

ANGUS COUNCIL
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

22 JANUARY 2002

- 1 SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE CONSULTATION ON REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT WITHIN NEW NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS
- 2 SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS SUBJECT REVIEWS

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to seek the Education Committee's endorsement of the consultation responses already submitted by officers of the Education Department in order to comply with consultation deadlines set respectively by SEED and SQA.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- (a) notes the terms of this report;
- (b) notes the key issues addressed in the SEED and SQA Consultation documents;
- (c) notes and endorses the responses prepared by officers of the Education Department which have already been submitted in order to comply with consultation deadlines;
- (d) notes in particular the attached response to the SEED consultation document.

2 SEED CONSULTATION EXERCISE: KEY ISSUES

2.1 On 20 September 2001 the then Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs, Jack McConnell, issued a consultation document on the Review of Assessment within New National Qualifications. The consultation exercise sought to explore views on two different models for the assessment and certification of new national qualifications courses. Respondents were asked to submit their views by 20 December 2001.

2.2 The consultation document which offered two main options for change emanated from the deliberations of the National Qualifications Steering Group.

2.3 The options brought forward for consultation known as Option A and Option B both assume that:

- national qualifications courses will continue to comprise a number of units
- graded awards would continue to be given on the basis of external assessment
- an appropriate range of internal assessments would continue to be used to give feedback to students and teaching staff during the course and to generate evidence to be used in appeals against the results of external assessments

2.4 Option A is summarised thus:

"Candidates could achieve a course award by successful external assessment, with unit certification available as an option. This would enable a reduction in internal assessment for candidates who did not wish to acquire unit certification".

Option B is summarised thus:

“Candidates could achieve an ungraded course award by demonstrating they had achieved the full range of unit learning outcomes, with an optional external examination available for candidates who wished to achieve a graded award. This would enable a reduction in external assessment, and in related internal assessment (such as production of evidence for appeals)”.

2.5 Respondents were invited to submit their responses to a specified number of questions on a proforma issued among the consultation papers. The Angus Council response is provided on this proforma in the Appendix to this report. **It should be noted that the “five approaches” referred to in question 1 refer to the following:**

- Option A – but not Option B
- Option B – but not Option A
- Option A and Option B
- neither Option A nor Option B
- any other fundamental change

2.6 The option selected in the officer response is the **fourth** of the above options. The response provided in the Appendix emphasises that neither Option A nor Option B would of themselves alleviate concerns expressed by teaching staff and pupils. Moreover, the response advises SEED that it is the uneven burden of assessment in individual subjects which is causing the greatest concern in schools. It is the belief of officers of the Education Department that current difficulties should be addressed by:

- introducing a level of consistency across all national qualification subjects with one or two unit assessments being the **maximum** for **all** subjects
- introducing national assessment bank items with “headroom”, ie providing assessment items which allow candidates to be scored in unit assessments with reference to available grades rather than simply be scored on a pass/fail basis

2.7 Assessment within individual national qualification subject areas is, of course, the subject of a parallel consultation exercise carried out by the Scottish Qualifications Authority who undertook a review of all national qualifications subjects in line with the recommendations of the National Qualifications Task Group chaired by the National Exams Co-ordinator.

3 SQA NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS SUBJECT REVIEW: KEY ISSUES

3.1 As part of this SQA review the views of stakeholders were sought in September 2001 in relation to:

- the internal and external assessment of individual subjects
- the administration of courses
- any other issue related to a specific course/subject

3.2 In carrying out subject reviews, SQA have sought to focus on four areas for improvement:

- to make assessment more effective and efficient
- to ensure courses have comparable assessment demands at each level
- to reduce unnecessary duplication of effort
- to reduce the burden of administration associated with assessment

3.3 A proforma for the submission of comments was issued by SQA for completion in respect of each subject review. Responses were sought in three phases, by 20 October, by 15 November and by 14 December 2001.

3.4 Angus responses were prepared by secondary Curriculum Advisory Groups in respect of each national qualifications course currently being delivered in Angus secondary schools. The responses were submitted to SQA in line with the schedule described above. Common issues which emerged across the range of subject responses and which have informed the response to the SEED “Option A/Option B” consultation proposals relate to the need for SQA to:

- provide more detailed information including exemplars on the standards applied in the marking of national qualifications assessments
- reduce the number of internal assessments
- provide consistency in the number of assessments required across the range of national qualifications subjects
- develop national assessment bank items with “headroom” for all subjects

3 CONCLUSION

- 3.1** The Education Committee is asked to endorse the responses prepared by officers of Angus Council including teaching staff. The responses have been informed by extensive deliberations within the Curriculum Advisory Groups attended by **all** Principal Teachers.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising directly from the contents of this report.

5 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

There are no human rights implications arising directly from this report.

6 CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration and the Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Each Curriculum Advisory Group has been consulted about and has contributed to the drafting of the responses to SEED and the SQA consultation exercises which are the subject of this report.

JIM ANDERSON
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

NL/AR

ANGUS COUNCIL - EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

CONSULTATION ON REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT WITHIN NEW NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Officer Response from Angus Council Education Department

Question 1 *"Which of the five approaches do you favour?"*

Response Neither Option A nor Option B

Question 2 *"Can you explain why you think this approach is best?"*

Response National Qualifications are based on the principle of continuous assessment with an external examination to ensure that a national standard is achieved. Teachers and students accept the principle and are becoming more familiar with this structure.

We therefore believe that neither Option A nor Option B would in themselves alleviate the concerns expressed by teaching staff and pupils.

Option A which allows candidates to achieve a course award by success in the external assessment alone, with unit certification available as an option, could result in pupils being categorised prematurely and inappropriately. It would be difficult for centres to decide with confidence which pupils should complete the unit assessments and which are capable of achieving success in the external assessment.

Option B, which allows candidates to achieve an ungraded course award by demonstrating that they have achieved the full range of learning outcomes through internal assessment, with an optional external examination for those who wish a graded award, also presents problems. There is likely to be an issue of credibility in relation to ungraded awards and it is likely that most candidates would wish to attempt the external examination in order to obtain a higher value award.

Question 3 *"If this approach was implemented, in what way would you use it in your capacity as a learner, provider of education, or user of qualifications?"*

Response We believe that it is the uneven burden of assessment in individual subjects which is causing the greatest concern in schools.* It should, therefore, be the priority of the current Subject Review Panels to reduce the number of internal assessments in certain subjects in order to introduce a level of consistency across all subjects, ie one or two assessments per Unit should be the **maximum** for **all** subjects.

National Assessment Bank (NAB) items with headroom (allowing candidates to be graded) should be developed for **all** subjects. These could then form part of a prelim examination as well as providing an internal assessment instrument for Unit Assessment. This approach would reduce the number of assessments over a session and would provide an appropriate evidence base for appeals.

***NB** This issue permeates many of the subject review responses which were prepared by groups of Angus Principal Teachers and which have been sent to SQA in line with their submission deadlines.