

Presentation number WC0177 for the International Association of Educational Assessment - 35th Annual Conference, Brisbane, Australia 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2009

Dr John Allan: Scottish Qualifications Authority

#### Abstract

The paper will discuss the new generation of qualifications which are to assess the newly introduced 'Curriculum for Excellence'. This new curriculum increases teacher responsibility in order to achieve a better development of general capacities and skills for learning, work and life. The paper will show how a range of school-based assessment and moderation will be used to reconcile teacher-assessment and the consistent application of standards. Examples will be given of types of assessment already in use for the assessment in some subjects, of Core Skills, and in work-oriented courses and in the new Scottish Baccalaureate.

## **Introduction**

Launched by the Scottish Executive<sup>1</sup> in November, 2004, Curriculum for Excellence is designed to provide a seamless education from 3 to 18 in Scotland. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is one of the four partner national organisations - SQA, the Scottish Government, Learning and Teaching Scotland, and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) - involved in the Curriculum for Excellence programme of work. We are involved in all strands of activity, including work with partners to develop curriculum outcomes, and to review performance and accountability measures. Our principal role is to develop new and revised qualifications and assessment for introduction from 2013/14 onwards, a key strand of the programme.

## **Background**

Why do we think that things must change? Like other countries, Scotland faces new influences which are encouraging us to look differently at the curriculum and qualifications. These influences of course include global, social, political, technological and economic changes and the need to increase economic performance. Although Scotland has a well qualified workforce, productivity needs to be increased and the economy grown in a sustainable way. Scotland aspires to be a high performing country and this means that we must set high expectations for the education system and how it helps to realise our economic potential. At the same time we face a number of challenges. The indigenous population is decreasing, with challenges of cultural and language diversity and the need for greater religious tolerance, changes in the patterns of life and the demands of employment, and the likelihood of new and quite different jobs during an individual's working life.

In addition of course, the education process itself is changing. There is growing understanding of the different ways in which children learn and how best to support them. New technologies are making information available as never before and offer exciting potential to enrich learning. There is increasing opportunity to recognise fully the talents and contributions of the growing range of adults involved in educating our children, reflecting the developing role of the school as a partner with parents and other providers of services for children, including colleges and other organisations and the community. At the same time there is a continuing need to address under-achievement and to address the stubborn link between social class and achievement. It might be argued that we are a meritocracy in name only, where morbidity, health and the share of life's chances are all affected, and citizenship, community cohesion and national performance are put at risk.

We do however need to hold on to what is good about the Scottish system. This includes the flexibility which already exists. No one is arguing for a more prescriptive system. Strengths

---

<sup>1</sup> Now Scottish Government

include the combination of breadth and depth offered by the curriculum and qualifications, the quality of teaching, the quality of supporting material that helps teachers to deliver much of the current curriculum and qualifications and the comprehensive principle around which Scottish education is structured. In the view of the OECD commissioners who reported in December 2007 ‘comprehensive schooling in Scotland, based around local, non-selective, all through schools 12 to 18, has contained levels of social inequality, while supporting higher overall levels of attainment.’ They go on to say that ‘Scotland’s attachment to a more socially integrated and community based system of schools has paid dividends, while selective systems in other parts of Europe have delivered ‘choice’ for some families but at the price of greater inequality and lower standards.’

So given all of this, what needs to change? This includes over-crowding of content - in Australia you talk about thinning out of the overcrowded curriculum to Yr 8, to ensure a depth of understanding before learners move on - the need to make learning more enjoyable for all and a better connection between the various stages of the curriculum from 3 to 18 and between the curriculum and qualifications. Currently in Scotland, we have a pre-5 and 5-14 Curriculum, and qualifications, all designed at different times. We also need to achieve a better balance between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ subjects, although in part this has been addressed through our Skills for Work qualifications which have been introduced into the middle secondary school. These are designed to give all young people an opportunity to develop generic employability skills and positive attitudes to learning through an understanding of the workplace and skills in how to evaluate their own progress, how to analyse and solve problems, how to be adaptable, how to set goals, reflect, and learn from experience in a work based context. Skills needed in tomorrow’s workforce and for life and further study and to ensure positive destinations for all of our young people. Most critically we need to ensure that assessment and certification support learning - ‘tests’ worth teaching to.<sup>2</sup> The OECD review talked about high achieving learners having extensive motivation to get the qualifications to go to university which low to middle range learners don’t appear to have. We need to provide qualifications which are intrinsically motivating which all learners can connect with and see the relevance of to their future life and work. And we need to facilitate all of this with much more room for local discretion and professional freedom, particularly in relation to assessment.

### **Role of qualifications**

What is the role of assessment and qualifications? We aim to develop assessment and qualifications which support good learning and teaching, equip young people for the demands of the 21st Century and meet the needs of other users of the qualification system, including the wider expectations of society. Key to that is that the qualifications are credible passports for our young people, to help them to progress to the next stage – be that higher education or

---

<sup>2</sup> William suggests that teachers will always teach to the test, so we need to create tests worth teaching to

employment and training. Key too is that the qualifications build on the curriculum to help all young people make successful transitions into life and work. They need also to be feasible for teachers and others to deliver and support the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence.

In so doing they will also underpin what SQA and ultimately the Scottish Government's aims to develop - a portfolio of qualifications to support the needs of Scotland, to assist with sustainable economic growth, to help social development and to help all of our people achieve their potential.

The design for the new qualifications which underpin Curriculum for Excellence emerge from extensive engagement by SQA – in 25% of schools and colleges, through focus group interviews with senior managers, teachers and learners, and stakeholder seminars and workshops. This was followed by formal consultation led by the Scottish Government in 2008 and a parliamentary announcement on the next generation of national qualifications in June 2009. The qualifications themselves will emerge from an open and transparent process of further engagement, including access to draft documents online.

The new qualifications will help towards the aim of raising standards of achievement and improving learning experiences. Young people and adult learners will benefit from qualifications that support the curriculum rather than lead it and will experience a better planned, better connected and more progressive educational experience. It is intended that assessment approaches will promote breadth and depth of understanding, motivate and challenge learners and ensure that their transition into qualifications is smooth. The new qualifications will equip Scotland's young people and adult learners with skills for learning, life and work as well as the knowledge and understanding they need for the challenges of 21st century society.

Scotland has had a Unit based system of qualification for over 25 years. The new qualifications will be designed to have fewer, broader outcomes than current qualifications, specified in a way which encourages synoptic/holistic rather than 'atomised' assessment and which will rely on teachers exercising more professional judgement about candidates' work and attainment of outcomes in the round, rather than chasing evidence from a detailed list of criteria. In this system, qualification specifications will be shorter, simpler and more user-friendly (using plain English) not overly-prescriptive, but instead broad in their requirements, more likely to be skills based, than to specify long lists of content, and flexible and open, with room for teacher and learner choice. Although SQA will provide the assessments for the new qualifications centrally we will also continue to encourage teachers to produce their own assessments<sup>3</sup>. We recognise this as a significant challenge.

---

<sup>3</sup> Black suggests that despite clear SQA policy guidance many teacher think that they are not permitted to produce their own assessments

## **The role of assessment**

Assessment is central to the success of the new qualifications. As Wiliam suggests, it is of course through assessment that we can find out whether students have learned what they have been taught, so that we can make appropriate adjustments to our teaching and learners can receive guidance on next steps. Assessments are also used to describe the achievement of learners, so that decisions can be made about their suitability for particular jobs, or the kinds of educational experiences that should follow. Parents use the results of assessments to learn about the progress their children are making at school, and to make decisions about the quality of education offered in different schools. And, of course, policy-makers use the outcomes of assessment to provide information about the quality of schools or the curriculum.

Ultimately, therefore, all assessments are used to support decisions—the key idea is that a decision made with the information from the assessment is better than the decision that could be made without such information. So, of course the quality of the decisions will therefore depend on the quality of the assessment.

These uses are not however unproblematic, particularly where they are linked to target setting and where the distribution of University places and good jobs are made on the basis of the outcomes.

Why is this important? It is important because it may, as Ecclestone suggests, lead teachers and learners to act as ‘hunter-gatherers’ – simply collecting knowledge and repeating it, without any form of reconstruction or transformation. And if assessment driven learning and teaching is a response to the need to be economically competitive, then it may be counter productive in its effects. Systems which develop individuals, even where learning is individualised, who need because of the types of assessment questions set to do little more than reproduce existing facts may be unlikely to be economically competitive, except where low wage, low status, repetitive jobs are valued, in that they are likely to produce workers who lack agency and are uncritical, unimaginative and compliant. Lyotard, Ozga, and Ecclestone are among those who have described this process.

So what can we do about this in developing qualifications? The key appears to be involving the teacher more in the assessment process – particularly in developing assessments - and thereby realigning assessment and learning. Using teacher assessment in certification is attractive because as Wiliam suggests, it increases reliability by increasing test time and increases validity because it addresses aspects of construct under-representation.

Recent evidence from the OECD report referred to earlier suggests that in Scotland, within school differences are greater than between school differences and that teacher quality is the single most important determinant of learner achievement. So it looks like in order to improve learning we just need to do more assessment in the classroom? Well, yes and no. The main challenge is that teachers need to become experts in assessment. This would mean more teacher

led assessment - including assessment development - and setting of standards, and making assessment literacy central to initial teacher training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). We also need to ensure that assessment is fit for purpose – for example using written examinations only where they are appropriate and practical assignments where they are appropriate - and ensure that assessment is central to learning through cumulative and integrated approaches to assessment and incorporating self and peer reflection and moderation by teachers, and including students in this process, where appropriate.

Central to this, is assessment literacy, skills and values. As Gardner suggests assessment literacy would include knowledge of the types, methods and purposes of assessment, and an understanding of the reliability and validity, of responses, scores and grades, and so on, and their implications for learners. Assessment skills would in turn include competence in different assessment methods, question design, item writing, feedback, moderation, facilitation of self and peer assessment and so on. Assessment values would include an endorsement of the importance of consistency, impartiality and transparency in assessment practice.

We should not however underestimate the challenges. Gardner characterises teaching as a partial profession while Carr sees it as still a vocation. In order to become a profession, teachers would have to take more control of professional knowledge like doctors and lawyers do and one of the main elements of professional knowledge is assessment literacy, skills and values. Simply telling teachers this will not work. Extensive CPD and peer support through processes of moderation is required. Generally, teachers do trust themselves and each other with assessment for high stakes purposes.

### **‘Tests’ worth teaching to**

What kind of assessment will promote teacher assessment literacy and create robust learners? Teacher led assessment is already widely used in Scotland’s schools and colleges in conjunction with external assessment and verification. The examples given here are from our Core Skills, work orientated courses and the new Scottish Baccalaureate and it is these approaches which will underpin approaches to assessment in Curriculum for Excellence.

Of course, reconciling teacher led assessment and consistent application of standards is not easy. The difficulties in agreeing standards for innovative and open assessment as opposed to content led assessment and for convergent as opposed to divergent tests, particularly in relation to IQ tests, is well known. I mentioned ‘tests’ worth teaching to earlier. Teachers are often accused of simply coaching their learners to pass examinations, awarding bodies are accused of stifling teacher innovation through the types of questions asked and learners will often ask ‘are we going to be assessed on this?’ With obvious implications for motivation. Of course teachers will always want to do the best they can in preparing learners for assessment. It would be perverse if they did not. As noted earlier the solution may of course lie as Wiliam suggests in creating ‘tests’ worth teaching to. And of course it is a very old problem. Aristotle discusses it, as does Montaigne,

who distinguishes between being learned and being wise – the latter defined not by how much you know (being learned) but by how useful and appropriate it is (being wise). For Montaigne, writing in 1580, introducing such questions would lead to a new hierarchy in education and society. The following question is adapted from De Botton and Montaigne.

Consider these two quotations:

- “I want death to find me planting my cabbages, neither worrying about it nor the unfinished gardening”

- “I can scarcely tell my cabbages from my lettuces”

What is the wise approach to life?<sup>4</sup> Are these not the types of questions we should be asking our young people?

So what are SQA’s modern equivalent assessment questions and how do we attempt to apply consistent standards?

### **Example 1 – Core Skills: Problem Solving**

#### **Raft Review**

##### **Background**

This stage of the process was completed back on dry land later the same day – it is important to do this as quickly after the event as possible to capture the spirit as well as the contribution memory. In this example various review methods were used – flipchart to note first impressions of how well things had gone, personal attribute cartoon cards

##### **Task 1**

There is opportunity to challenge positive attributes chosen. What would happen if there was disagreement from others in the group?

*Please enter your comments in the comments box.*

##### **Task 2**

What do you think of Kevin now?

*Please enter your comments in the comments box.*

##### **Task 3**

Is more than one review/evaluation needed?

*Please enter a 1 to indicate a YES, and a 0 to indicate a NO in Box 1 and enter your comments in the comments box.*

---

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly Scottish school examination questions from the 1950s and before have much more of this feel to them

## Example 2 - Scottish Baccalaureate in Science<sup>5</sup>

### Project requirements – Information for candidates

The project you choose must be an investigation or a practical assignment. It should be of personal/career interest to you and will provide you with opportunities to do the following:

- link with and work within different and less familiar learning environments to support the project.
- use your knowledge and understanding of science and other areas of learning across the curriculum in one or more of the following broad contexts:
  - employability
  - enterprise
  - citizenship
  - sustainable development
  - economic development.
- Make connections between subject knowledge and the wider world.
- Develop the following cognitive and generic skills:
  - **application** – of subject knowledge and understanding
  - **research skills** – analysis and evaluation
  - **interpersonal skills** – negotiation and collaboration
  - **planning** – time, resource and information management
  - **independent learning** – autonomy and challenge in own learning
  - **problem solving** – critical thinking; logical and creative approaches
  - **presentation skills**
  - **self evaluation** – recognition of own skills development and future areas for development.

Evidence of achievement should be organised in a folio or e-portfolio which contains five mandatory pieces of evidence. These are:

- project proposal
- project plan
- presentation of project findings/product
- evaluation of project
- self-evaluation of generic/cognitive skills development.

---

<sup>5</sup> The prime focus of the Interdisciplinary Project is the development of cognitive and generic skills which will assist the candidate to: advance as an independent learner; increase confidence; develop their own learning and improve career prospects.



Evidence in the folio may be presented in any suitable recorded format including e-evidence. You may wish to undertake the Interdisciplinary Project as part of a group. Each member of your group must clearly define their own roles and responsibilities and must demonstrate an appropriate level of participation in all three stages of the project. In order to pass the Unit, whether you have undertaken the project individually or as part of a group, you must complete all five pieces of mandatory evidence and achieve the evidence criteria for a Grade C pass.

### **Example 3 Skills for Work - Hairdressing**

#### **OUTCOME**

Carry out general salon duties in a hairdressing salon environment while working as a member of a team.

#### **Performance Criteria**

- (a) Meet specified salon standards for timekeeping, appearance and behaviour.
- (b) Carry out agreed duties as part of a team.
- (c) Follow salon procedures relating to agreed duties.
- (d) Listen and respond appropriately to others.
- (e) Complete all duties in a way that contributes to the smooth running of the salon.
- (f) Work safely while carrying out agreed duties.

#### **OUTCOME**

Carry out reception duties in a hairdressing salon environment.

#### **Performance Criteria**

- (a) Communicate with customers politely and clearly.
- (b) Ask appropriate questions to respond to customer needs.
- (c) Respond to telephone calls following organisational procedure.
- (d) Make appointments following organisational procedure.
- (e) Handle payments following organisational procedure.
- (f) Comply with legislation relating to customer records.

Unit Specification — Hairdressing: Working in a Salon Environment (Intermediate 2) 3

#### **OUTCOME**

Review own performance in relation to the development of specified employability skills.

#### **Performance Criteria**

- (a) Identify own strengths and weaknesses in specified employability skills.
- (b) Gather feedback from others on specified employability skills.
- (c) Identify areas for improvement in specified employability skills and set relevant goals.
- (d) Evaluate progress in achieving identified goals.

### **EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS UNIT**

Performance evidence and written/oral recorded evidence which covers all the Outcomes and Performance Criteria is required. The term *customer* is used in this Unit to mean a

visitor to a salon who may purchase a produce and/or become a client (ie a person receiving a hairdressing treatment). It is important to note that, while a variety of individuals (for example, candidates' peers, or other students of the centre) may act as customers for both formative activities and summative assessments, practical activities must be carried out either in a realistic working environment or real workplace. This will involve working with customers, working with others in a team and will develop good working practice.

### **What is the role of verification?**

These approaches to assessment are only however part of the solution. How can we reconcile teacher assessment and the consistent application of standards and help teachers to trust themselves and each other? Along with the new approaches to learning and teaching which the Curriculum for Excellence brings, it is important that teachers share understanding of the standards required to achieve qualification outcomes, particularly with the move towards more teacher-led internal assessment, and that they apply these standards consistently in their assessment of all learners in all settings. As well as individual teachers applying standards, it is essential that assessment judgments are consistent within schools, local authorities<sup>6</sup> and nationally. This will ensure that the breadth and depth of learning of the new curriculum is assessed consistently against the standard, although the actual evidence of achievement will be demonstrated in many different ways.

The aim of Curriculum for Excellence is to ensure that all children and young people develop the general capacities, attributes, skills and knowledge that they need for life, learning and work. It is therefore important that all teachers across Scotland in schools and colleges have a shared understanding of the standards across the curriculum. This may seem a difficult challenge but there is existing practice and expertise though local (internal) and national (external) verification which could be further extended to assist the development of systems for the national dimension.

Verification is the process by which SQA ensures that quality assurance processes are operating effectively within schools and colleges for its qualifications. The process of internal verification for SQA qualifications in which an experienced member of staff in the same subject area reviews proposed assessments and corresponding answers and solutions ensures a sharing of standards and fair and consistent assessment. SQA is currently developing various new models of external verification for the quality assurance of its qualifications which are all designed to further ensure their integrity and credibility.

Verification can be carried out in different ways and to various levels of formality but it is critical to the fairness of the assessment process for learners. It is also essential that confidence in the assessment process is assured for the benefit of all learners and the wider community. It is a matter of social justice. Verification starts with the individual teacher reflecting on their

---

<sup>6</sup> Education along with other public services in Scotland is administered by 32 local authorities

assessment practice. The purpose of each assessment should be clear to the teacher and the learner.

The assessment of the breadth and depth of the learning of the new qualifications will further require teachers to share their understanding of the standard required. Existing mechanisms within subject departments who already plan assessments together and check each other's assessment decisions to ensure standardisation may help this process but it will be necessary to ensure that there is a commonly understood standard across all qualifications. This will be particularly important in our new qualifications in literacy and numeracy, where a portfolio based approach drawing together evidence from across the curriculum will be used.

Verification based on clusters of schools and colleges at local level are also an existing mechanism which could be extended to ensure that all schools within a local authority share the standard and apply it consistently in all their assessments. Professional discussion between colleagues will be invaluable for less experienced teachers as well as a possible means of delivering CPD. CPD for assessment will be critical to the success of Curriculum for Excellence.

Although currently schools are familiar with the system of central verification which SQA uses to check standards across schools and while visiting verification is used to a limited extent for school provision, it is already extensively used throughout the year – and in various ways – for college and workplace qualifications. It is valued as a means of providing development and sharing good practice as well as ensuring the quality of assessment. This practice needs to be extended to schools.

In addition, SQA has an Understanding Standards web-site which offers guidance to teachers, is piloting verification at local authority level for work based courses and has developed a new model of school/college/university verification based on professional dialogue - for the Scottish Baccalaureate Interdisciplinary Project - and more responsive models of quality assurance are being explored with colleges to reflect developments in that sector.

Many teachers are SQA verifiers who already have extensive experience in sharing the national standard and promoting good practice. The expertise of the SQA external verifiers and the knowledge of different models of quality assurance could be a further valuable resource for the development of verification models within and across schools and local authorities. One of the great strengths of the existing system is the involvement of teachers in the development, maintenance, quality assurance and review of qualifications but this system needs to be further developed and extended.

We believe that teacher led assessment supported by local and national verification is the key to better assessment within Curriculum for Excellence, and indeed a more flexible system of qualifications across our portfolio. We believe also that it would support the further development of teacher professionalism.