



A new model for qualifications and assessment in Scotland

YouthLink Scotland Response to the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (Phase 3)

Introduction

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation representing over 100 regional and national youth organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors. Our vision is for a nation that values its young people and their contribution to society, by ensuring they can access critical relationships with youth workers to achieve their potential. As the collective voice of the youth work sector, we support and represent their policy and practice needs, including their essential role in delivering Scotland’s national outcomes. We campaign for equal access to high-quality youth work for all young people, supported by a confident, skilled and well-led workforce. As part of this process, we have been calling for Education Reform to drive a transformed, rights-based education system where every young person can access youth work as a fundamental element of the education offer.

Response

Our [response](#) to Phase Two of the Review of Qualifications and Assessment called for a system that would support progression in young people’s learning across settings, value all achievements and demonstrate parity across different qualifications and awards. Above all, we felt it should reflect what is important to learners and help them understand and value their skills and achievements.

As part of the national discussion, over 700 young people told us that youth work – and the skills and achievements they gain, are important to them. They asked for Education Reform to ensure that everyone can access youth work as a fundamental element of their education. And that their skills and achievements through youth work are recognised alongside qualifications¹.

The proposed new model for qualifications and assessment in Scotland aims to allow young people to capture and value a broader range of achievements. The three areas that would constitute a Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA) (‘subject studies’, ‘learning in context’ and ‘personal pathway’) reflect a learner’s entitlement to

¹ https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/7719/views-of-young-people-participating-in-youth-work_web.pdf

experience the curriculum across four contexts for learning. Importantly, this also implies that each context or 'area' is equally valuable. It will also allow young people to reflect on and demonstrate the skills, capacities and achievements gained through these different experiences. And their transferable nature.

Challenges

We are concerned that this new approach could increase existing inequalities, particularly for learners impacted by poverty and other inequalities. The Independent Review Group (IRG) will be aware that young people do not have equal access to opportunities across the three areas that form the criteria for the SDA – both in relation to availability and 'readiness' of the learner to engage. Additionally, two of the three areas will be offered to learners in a formal setting (and presumably assessed/verified here too). Youth work is an important part of education for many young people. This includes learners who already face significant barriers to learning and achievement - those impacted by poverty and protected characteristics. The model also suggests that young people who do not achieve national qualifications (the 'subject study' element) will not be able to earn the Diploma. These young people could benefit most from a new - more equitable - model where they can capture and value their skills development and achievements through non-formal learning, such as youth work. We would also want to understand how the system could mitigate any potential negative impact on mental health resulting from additional elements to assessment.

Changes to support equity

The model could more clearly acknowledge that the curriculum is broader than school (and college). Youth work is part of the educational experience for many young people – in school, college and community². For some, it may be the only way they experience the curriculum. Collaboration across youth work, school and college should be set out as an expectation for delivering inclusive opportunities that build evidence towards an SDA. For example, 'learning in context' cannot just consist of options managed/determined by schools and colleges. It must embrace what young people do beyond school. Many young people participating in youth work are already involved in interdisciplinary learning (IDL), including through projects around climate action and undertaking youth awards³. Expanding access to opportunities such as this would also help tackle issues of equality of access. These decisions cannot be left to local leaders – there must be consistency in approach.

Additionally, we must demonstrate parity across young peoples' achievements, not just across qualifications. One opportunity to do this would be to allow youth awards or other recognition of achievement to count as evidence under the 'subject studies' section. This would ensure that learners who do not achieve a national qualification still have a pathway to gain an SDA.

² <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/youth-work-and-the-attainment-challenge/building-capacity-for-collaboration/resources/youth-work-a-guide-for-schools/>

³ <https://www.awardsnetwork.org/>

Young people participating in youth work are supported to capture and value their skills and achievements⁴. We are encouraged by a proposed national digital profile that will support the SDA's 'personal pathway' element and better enable profiling across educational settings. Professional learning will be necessary to ensure the collaborative approach needed to help learners profile and compile their 'personal pathway' across education settings. We would also suggest a more tailored approach to its design – pre-set themes such as 'social, cultural, economic' might disadvantage some young people who cannot access such opportunities. Also, given that employers consistently identify the importance of skills, we suggest that skills should be central to the digital profile and the personal pathway.

We agree with the need to challenge and change the persistent perception of different pathways. The use of language will play a key role. This must be reflected across all elements of the proposed system. For example, we must stop using the term 'wider achievement'. It is also essential that we do not reinforce the idea that school or college is the 'only' (or preferred) setting for learning through our use of language. Additionally, the IRG may wish to consider an alternative title for 'subject studies'. This could be seen to reinforce the 'preference' for traditional/academic subjects. There will also be learners who do not undertake study in subjects – would they recognise their pathway in this title?

Summary

YouthLink Scotland welcomes the proposed model and the intention to value and promote the achievements of our young people. Several changes to practice will be required to support a new approach to assessment. Professional learning, inspection, tertiary education application processes. Alongside this, culture change will be equally as vital. We can only promote and value a broader range of achievements if all those responsible for learning actively collaborate. Collaboration is essential to ensure that every young person has the best opportunity to develop the skills, competencies and achievements needed to fulfil their potential. This must be matched by an assessment model that affords the flexibility required to demonstrate our young people's broad range of achievements.

ENDS

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⁴ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/youth-work-and-the-attainment-challenge/skills-framework/>