

THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

National Qualifications

- 1 The thrust of the NQ workload campaign has been about reducing workload associated with the new qualifications, in particular the burden of internal unit assessment. The resolution which gave rise to the current action focused on the internal units at National 5 and 6, which appeared to many people to be largely redundant as they didn't contribute to the external grade, which is based on a combination of coursework and external exam.
- 2 The EIS argued for these unit assessments to be non-mandatory, as a mechanism for achieving an immediate workload alleviation for 2016/17; this was rejected by SQA, and others, as potentially damaging to the integrity of the qualification. Although the EIS did not accept this argument, we responded to a fairly united front of opposition by suggesting that as a minimum the extensive duplication which we perceived to exist between unit assessments and the exam, should be stripped out from the units, again seeking to achieve the desired workload reduction for teachers and an assessment burden reduction for students. This was rejected as not being feasible in terms of implementation for 2016/17.
- 3 Some modifications – particularly around thresholds for unit assessment and the suspension of random verification – have been introduced for this session but the Institute deemed the concessions as too limited to prevent the move to the industrial action now taking place.
- 4 The National Qualifications Working Group has been reconvened under the leadership of John Swinney and is now looking at what further changes can be agreed to address the concerns around workload and over assessment.
- 5 Within the Group, which has met only once to date, the EIS pressed for early decisions on major issues, with a view to ensuring that any agreed changes could be processed and implemented for Session 2017/18. There is little prospect of further significant change being introduced this session as the view that major changes in the middle of ongoing courses would be disruptive and difficult to manage, is one shared by all parties.
- 6 In terms of moving issues forward, the Education Committee is asked to consider the merit of the EIS advancing the following option for consideration by the Working Group:
 - That the SQA migrates to the external exam or coursework, those elements of unit assessment which it perceives as integral to integrity of the qualification.

- That in the subsequent arrangements the following should apply - on achievement of a graded award through the external assessment, successful candidates would also be awarded the subsumed unit qualifications for that course. (As in current practice around Literacy award at National 5 English.)
 - That the current unit qualifications will remain as potentially accredited individual awards, without the external course grade, to maintain and support flexibility in meeting the learning needs of different groups of learners e.g. returning adults in FE
- 7 A significant advantage of this approach is that schools would still be free to use the current units as course organisers (and, indeed, to use existing unit assessments as formative or summative classroom assessments) – minimising any further changes to course content or structures (although there may be changes to assessable coursework in some subjects). In essence the course wouldn't change – simply the assessment process for, Centres presenting for graded awards.
 - 8 Inevitably, this is likely to lead to either longer examinations or a greater degree of coursework (the EIS preference) with an appropriate degree of proportionality being applied by SQA; whilst everything may potentially be assessed within an exam, not everything can be.
 - 9 However, by creating a new context for the way in which units are used, including any associated assessment, the changes would support greater professional autonomy, reduce the burden of formal assessments for pupils, create additional time for teaching and learning and remove the need for the verification and recording processes around unit assessments which have been central to the concerns around workload.
 - 10 The importance of unit accreditation being subsumed within the graded award is to prevent unnecessary presentation for unit awards with the sole purpose of improving tariff scores. Given that Units are threshold awards the achievement of a graded award in the external assessment would indicate appropriate mastery of the threshold indicators.
 - 11 In the event that it is decided to create a graded external assessment at Nat 4, the same basic principles would apply.
 - 12 The EIS view is that an early decision to move ahead along these lines would mean that the changes could be introduced for session 2017/18, a red-line target for the union. Potentially this target may mean additional resource being found for the SQA.

- 13 A number of other issues would remain to be discussed and resolved within the working group – not least being issues of by-pass, senior phase curriculum architecture and the interface between BGE and SP. The EIS has consistently supported the view that time needs to be made available to achieve the key aims of CfE Senior Phase – the promotion of deeper learning, the maintenance of breadth across the curriculum, and the achievement of parity between “academic and vocational” pathways. A resolution of these issues is more feasible if the concerns around the qualifications themselves can be addressed in the first instance.

Action:

Education Committee is asked to consider and approve the approach outlined above.