Review of Qualifications and Assessment

BACKGROUND

- This response is from Scotland's United Nations University Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD); known as 'Learning for Sustainability Scotland' (https:/www.learningforsustainabilityscotland.org). It contains a synthesis of inputs from members of our Steering Group, core staff team, and academic colleagues from the University of Edinburgh and University of St Andrews.
- Learning for Sustainability is a core aspect of education in Scotland and aligns with several other agendas; notably quality education and learner engagement. It is not merely learning *about* 'sustainability' but rather supports a suite of competencies to enable learners to fulfil their own potential, contribute to society and pursue ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially-sustainable futures in an uncertain, changing world.
- We submit this contribution in conjunction with our response to the National Discussion on education in Scotland: (https://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Final-LfS-Scotland-response-Nat-Discussion.doc.pdf) as we believe that alignment of the outcomes of the current Review of Assessment and Qualifications with the outcomes of the National Discussion - looking beyond qualifications to experiences and processes – is essential.

Defining Learning for Sustainability

Learning for Sustainability (internationally known as Education for Sustainable Development) is an international and national priority for education.

> Learning for Sustainability (Education for Sustainable Development) empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning, and is an integral part of quality education. ESD is holistic and transformational education, which addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment. It achieves its purpose by transforming society.
>
> UNESCO 2019 (https://www.unesco.org/en/education/sustainable-development)

The Scottish Government's Vision 2030+ report (2017 https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/res1-vision-2030.pdf) set out Scotland's continuing vision for Learning for Sustainability in educational settings through to 2030. These commitments align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030: central to Scotland's national vision and at the heart of the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework (https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/) . The Scottish Government's Learning for Sustainability Vision 2030+ Action Plan, launched in June 2019 (https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/LearningforSustainability-Vision2030ActionPlan.pdf), set out specific actions for stakeholders and delivery partners and a refresh of this Plan is currently underway with engagement of learners, educators and all stakeholders.

Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is a cross-curricular approach which enables learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society. An effective whole-school and community approach to LfS weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development education and outdoor learning to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences.

 LfS is an important component of Curriculum for Excellence, an entitlement for learners and a core part of teachers' professional standards. It supports the development of knowledge, skills and the values at the heart of the curriculum's four capacities and provides a mechanism for promoting and working towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

- **Scottish Government Learning for Sustainability Action plan 2019 (**https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/LearningforSustainability-Vision2030ActionPlan.pdf)

Why Learning for Sustainability?

The intentions and practices of learning for sustainability overlap with other contemporary agendas; particularly those of quality education, equity and inclusion, closing the poverty-related attainment gap, entrepreneurship and learner voice. This response is thus not only of interest for learning for sustainability, but in supporting the quality, nature and purpose of education in Scotland – and its associated assessment and qualifications structure - more widely.

Our discussion set out the need for a shared **purpose for education**: **to enable learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable world.**

This vision aligns with the international UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030 (https://sdgs.un.org/goals) and the recent publication of the Scottish Government's 'Achieving Excellence and Equity: National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan 2023' (or 'NIF') in which the vision statement has been amended 'to recognize the need for sustainability to be a core aspect of the learning experience'. (https://www.gov.scot/publications/achieving-excellence-equity-2023-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/pages/2/

'Heart, Hand and Head'

Addressing this vision for the education system will require systemic changes not only in curriculum content and the development of cross-cutting competencies to deal with a changing world, but also in assessment and measurement of 'success' and 'achievement'. A 'Heart, Hand and Head' approach aligns with UNESCO's Global Competencies for Sustainable Development (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444 page 10) and the OECD

Learning Compass 2030 (https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/learning-compass-2030/). This approach necessitates a holistic approach to education - beyond merely the acquisition of 'knowledge' – that gives equal value and weight to the development of competences, values, attitudes and skills.

Pedagogical approaches

Enabling learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable world will require a shift from 'teaching' to 'learning', and the linking of formal and informal learning. Competences and values cannot be taught but must be developed by learners themselves. This transformative approach aligns with the findings of the UNESCO International Commission on the Future of Education June 2022 (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381984). Development of cross-cutting competencies will require action-orientated pedagogies; with a corresponding shift in the way we assess this.

2.1 Topic: Curriculum for Excellence - Four Capacities Question 1: a) Should information be gathered across all four capacities? Yes/No/Unsure	
b) Please consider each of the capacities in turn. What kinds of information should be gathered on learners' progress and achievements in each capacity?	**Summary** We welcome thinking around the acknowledgement – and subsequently, some form of 'formal' recognition – that goes beyond the purely 'academic' achievements of learners. We wish, however, to highlight the following: - Caution is needed regarding any proposed data-gathering process as this could lead to a potential narrowing of ambition: i.e. the Capacities become a reductionist model of 'pre-determined' success criteria. - There is a need for a system-wide shift in what constitutes 'assessment' when it comes to meaningful recognition of progress and achievements in each Capacity. - Information about progress on enabling learners to fulfil their own potential, contribute to society and pursue ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially-sustainable futures in an uncertain, changing world requires a focus on not only assessment of learning but also assessment for learning and assessment as learning. This needs " a

	mix of traditional assessment methods and more reflective and performance-based methods, such as self- and peer assessment, that capture learners' insights on such aspects as personal transformation, deepened understanding of critical inquiry, and engagement and civic agency. Feedback from educators, peer feedback and self-evaluation (e.g. using reflective journals or portfolios) empower learners to monitor their own learning processes and to identify possibilities for improvement" (UNESCO 2017, p. 57). • Any data gathering must provide clearly defined benefit to the learner as well as the assessment system. There is evidence to suggest that many young people - particularly at secondary level - are unaware of what the Four Capacities actually are: (https://education.gov.scot/media/fyhfck3p/education-scotland-notosh-exploring-the-four-capacities-october-2022.pdf), and this is a key issue to be addressed. We also highlight that: The purpose and vision for the future of the whole of Scottish education is – rightly – under consideration. To ensure that our educational system delivers when it comes to providing our learners with the skills, knowledge, values, confidence and resilience that they will need to thrive in an increasingly uncertain future, then there is a need to revisit and refresh all of the initial visioning and purposing that led to the creation of CfE, including the Four Capacities. Possible existing models for consideration include: ▪ The **UNESCO Education for Sustainable development (ESD) competences**; which already have a degree of overlap with the Four Capacities and provide a framework for 'application' of knowledge, skills and values and the creation of an 'activist' mindset: (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444 page 10) ▪ **The Transversal Competences** which have been introduced across the equivalent of Senior Phase in Finland. These weave competency-based learning across the curriculum irrespective of the subject area being studied; providing holistic, real-life, joined-up learning experiences for all learners; regardless of subject choice: https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/transversal-competences-finnish-general-upper-secondary-education ▪ **The Four Purposes of the Curriculum for Wales:** which also have a degree of overlap with the Four Capacities, but with additional 'integral skills'; such as creativity & innovation, critical thinking & problem-solving, personal effectiveness, and planning & organising: https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/developing-a-vision-for-curriculum-design/#curriculum-design-and-the-four-purposes

	▪ The **OECD Learning Compass 2030**: an evolving learning framework that sets out an aspirational vision for the future of education. (https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/) Comments received from our contributors included: • *'I don't know how you can genuinely look at assessments, qualification and the whole reform agenda of a purpose and vision for the future of Scottish education without also going back to in questioning some of that initial visioning and purposing around Curriculum for Excellence.'* • *'We need a big and bold vision and tinkering with the Four Capacities is trivial compared to coming up with that big bold vision.'* • *'The Capacities exist and they're part of what is expected so they need to be measured somehow – but they were written 15 years ago. The world is now a very different place.'* • *'The ambition of the Four Capacities is completely open to interpretation depending on your role, your subject discipline, whatever it is you're teaching, but also the direction in which you want to steer your learners… e.g. my idea of a "successful learner" might be very different to that of another practitioner; particularly when it comes to statements such as "determination to reach high standards of achievement". What exactly are we classing as "achievement"?'* • *'Are pupils really aware of what the Four Capacities are? Some evidence from Education Scotland that they do at primary school but that this is not so evident at secondary level. What is the benefit to the learner in gathering all of this data? (Education Scotland - NoTosh - The Four Capacities Version 5 Sept 2022)'* • *'Caution is needed regarding any proposed data-gathering: potential narrowing of ambition, reduction in realising what the Capacities are actually about. It could potentially lead to a reductionist model, rather than starting with what the learners are doing and then matching that to the Capacity/competence.'* • *' "Successful learners" is the only Capacity that's measured effectively at the moment. Information needs to be meaningful and measuring e.g. 'confident individual' requires a change of mindset.* • *'We need to move beyond the kind of assessment whereby a pupil sits an exam to demonstrate 'successful learner' and that's it.'* • *'Need to think about how values inform the capacities, not the other way around.'* • *'I think there's too much onus in the system at the moment for every day to get to a 'set point'. At the same time. This isn't learner-centred. It needs to be about learner progress and making sure that it meets the needs of the learners AND the system.'*

2.2 Topic: Out of school and college achievements or awards Question 2: What, if any, information on learners' achievements obtained outside school and college should be gathered? Please explain your response.	There is a need to ensure that achievements and awards out with the school or college (wider achievement) are seen to be of equal importance to attainment measures. Within the context of Learning for Sustainability there are many rich opportunities for personal achievement that inspire learners and help them develop skills for learning, life and work. These should be fully recognised and valued and not seen to be peripheral to CfE. A change in culture and practice will be required to ensure the system values them equally.
2.3 Topic: Skills and Competences Question 3: a) Should information be gathered on learners' skills and competencies as part of their senior phase? Yes	
b) If you have views on how this might best be done please provide them here.	**Summary** Research evidence shows that making learning relevant and contextualised by using and applying values, skills and knowledge is motivating, meaningful, inspiring; and results in improved attainment and achievement. (Scottish Government 2020 https://www.gov.scot/publications/educational-outcomes-learning-sustainability-brief-review-literature/pages/3/) This transformative approach aligns with the findings of the UNESCO International Commission on the Future of Education June 2022 (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381984). Competences and values cannot be taught but must be developed by learners themselves; and the development of cross-cutting competencies will require action-orientated pedagogies. Enabling learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable world will require a shift from 'teaching' to 'learning', and the linking of formal and informal learning.

This will require a system-wide change of mindset: including the way in which Initial Teacher Education institutions work with teachers.

A focus on the development of cross-cutting competencies to address a changing world requires new approaches to assessing attainment and achievement. These include student self-assessment, reflective writing, scenario/test case, focus group and interviews, performance observation and concept-mapping.

(Rieckmann, M. (2022). Developing and Assessing Sustainability Competences in the Context of Education for Sustainable Development. In: Karaarslan-Semiz, G. (eds) Education for Sustainable Development in Primary and Secondary Schools. Sustainable Development Goals Series. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-09112-4_14).

Comments received from our contributors included:

- *'The current exam system and what is measured is one of the single biggest barriers to enabling the above (holistic, 'whole-person' assessment) to happen and this will continue for as long as we continue to have subject-specific, content-driven exams.'*
- *'Learners and educators need space to really understand and talk about values, different ideas, different knowledge in a meaningful, authentic way. We need interdisciplinary - not 'siloed' - content delivery.'*
- *'if the only thing we ever value is people who excel at a certain grade level in specific subjects, what does that actually say about their knowledge, about their values, about their capacities and abilities?'*
- *'Recognising non-academic / non-traditional learning'*
- *'Recognising all achievement'*
- *'Looking at the processes, not just the outcome'*
- *'Looking beyond summative assessment to bring in more formative assessment.'*
- *'Initial teacher education needs to change if assessments & qualifications are to change. We are driving and producing a single-model system of teachers 'replicating' themselves; rather than bringing diversity of thinking and perspective: all of which are essential if we, as a society, are to meet the challenges – and seize the opportunities - of the future.'*

3.1 Topic: Exams and other forms of assessment	It is vital that we look at both assessment and the logistics of how courses are taught when answering this question. Currently, 'success' is predicated on limited, knowledge-based indicators, and the course content/assessment system means that if a learner misses classes – in school, college, university or indeed, ITE – then their performance in the final examination

Question 4: Please share your thoughts on what a 'better balanced' assessment system would look like. As well as considering the balance between external examination and internal assessment you may also wish to comment on the frequency of examinations.	may be compromised. We need to move towards a system that more fully aligns with the 'experiences and outcomes' ethos of the BGE phase in order to allow learners to fully demonstrate their learning on a 'continuous assessment' basis, rather than a single final examination. We would also benefit from adopting some of the tried-and-tested assessment methodologies from other countries: such as Finland, where ongoing, teacher-based assessment is the norm until the final 'leaving certificate' elements of secondary schooling. Comments received from our contributors included: • *'We have to move away from the multiple subject-specific exams that are effectively taught in ten weeks across two terms. If a learner misses any of that course, then they will struggle in the final examination. That's not a good system.' (Discussion as to the fact that this issue also applies in Initial Teacher Education).* • *'We grade 'success' on limited indicators - and then they we teach to the indicators and very little else. We need to make sure that every learner has experiences that allow them to develop the knowledge, skills, values and attributes they need to thrive in life.'* • *'In Finland, there are no 'high-tariff' assessments until learners are about to leave school – and then it's essentially a 'leaving certificate'. Prior to that, assessment is carried out by teachers. We need to embed the principles of trusting teachers to evaluate the work of their students because they know them better than anybody else.'*
4.1 Topic: Recognising Achievement at the end of the Broad General Education (BGE) Question 5: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing an achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE.	We are unsure about the benefit of introducing any kind of achievement, award or qualification at the end of the BGE. There is a concern that learning and teaching in the BGE will simply become focused on achieving the criteria of any such structure; mirroring the concerns already raised about assessment in the Senior Phase. Comments received from our contributors included: • *'I'm not sure about some sort of award in the BGE because my immediate concern about that is everything then gets focused on leading to that award rather than using that as a way to say 'Look, it's great you've achieved all this and now you're moving into the next stage and it's helped you'. I don't think that is what would happen. So I would be exceptionally cautious about awarding anything in the BGE phase.'*

4.2 Topic: Recognising Achievement in the Senior Phase Question 6: Please share your thoughts (advantages/disadvantages) on the idea of introducing a type of leaving certificate in the Senior Phase.	We believe that there is merit in a wider consultation on this proposal. Of particular interest are: - The breadth of learning evidenced through structures such as the International Baccalaureate: which already aligns with some of the original principles of Curriculum for Excellence: https://ibo.org/programmes - Recognition of transversal competences such as those introduced to the equivalent of Senior Phase in Finland: https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/transversal-competences-finnish-general-upper-secondary-education Comments received from our contributors included: - *'I think it (the International Baccalaureate) offers something that could align nicely with the original principles of Curriculum for Excellence; depending on how it is conceived and situated within the Scottish context.'* - *'You can imagine a Scottish Baccalaureate portfolio showing all the things that you've done. Senior Phase needs to be about a balance between internal and external assessment, which is essentially about quality assurance.'*
5.1 Topic: The Potential of Technology Question 7: How should Scotland's qualifications and assessment system make best use of digital technologies?	Digital technologies have a key role to play in qualifications and assessment; particularly when it comes to the creation, sharing and evaluation of portfolios of learning by learners and teachers. Care must, however, be taken to ensure that the use of digital technologies does not become an integral/unavoidable part of accessing assessments/evidencing achievement as: - Issues of equity and access to technology are still a major issue across Scotland; which can be further compounded by unreliable connectivity, particularly in our rural areas. - Not all learners/educators have a natural aptitude for technology. An 'insistence' on digital evaluation methods could put these individuals at a disadvantage.

6. An Approach to Benefit all Learners Question 8: How can we make sure that proposals for a future qualification system will uphold the rights of all learners to demonstrate their achievements?	Currently, Scottish education is geared towards performance measurement and data-gathering against international benchmarking standards, such as PISA. This then informs much of what then is taught/measured in schools (as evidenced in structures such as the National Improvement Framework and its ongoing focus on literacy and numeracy, and strategies such as the national STEM Strategy). As a result, our current qualifications system is, for the most part, based on assessment of knowledge – and our Senior Phase is almost exclusively based on preparation for this kind of assessment. If our learners are, however, to thrive in an increasingly challenging world, then knowledge is not enough. It is imperative that we enable and support learners to develop and enhance the skills, values, confidence and resilience that will help them to frame and apply their knowledge – and this must be given just as much weight and importance in terms of evidencing learner success. We need, therefore, to explore and implement competency-based metrics, such as those we outlined in our response to Question 1 and weave these across the entirety of our assessment system. Comments received from our contributors included: *'We need to get off this treadmill of performance measurement against international benchmarking standards. I see it translated down to local authority level, at regional improvement level, when different sets of metrics and measures could be used. And so if competences are the kind of thing that we're saying we would want to see in assessment and qualifications and curriculum, if those long-term measures could achieve something worthy for our society/ culture/system - are there different metrics that we can suggest?* *If we can't ever see an alternative to what the current mantra is, if we can only justify ourselves against the same benchmark year on year on year - PISA, or other international tables - then we'll keep measuring ourselves in that way.'*

| 7. Have we missed anything?

Question 9: Is there anything else in relation to the reform of qualifications and assessment which is not covered in this consultation which you would like to raise? | We need to consider the purpose of education when considering both the review of qualifications and assessment; and the wider, system-wide reform as outlined in the National Discussion on Education. If we are truly 'putting the learner at the centre', then we need to design and provide an educational system that supports and enables them to develop the competences, skills, values and attributes – as well as knowledge – that will enable them to thrive in an increasingly challenging future – as well as seize the opportunities that this presents.

In addition to all of the suggestions we have outlined in previous answers, this will necessitate:

- An examination of the role that further and higher education have in driving the expectations of the examination system
- Aligning assessments and qualifications to the ethos envisaged across the Four Capacities
- Addressing the symbiotic relationship between assessments & qualifications and Initial Teacher Education (particularly for secondary teachers). We need to ensure that their training goes beyond subject-specific content to effectively embed the key, cross-cutting themes and core values outlined in the Professional Standards for Teachers; including Learning for Sustainability
- Weaving a culture of pan-thematic, interdisciplinary learning and assessment in which the ambitions of key policy drivers and other national strategies across education are joined-up more effectively: (e.g. https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/) |

Learning for Sustainability Scotland

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