifelong learning, as the learner will be able to return to learning at a later date using their profile. This is welcomed by colleges as it places the emphasis on learning and promotes a move away from solely teaching to assessment. Further consideration should be given as to how the profile will be recognised both across the United Kingdom and internationally.		

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• 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. The Qualifications Body will regulate the information about achievements in Programmes of Learning and Project Learning. The Personal Pathway will be entirely in the control of the learner. • The digital profile must be fully accessible for all learners and available in Gaelic and other minority languages.			
Recommendation 7: Include the Programmes of Learning element as a prerequisite for the award of the Diploma. All learners should be offered a broad range of courses including academic, vocational, professional and technical courses. It is an entitlement. The Review recommends that the learning, teaching and assessment of Programmes of Learning can be strengthened by collaboratively taking forward the following actions: • Review course specifications to ensure that there is a strong relationship between what matters in the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and qualifications. • Improve progression between the BGE and the Senior Phase and within	The programmes of learning is especially attuned to the courses delivered within colleges which provide a wide variety of skills named in this recommendation – vocational, professional, and technical. Through these new approaches this can strengthen college-school partnerships which are continuously developing. Furthermore, where appropriate, these qualifications should be led by industry experts which will help to improve ties with local businesses. For this to take root it would need to be supported by a strong lifelong learning careers service.	Colleges will work collaboratively and share their existing knowledge with the qualification body to build on their existing expertise on continual assessment. Helping people learn by assessing skills as well as knowledge is welcomed by the college sector, as it has a great deal of experience in this area.	

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the Senior Phase in schools and colleges. • Broaden the range of assessment methods for National Qualifications in the Senior Phase including increased opportunities for classroom assessment. • Act to reduce the number of examinations in the Senior Phase and involve only internal assessment at SCQF Levels 1-5. This will open up a range of possibilities, e.g., for SCQF Level 6 Higher courses to progress across two years. • Where appropriate, retain external examination. Current examinations should be reviewed to reduce susceptibility to question prediction and over-rehearsal. • Increase flexibility by modularising courses and Programmes of Learning. This will allow learners to build credit as they progress through courses. • Create more time for learning and teaching. These proposals offer the potential for there to be more time for learning and teaching. Be vigilant to make sure that the time released is used for that purpose.			
Recommendation 8: 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. This is an issue of equity. It must be flexible for all	Colleges Scotland supports the inclusion of the Personal Pathways element. By encouraging the learner to reflect on what they have learned throughout their courses it will help them to:	The Personal Pathway echoes the sentiments and goals of colleges as institutions supporting their communities. This strategy will help colleges include more social, cultural, economic and wellbeing aspects to their courses.	

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learners, recognising the importance of personal choice and should focus on what learners have achieved. This element should: • Encourage and celebrate the interests, competences and achievements of every learner. • Be owned by the learner, promote personalisation and choice. • Support learners to self-reflect on the skills and attributes they have developed. • Focus on what an individual has learned through an experience rather than on the number or location of experiences. • Subject to authentication processes but not graded. • Aim to include social, cultural, economic and well-being aspects. In many cases learners' experiences will integrate a number of these aspects. • Include a reflective, personal discussion which should be undertaken across an academic year and throughout the Senior Phase. Supportive structures should be established to support the development of this area of the Diploma. This should include professional learning and to ensure that the importance of this area of work is recognised, is well co-ordinated and has status, a promoted post should be established for those	• Strengthen their contributions to their communities. • Engage in local cultural and arts activities. • Build strategies on how to develop wellbeing for themselves and others. • Gain an understanding of their achievements which they are proud of. Personalising each course in this way contributes towards futureproofing college education. Colleges support a reflective and personal discussion as this helps to place the learner at the centre. This will need financial support to help train staff to build these new Personal Pathways roles.		

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leading this work in schools and colleges.			
Recommendation 9: Use descriptions of knowledge progression and the universal skills framework, in the recently published Skills Review (Withers, 2023), if accepted, to inform the design of Project Learning in the SDA. They should also be used as the basis for assessment.	Colleges Scotland has produced a comprehensive response to the recommendations of Withers and there needs to be a tie-in as these recommendations are taken forward by Scottish Government.	Colleges Scotland supports the Withers report, particularly where it reinforces the key role the college sector plays and how the sector is central to the delivery of a world class skills deliver system supporting both economic and social prosperity.	
Recommendation 10: 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. • Project Learning should be an identifiable and distinct part of the curriculum, building on Programmes of Study. Individual learners must be allowed to apply their knowledge and skills across subjects to tackle a challenge. Project Learning can be undertaken through a mixture of group and individual work. However, it should be individually assessed. • Project Learning should take place throughout the Senior Phase. A learner could choose to investigate a new project each year or build on the same project as they progress through the Senior Phase. The level of challenge should steadily increase, and	Colleges Scotland supports the inclusion of Project Learning.	Colleges support the learner-centred approach of Project Learning. With the onus being shifted away from end-of-year examinations this is consistent with the teaching practices found within colleges which harnessed the skills and experiences of the learner. Colleges will contribute their particular skills and knowledge of project learning into the discussions and development of the SDA.	

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achievement should be linked to SCQF levels and credits to demonstrate progression. While the focus of this Review is on the Senior Phase it may be beneficial to promote Project Learning in both 103 primary schools (where it already exists in a range of forms) and in the BGE Phase so as to support learners for the type of experience to come. • Project Learning will be internally assessed within educational settings, with external verification built into the process to ensure shared standards across the country. Processes will be rigorous but light touch. • There will be flexibility and different pathways within the Project element to promote inclusion particularly for learners with ASN, learners who are neurodivergent, learners who are highly able and those who may be educated at home. While some learners may undertake complex, long-term enquiry into major global issues, for other learners the project element of the Diploma may involve drawing together educational experiences to help build confidence, for example in terms of communication or independent travel. • The goal of a project investigation should be chosen by the learner. We acknowledge it may be necessary to start with a more defined offer in the early stages of the Project element of the Diploma. Examples will be			

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developed collaboratively by teachers and lecturers, local authorities, researchers, national agencies and learners. These examples will be made available to schools across the country for them to adapt into their own circumstances.			
Recommendation 11: Enhance parity of esteem between types of qualifications by recognising as equal all qualifications at the same SCQF level with the same credit points: • Scotland, should use the SCQF Level followed by the name of the qualification in promotional literature and in recording of results • Academic, vocational, professional and technical qualifications should all be included within the Programmes of Study element of the Diploma • Due recognition is given to all elements of the Diploma as an award that illustrates much more that the completion of programmes.	Colleges would support the cultural change towards parity of esteem. Colleges know that the work they do is vitally important to the economic wellbeing of the country. They provide expert knowledge and skills on a wide variety of essential careers, as well as upskilling and reskilling those within the workforce who require it – including in green skills. Moving to the use of SCQF levels across the post-school landscape would help to bring equity. Furthermore, it would also help in the role of community learning. Colleges welcome the central recommendation of the report in this area by building on the language of SCQF level to help provide a better understanding of different qualifications and how they relate to one another. Recognition of prior qualification would help to reduce unnecessary duplication within their learner journey. This must be done in partnership with local schools, universities and other qualification bodies.	The college sector will continue to push for recognition of prior learning. This is often not well understood, and it is important that there is clear guidance on how this is applied across the tertiary education sector. The college sector will make greater use, and support others to do the same, of the SCQF framework to map a range of suitable pathways for learners. The college sector will use its collective knowledge and expertise to advise how changes should be implemented, ensuring as little disruption as possible to the learner and operational processes, whilst reducing duplication.	
Recommendation 12: Establish a Cross Sector Commission on Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Artificial Intelligence is creating positives and challenges for the college sector, and these can be assisted by this recommendation.	Colleges will be able to share their experience of working with AI across the tertiary sector. This will not only help to meet the challenges that AI has created but will	

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• As a matter of urgency, Scottish Government should convene and lead a cross sector commission to develop a shared value position on the future of AI in education and a set of guiding principles for the use of AI. • In the interim, teachers and learners should be supported to use AI, to take advantage of opportunities to reduce bureaucratic tasks. Coursework tasks should be reviewed.	It is important that when taking this forward it ties in with the AI Strategy for Scotland.	help to create stronger inter-institutional dialogue – ultimately helping to enrich the post-school landscape.	
Recommendation 13: Create a national plan to make the SDA a reality for all learners in all educational settings. • A national plan should be agreed for the introduction and development of the SDA to turn ideas into a reality for all learners in all educational settings. This plan should include resource implications.	Colleges agree to establishing an appropriate plan for making the Scottish Diploma of Achievement a success as it builds on the experience of colleges in continuous assessment.	Colleges will contribute by continuing to create a place for all learners, with the ability to help those returning to the workforce.	
Recommendation 14: Develop the national plan and the wider process of change in ways that are inclusive and collegial. • It should be based on the Vision and Principles, must involve all those with an interest in qualifications and assessment and have a clear indication of how different communities will contribute to making the ideas in the	Colleges are anchor institutions and conduits for helping those from the most deprived areas of Scotland into the labour market. This approach to assessment would provide further support to colleges and help to empower those who feel left behind that post-school education is a place where they can return to or begin their learner journey anew.	Colleges are at the heart of many communities, and as such they can communicate these more inclusive approaches towards achievement outlined as part of the SDA.	

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Vision a reality for every learner in Scotland. • It is critical that all communities have opportunities to develop an understanding of the new approach to assessment and qualification system in Scotland. There should be opportunities for all involved in qualifications and assessment to discuss this report and to consider how the Vision and Principles might be put into practice in their context. • The plan should include a review cycle (Recommendation 4) where evidence is gathered from policy and practice to explore the relationship between ideas and practice and to take appropriate action. This formative review should be undertaken in partnership by practitioners, policy makers and researchers.			
Recommendation 15: Introduce the SDA in phases. • The introduction of the SDA should be in a series of three overlapping phases. Space should be created to enable staff, learners and parents/carers to engage with the Vision and Principles and to be involved in the development of the Diploma. The plan for the phased introduction of the Diploma should be discussed and agreed by the start of session 2024-25.	The SDA should be implemented at an appropriate speed, with any pilot scheme ensuring it incorporates a college. Colleges understand that there will be difficulties and challenges attached to such a change in assessment but with their experience of assessing learners on more than an end-of-year basis there will be much that college staff will be familiar with.	To assist in creating that cultural change colleges will develop and help their staff to understand and work with the SDA. Much of the basis for experiential and skills-based learning is already present within colleges and the sector will share this to help the successful development of the SDA.	

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Recommendation 16: Make time available for staff in Education. Education staff need time to access professional learning, to collaborate and to engage with the changes being proposed. Given the unique needs of the GME sector professional learning tailored to help support the Diploma for Gaelic speaking learners and educators is crucial.	This is extremely important. For there to be a cultural change towards a parity of esteem across the post-school landscape staff must be trained, with suitable resource and funding provided to ensure this is done successfully.	Colleges will support their staff to have access to continued learning that will support the changes.	
Recommendation 17: Develop a long-term engagement and communication strategy	A long-term engagement and communication strategy will be vital in developing this work to the benefit of the learner.	Colleges will support the development of the engagement and communication strategy.	
Recommendation 18: Build a national strategy for standards. • There should be an agreed national plan to build and sustain local and national standards for qualifications and assessment. • Training in how to avoid bias should be an essential part of the strategy and should involve teachers from Scotland's increasingly diverse workforce. • The strategy should be developed collaboratively by policy makers, practitioners and researchers.	Colleges welcome the need for a national strategy for standards (which would include Standards of Curriculum Development as part of it) as this will help to create parity of esteem within the post-school landscape.	Colleges will use their current knowledge and experience in this area to help development a successful national strategy.	
Recommendation 19: The Scottish Government and the new national education bodies should model cultural change.	Colleges would welcome this approach from the Scottish Government, such an approach will help them lead from the front with regards to a cultural change.	Colleges will support this change in culture.	

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• As the SDA is developed and introduced, the Scottish Government and the new national education bodies should model cultural change by working collaboratively in ways that recognise and value the contribution of every participant.			
Recommendation 20: Embed Qualification and Assessment developments clearly and explicitly within the wider reform agenda. • The Scottish Government must, as a matter of urgency, communicate a clear narrative that shows how the developments in qualifications and assessment are an integral part of the wider reform agenda. • The Scottish Government should establish collaborative structures to take forward the development of the SDA that mirror those developed during this Review to ensure that all those with an interest in qualifications and assessment continue to be part of the strategy for its realisation.	Colleges welcome coordination and guidance from Scottish Government with regards to implementing into the wider reform agenda through the framework to be established through Purpose and Principles.	Colleges Scotland will support the development of this important piece of work, to ensure a coordinated approach to the different elements of the wider reform agenda.	
Recommendation 21: Design the new national qualifications body to work in partnership with learners, teachers, policy and research communities to: • Develop a flexible modular approach to National Qualification courses to	A move to a more learner responsive course would be beneficial for transition between institutions and for lifelong learning.	Colleges will contribute their existing knowledge and experience to the discussions around the new qualifications body.	

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allow learners to build credit over time towards qualifications and to enable the system to respond with agility to the changing needs of individuals, society and the economy. • Extend the range of assessment methods within National Qualifications and identify what other actions might be taken to reduce the potential for rote learning and enhance the learner experience. • Rationalise the existing range of courses to create a clear, coherent offer for learners, parents/carers, schools, colleges, employers and universities. • Build a new approach to qualifications and assessment that has public confidence, is highly regarded nationally and is rigorous but not overly bureaucratic.			
Recommendation 22: Ask the new curriculum body in partnership with the new qualifications body to work with learners, teachers, policy and research communities to: • Improve course progression between the BGE and the Senior Phase, and within National Qualifications offered in the Senior Phase. • Co-construct and to trial examples of Project Learning in different educational establishments across the country. These examples should be made available to schools and colleges	A coordinated approach to the different elements of the wider reform agenda is key to maximising the benefits from these changes.	Colleges will contribute their existing knowledge and experience to the discussions around the new curriculum body.	

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nationally for teachers/lecturers to adapt to their own circumstances. • Work with local authorities, schools, colleges, teachers and lecturers to build a national moderation system that is rigorous but proportionate.			
Recommendation 23: Ask the Independent Inspectorate (HMIE) to work in partnership with learners, teachers, policy and research communities to: • Ensure the process of inspection effectively supports the introduction of the SDA in ways that are consistent with a collaborative, empowered culture. • Review practice with researchers and practitioners as the SDA develops and to identify if gaps are emerging between intentions and practices. The evidence emerging from these Reviews should be used formatively to identify actions to re-align the process.	Colleges would be keen to be involved in discussions with Independent Inspectorate (HMIE) to coordinate a smooth transition into the SDA.	Colleges will contribute their existing knowledge and experience to the discussions around the approach taken by HMIE.	
Recommendation 24: Establish the SDA as expected practice for teachers: • Teacher Education Institutions should work with the GTCS to review their programmes to ensure that newly qualified secondary school teachers and college lecturers are well-prepared	Due to colleges working in a similar pedagogical structure, this should make for a smooth transition into the SDA.	Colleges will work with the GTCS and Teaching Qualification in Further Education providers to train and develop lecturers' skills in the different elements of the new SDA.	

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to work with the different elements of the SDA. • As part of their review cycle, GTCS should reflect the need for all secondary teachers to work with the SDA in their Professional Standards. • The Teaching Qualification in Further Education (TQFE) providers should review their programmes to ensure that college lecturers are well-prepared to work with the different elements of the SDA.			
Recommendation 25: Encourage colleges, employers and universities to use the wider evidence base provided by the SDA as the basis of decisions they take when selecting students or employees.	Colleges have been administering continuous assessment courses and as such can help to take the lead on these matters.	Colleges will contribute their existing knowledge and experience to the discussions around this approach.	
Recommendation 26: Require national monitoring and accountability systems to gather information on the breadth of achievements recognised within the SDA. Insight and the National Improvement Framework should be updated to reflect success as envisaged in the SDA.	Colleges Scotland supports a coordinated approach to this topic.	Colleges will cooperate with national monitoring and accountability systems in order to help progress and develop the SDA.	

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