

5th Seminar Series of the University of Glasgow Educational Assessment Network***'It's Our Future- Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment- looking forward, collectively, in Scotland'***

Following this seminar which took place on the 22nd May 2024, we invited the speakers to share back with us any key messages and points for reflection from the seminar.

Each speaker was a member of the independent review group and talked about thinking and ideas that emerged from the different community collaborative groups they were involved with.

Andrea Bradley: Key Points on Programmes of Learning

Offers a real opportunity:

- To end the treadmill of the annual two-term dash towards exams or other final assessment
- To re-set our collective thinking about the purposes of senior phase education...
- To shake the obsession with attainment data and the culture of competition between and within schools and local authorities, that completely distort what should be a clear and unequivocal sense of moral, social and educational purpose.

External exams only as appropriate and format revised to ensure less rote learning and more critical thinking.

Increasing flexibility by modularising courses and Programmes of Learning, avoiding the big-bang, all-or-nothing type approach to assessment.

Creating more time for learning and teaching and intentionally managing the risk of filling the time freed up with different types of assessment... because Scottish education just can't seem to get enough of it.

The enactment of this recommendation would align this phase of the learner journey much more strongly with the aims of CfE overall-

- learning across all 4 capacities, with equal weighting given to each,
- all learners and the achievements of all learners mattering equally,
- the holy grail of parity of esteem...
- the amount of formal assessment being kept to an appropriate minimum,
- and learners experiencing breadth, depth, creativity and enjoyment in their learning and teachers in their teaching.
- Finally for teachers- the opportunity to teach learners about the knowledge and skills associated intrinsic to their subjects in ways that are both rooted in care for young people, and that are professionally satisfying.

Less of an oppressive, exam-factory experience for the young people who sit exams

Less of a marginalized experience for the young people who don't sit exams within their courses and who can feel that the senior phase is not really about or for them

Better wellbeing for all students because teachers and lecturers are able to provide and support a genuinely learner-centred experience in the senior phase – one that makes sense in relation to CfE as a whole-

One that brings back the joy...

No more the vicious, data-driven circle of workload, stress and performativity.

So, what should the next steps be to move the system from where it is towards this recommendation in the report?

At national level but properly involving the profession...

- Complete the work on course specification review.
- Decide which qualifications genuinely require exams and then ensure that the exams for those courses are fit for purpose.
- National agencies create learning, teaching and assessment resources for all courses, and particularly internal assessments for use in courses where there is to be no exam. Involve the profession in the writing and quality assurance of these resources.
- Take exams out of S4. Move to two-year Highers and N5s for some students. Many schools are already doing this.

- Scale up. Education Scotland and local authorities support to schools in timetabling. This is relatively resource-light.

For a new world order in terms of senior phase assessment to become a reality and not just a recommendation, we need to see the start of real culture change.

1. On equally valuing every learner for who they are as a human being rather than as a gatherer of qualifications of whatever type... and insight points.
2. On equally valuing all learning that we have agreed as a society matters- regardless of whether it is 'academic', 'vocational', technical' or 'professional' and/or whether it is assessed by an exam or not.

And these two are tricky because of the issues of social class that are strongly in play.

3. Trust in teacher professional judgement that's been honed by ongoing dialogue with learners and in collaboration with colleagues to enable continuous assessment based in the classroom, and formative assessment strategies better support the learning of all, and promote greater equity of outcome than the current over-reliance on high-stakes assessment, which favours learners from more affluent backgrounds.

Confidence in the reliability of teacher professional judgement must be supported by the provision of allocated time for meaningful moderation activities, including the planning of assessment and the understanding of standards.

Time is of the essence in that sense too- because teacher workload is already out of control.

The implementation of the Scottish Government's manifesto commitment to reduce teacher class contact time to 21 hours is critical to addressing this and in enabling the kind of reform that we need to see.

Douglas Hutchison: Key Points on the Personal Pathway

- CCG for local authorities was chaired by Stewart Nicolson, Head of Service in South Lanarkshire and included senior local authority staff as well as representation from COSLA and SOLACE.
- PERSONAL PATHWAY: Glasgow has just over 300 establishments which makes it difficult as Director to visit them all regularly. One way of keeping in touch is through social media – Twitter / X.
- It is clear from social media that children and young people benefit from a wide range of experiences - social and cultural experiences.

- Schools and early years celebrate children and young people's successes both in school and from their home or community life.
- Children and young people learn a range of skills that develop their personal, social and cultural capital.
- Schools help children and young people to capture the learning and feed it back to them in a way that helps them articulate their skills / learning
- Schools do so much more than what is captured on young people's exam certificates. Personal Pathway was imagined to be a way of capturing the 'so much more' that schools are already doing.
- The issue of equity was discussed at length in the IRG. There is a risk that families and schools with more economic means will have an advantage. The reality is they already have an advantage in terms of all learning yet schools are giving children and young people in more deprived circumstances many enriching experiences.
- PEF is used regularly to give children and young people experiences they might not otherwise benefit from.
- So, in some ways *Its Our Future* is not radical. It is about setting out the right direction of travel while recognising we go at a manageable pace.
- We need to capture the 'so much more' of education and enable our young people to be able to articulate their skills beyond exam results. The Personal Pathway part of the Scottish Diploma of Achievement was designed for this purpose.

Ken Thomson: Key Points on the Further and Higher Education Sector

"I'm Professor Ken Thomson OBE and I was Principal of Forth Valley College in Scotland up until last year and then retirement. My focus was on the further and higher education sector and my Community Collaborative Group consisted of 15 Quality Managers from the 27 regional colleges throughout Scotland. At this point I'd like to ask how many in the room (of about 25) have been in a college, particularly as this seminar is about the future for qualifications and assessment within Scotland's education system. Only three hands went up. So, folks, that is why the 15 quality managers were so delighted to be asked to contribute to Louise's review. It is a fact very people know about or understand the Scottish college system – it is different from England. As an aside, I would recommend anyone working in educational research to visit a college. You will be amazed. People leave a college saying, "I did not know you did that".

In this presentation I'm focussing on Programmes of Learning.

Through discussion with the 15 QM's and over 3 meetings we highlighted:

- Qualification and assessment impacts on a range of learners not just school pupils
- Welcomed the reference to Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework as colleges are engaged from level 2 to level 10. Within Forth Valley College – my college had over 750 different qualifications.
- Recognise the number of pathways from school to college to work or University.
- Recognise the many routes to education, full time, part-time, block release, evening, on-line, apprenticeships, commercial training etc.
- To also recognise College's have a very strong quality ethos with lecturers setting and marking assessment according not set performance criteria and outcomes. These are then checked by an internal verifier, usually a curriculum manager and then the whole will be sampled by external verifiers from the qualification bodies. So, the new idea of taking responsibility for assessment and not relying on external examination, is not a new one.
- Recognising college's use a wide range of assessments, many on a competence-based framework and include modular approaches to delivery.
- Focus is on achievement as well as attainment.
- There is real encouragement in colleges to innovate through integration, to give the learner real life experiences.

An example I gave was project-based learning (creative learning as we called it) between the Sport Department and the Construction Department, where sport student went into workshops and designed a warm up programme for the Construction industry. This was used by Balfour Beatty who built the new Falkirk campus.

The QM's welcome the approach for equity between vocational and academic noting veterinary surgeons are also vocationally trained and it's not just the trade industries!

Whilst I'm referring here to the IRG work on Q&A, it stands alongside the Withers Report on Skills, particularly in noting that "all learners should be offered a broad range of courses including academic, vocational, professional and technical". Indeed, recent work undertaken by the College Development Network (CDN) called Co-creating learning highlighted that in 2019 there were over 70,000 school pupils being taught in schools as part of successful school college partnerships and great collaboration between schools. The programmes covered included Skills for Work, Foundation Apprenticeships, PDA's and HNC's. The latter complementing studies in 6th year where pupils had already achieved their 5 Highers in 5th year (What's 6th year for??).

One example I gave on modularised learning was showcasing a programme of study in biomanufacturing to a CEO of a biotech company. After the showcase he asked, "Why would I want that". We had completed missed the ask of what do you want? Rather we had assumed the need. Important therefore to engage with businesses as the end users of the qualifications and to support co-creation of qualifications for the future. Great examples include Net Zero, Facility Management, Creative industries and modularised learning for businesses upskilling workforce.

Going forward the QM's and myself provided some, I hope, helpful advice:

1. Tell the story of qualification and get buy in from industry and parents. Explain the value and benefit for change.
2. Educational reform must be a whole system approach, attributing to a food web rather than a food chain using ecosystem language.
3. Recognise the importance of the School College Partnership and opportunities the two sectors provide in collaboration for learners
4. Modular learning – for example breaking down HND's to Professional Development awards or fully integrating units into a project, offers flexible learning and the potential for commercial streams.

However, stressed throughout our discussions was when new comes, you must lose the old. Reform is not an add on to already difficult workloads. Reform should be an opportunity to do things afresh, go with the things that work and lose the stuff that doesn't.

Thank you once more to the speakers and those who participated in this seminar.