

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT SERVICE COMMITTEE
13 NOVEMBER 2008

Agenda Item	
Report No	

A CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE
Consultation on the next generation of National Qualifications in Scotland

Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Summary

This report updates members on the response to the Scottish Government's Consultation on the next generation of National Qualifications prepared as submitted by Officers by the closing date of 31 October 2008.

1. Background

- 1.1 The introduction of a Curriculum for Excellence seeks to ensure a continuous coherent and progressive curriculum from age 3 to 18 with an emphasis on skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work and a continuous focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.
- 1.2 Assessment in a variety of forms will help to provide an ongoing picture of a young person's learning and achievements as he or she develops across the four capacities of Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens. Critically. Assessment will lead to the next steps that the young person will take as they learn more.
- 1.3 At the end of S3, a young person's outcomes and achievements should be recorded, recognised and valued by their teachers and their schools. There will be the opportunity to bring together the teachers' judgements and the young person's own record of their achievements and skills by drawing on a range of evidence.
- 1.4 As young people move into the Senior Phase in S4, they will continue to develop the four capacities and their skills for learning, life and work. There will be opportunities to maintain and enhance literacy and numeracy skills. They will also start building their lifelong portfolio of qualifications.

2. The Government Proposals

- 2.1 National Qualifications at Access, Higher and Advanced Higher will be retained as points of stability.
- 2.2 A new qualification will replace the present Standard Grade General and Credit levels and Intermediate 1 & 2.
- 2.3 New awards in literacy and numeracy will be available at SCQF levels 3 to 5.

- 2.4 Increased flexibility in the arrangements for taking qualifications to better meet the needs of young people.

3. Highland Response

- 3.1 A small Group of Officers and Secondary Head Teachers considered the consultation questions and an initial draft response. Following this the response was redrafted and shared with Secondary Head Teachers and reviewed at a conference of secondary head teachers. The final draft was agreed by ECS senior management team – see attached response
- 3.2 Where there was substantial agreement on the response, this is included in the main body of the text. The central argument in this matter is for a much wider range of assessment and routes to qualification than is presently the case or appears to be planned. A major element of pupil choice of assessment route is proposed.
- 3.3 Where there were minority points of view or in some cases contradictory views, these have been included as discussion points within the response since these are issues that are very relevant to the balancing of different interests.
- 3.4 In particular the balancing of the interests of all Young People, including those requiring more Choices and More Chances, Universities, Employers and the community at large were a key feature of the discussions and contributions.
- 3.5 It was felt that the central characteristics of the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence were being given insufficient weight in the consultation and possibilities in this area have been suggested in the appendix to the consultation response.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 Members are invited to consider the detailed responses submitted by officers and to make any additional comments.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Date: 29 October 2008

Author: Quality Improvement Team

Background Papers:

ECS Response to the consultation on the next generation of national qualifications in Scotland.

RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS

EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS

THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Please note that the Respondent Information Form MUST be returned with your response.

Responses can be submitted on-line, or on a copy of the questionnaire printed from the website, or by cutting out and completing this section of the document. Additional paper should be used if you wish to provide more extended responses but please ensure that any such pages include your identifying details.

Name/Organisation: The Highland Council

PROPOSAL 1

National Qualifications at Access, Higher and Advanced Higher will be retained as points of stability. Highers, in particular, will remain the 'gold standard' of the Scottish education system. The content of all National Qualifications will be updated to reflect the values, purposes and principles of *Curriculum for Excellence*. Some aspects of the structure of these qualifications will also be reviewed.

Q1. Do you welcome the intention to update all qualifications at Access, Higher and Advanced Higher in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*? Please comment on any implications to be considered.

YES

Comment: Updating these qualifications will need to take into account the major presentational, project, research and active learning skills being developed under a ***Curriculum for Excellence***. It will thus imply significant changes in assessment methodology in order to provide a rebalancing of skills and competencies demonstrated. It also implies a major change of approach in order to positively engage a large disadvantaged group in our community in activities leading to valued attainment of pertinent skills.

For example, written unseen examinations should therefore be reduced in many areas as the other assessment methods have their place. There needs to be a much greater emphasis on verbal assessment as that reflects the real world. ***For an outline of some of the possibilities, see Appendix.***

This implies a further development of the outcomes across all areas in order to have genuine progression from earlier to the most senior levels. There needs to be a clear statement of outcomes at the senior level relating to the skills and capacities – described in a form clearly understood by learners. The reconstitution of essential knowledge and skills in senior courses will represent a major national challenge.

There are some particular risks in any approach to rebalancing summative assessment:

- change could be small scale - leaving the academic bias essentially unchanged and the *Curriculum for Excellence* undermined as teachers orient lessons to the traditional tests and forms of recognition. This would restrict the opportunities for young people to attain to that of the present level which is disadvantageous to a large number.
- a redefinition of attainment giving significantly more weight to a wider range of skills might result in a loss of confidence in certain sectors of the community. This might be particularly true at Higher level where university influence is large.

The updating of Access 1 & 2 would represent a relatively easy step given that these courses are already completely experiential and very close to the essentials of the Curriculum for Excellence. The completely internal approach to Access 3 should also be retained.

In broad terms there remains the concern that, although skills for learning may be adequately covered, skills for work and, most importantly skills for life do not appear to be. The way the consultation has been framed has limited us to contributing the appendix. These skills and issues are much more central than that.

We need to ensure that Highers and the new curriculum awards easily match so that composite classes can run successfully from S4 – S6 in small schools or in subjects with a low uptake.

Debate and discussion points within Highland

- Qualifications should be a genuine reflection of ability to learn, not 'cramming'
- Our suggestion is that the four capacity model should permeate the learning experience but **not** be part of academic attainment / assessment.
- Should achievement / attainment be assessed on the same scale?

PROPOSAL 2

A new qualification will replace the present Standard Grade General and Credit levels and Intermediate 1 and 2 (SCQF 4 and SCQF 5) qualifications.

The new qualification will be available in a wide range of subjects, as at present. The new qualification will reflect the best features of Standard Grade and Intermediate. Standard Grade Foundation level will be removed and Access 3 will provide certification at SCQF level 3. (See Annex A Table 1 for illustration of new qualifications on SCQF framework.)

Q2. Early consultation has identified the 'best' features of Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications as:

- the 'inclusive' approach to certification contained in Standard Grade; and
- the 'unit based' structure of Intermediate qualifications. Are there any other features in the present Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications which should be included in the new qualification at SCQF levels 4 and 5?

Comment: The range of assessment methods in Standard Grade could be widened with a much greater emphasis on folio and project, practical lab work, performance and verbal

communication. The weight of terminal, unseen and summative examinations requires to be significantly reduced at these levels and an option given to pupils to proceed by different assessment routes.

It is very surprising that the ASDAN process of giving recognition to a much wider range of internally devised courses and experiences is not being considered in this consultation. The assessment methodology of the short courses such as Skills for Work, PC Passport etc appears also to be unrecognised.

Consideration should also be given to the assessment methodology of the St Andrews First Aid Certificate, the Elementary Food Hygiene Certificate, John Muir award and other such assessments – particularly since Health and Wellbeing is an important responsibility of all teachers to all pupils up until the age of 18.

Debate and discussion points within Highland

- In S5 & S6 pupils presently sit 3 NAB's per course and 3 practice assessments – this can amount to 30 Internal Assessments. We need something more flexible than this.
- Harmonising structure is needed. But some subjects are concerned that range and flexibility of courses will be reduced.
- Different subjects have differing views on what they would like to see in regard to best aspects of SG and Ints. e.g.
 - Art would like to have 100% internally produced/externally assessed folio work
 - History would prefer to maintain the greater variation of KU/Skills based questions which SG has
 - Bus Man – would not like to lose the 30% practical element of SG
 - Geography would prefer to maintain the portfolio and flexibility of SG + Ints. Especially for those who, e.g. can manage SG, but are not ready for H
 - Maths and Technology would not like to see any increase of burden of internal assessment
 - Folio assessment could be based on deep learning and rich tasks and assessed by key staff. Currently science skills aren't really developed through the course.
- If students sit units only – do they get a general qualification?
- Will there be a process to improve and validate NAB's which will replace the final qualification.
- Not sure if the one – year intermediate style courses are always motivating.
- Support for a variety of pathways but progression between stages needs to be smooth and levels between subjects have to be equitable.
- The development of courses needs to be much more centrally and generically co-ordinated and not left to specialist subject groups.

Q3. One of the proposals is to grade units. Do you agree that units should be graded A-C rather than pass/fail?

Yes in some areas – no in others. The present NAB's have not been very successful.

Comment: There are already too many sub-divisions in grades and awards, and continuing pressure for more finely graded discriminations. For example, an ordinary award (pass / fail) moved to ABC and then to the sub – dividing numbers within ABC. Standard Grade moved from FGC to the sub divisions within these levels. The change of General (SG 3 & 4) to Intermediate 1 (ABCD) gave us further grade division.

There has been a further tendency for the grade divisions to generate particular courses with different degrees of exclusivity built in. For example, some Credit / General courses containing a wide group of pupils developed into separate Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2 courses.

We believe that assessment should be functional for individual learners and a wide range is therefore needed.

We would propose three routes for overall assessment at SCQF 4 and 5:

- An internal assessment only route – in which case the unit assessments would be graded.
- A mixed route 50% internal Assessment where units would be graded.
- An examination only route without graded units.

This keeps young people at the centre of the process and gives them serious choice about how they are assessed.

We believe that the units should not be separated from the overall course award. High grades in unit assessments should significantly contribute to high grades in overall awards.

We would suggest two grades within these awards, pass and distinction.

Grades of any description within Access courses are not supported.

Debate and discussion points within Highland

- There are real issues of equity over project work – inevitably, interested educated middle class parents help offspring gain a real advantage.
- Concern over teacher workload – the trend has been to get rid of folios eg Geography and History.
- Roll of challenge based assessment approaches not clearly articulated eg ASDAN courses, Open University Courses.
- There needs to be an extended dialogue to have 'agreed' commonality of standards.
- How do we ensure that internal assessments are valued by students, employers, higher Ed etc?
- The STAR system has to show staff how they can be flexible in assessing.
- A better balance between wide assessment processes and accountability for

attainment/ achievement has to be struck.

- The model of assessment needs to best meet the course requirements and offer learners an element of choice.
- The nature of what we are assessing needs to be changed to reflect a wide range of skills including social and emotional aspects.
- Assessment must continue to provide next steps in learning.
- We would not be happy with the units being part of the overall course award – this could put pressure on the staff. Do not grade them but instead have them as a teaching tool.
- We do not like the internal assessment only route – lack of credibility.
- Is project work a reliable assessment instrument? It can be valid but often unreliable.
- Graded unit assessments contributing to level of final award is a major concern. SG sciences practical assessments are notorious for being awarded at Grade 1....! Hence, *validity and reliability issues due to external pressures.*
- Surely each of the 3 model route would not end up with Currency? However different models for different subjects and levels as appropriate.

Q4. Do you want graded units to count towards the final award?

YES

Explanation:

See above.

Q5. Which option for introducing compensatory arrangements would you most support?

Please tick one option or suggest an alternative.

- Option A** Extend the range of grading in course awards to grade E.
Option B Recognise unit passes only. Yes
Option C Compensatory award at the level of the course studied with no grade awarded.
Option D Compensatory grade C award at the level of course below that studied.
Option E Compensatory grade A award at the level of course below that studied.

Explanation/other suggestion:

Options D & E imply the assumption that the person who has failed a more specialised level is competent in the less advanced level. There is no evidence for this. It also serves to demean the more basic level which can be captured in the passing instead of being worked for.

Q6. The proposed name for the new award is General (SCQF 4) and Advanced General (SCQF 5). Please indicate if you are content with this suggestion. If not please offer an alternative and explain your choice.

NO

Explanation/other suggestion

General is an insufficiently positive title. 'Achievement' be better. EG Scottish Achievement 4, Scottish Achievement Award 5. Scot Award 4 and 5 are possible names. Whatever is decided, it needs to be really positive.

General is diminished by *Advanced General* coming above it. It is not the same as *Higher / Advanced Higher* since the Higher has an intrinsic meaning of itself being of more status than something else.

PROPOSAL 3

New awards in literacy and in numeracy will be available at SCQF levels 3 to 5.

Curriculum for Excellence brings a sustained focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills in our young people. To help strengthen this focus, the Scottish Government is proposing new separate awards to accredit young people's literacy and numeracy skills – the Scottish Certificate for Literacy and the Scottish Certificate for Numeracy. The awards will be available at SCQF levels 3 to 5. The expectation is that all young people will be presented for these awards unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so. The intention is also to ensure that the structure of these awards is flexible enough to make them available to adult learners.

Q7. Do you agree with the proposal to offer literacy and numeracy awards at a range of SCQF levels (3 to 5)? If not please offer an alternative.

YES

Explanation/other suggestion:

Offering the awards will undoubtedly broaden access and recognition.

In literacy it will strengthen those pupils who are strongly literate in a range of disciplines (often non-fiction) but who do not have high levels of skill in creative writing, poetry, literature etc. It will be centrally important to maintain as wide a scope of literacy as possible.

In numeracy it will offer recognition to those who are numerate in a range of areas but who do not have high levels of skills in algebra, geometry etc. It will be centrally important to maintain as wide a scope of numeracy as possible.

Scot Awards at Levels 3, 4, and 5 would be better than separate certificates. Consideration should be given to offering these awards at level 6 in order to give parity of esteem and meet university entrance requirements.

Awards could be gained at any time the pupils are ready for them.

There are major issues over the outcomes at level 5, and how all teachers fulfil their responsibilities for teaching literacy.

It is surprising that a Scot Award for Health and Wellbeing is not being considered when it has far more relevance and importance to many people's lives than some of the subjects in the awards framework.

Debate and discussion points within Highland

- Generally, recognising skills across the board is a positive thing, but logistics a major concern
- Is this going to be a standard for employers? If so, what does it look like, what purpose will it serve?
- Who teaches towards it and who manages the assessment process?
- How do you achieve equivalence of worth?
- When will it be undertaken?
- Internal assessment of more rich tasks favoured.
- Ensuring that learning is not focussed on passing an external literacy / numeracy assessment for all.

Q8. National Qualifications at Access 3 (SCQF level 3) do not have an external examination. Do you agree that any new awards in literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 3 should have an external examination?

NO

All access awards should be through the internally assessed route and should be heavily experientially bases.

Q9. Should the weighting between the internal and external assessments for the literacy and numeracy awards be equal? If not should more weight be attached to the internal or external assessment? Please explain.

Equal weight in the Examination and assessment route.

More weight to internal assessment

More weight to external assessment

Entitle young people to a choice of assessment route:

- An internal assessment only route – in which case the unit assessments would be graded.
- A mixed route 50% internal Assessment where units would be graded.
- An examination only route without graded units.

External examination other than written assessment needs to be prioritised.

Q10. When should young people be assessed for literacy and numeracy awards?

Please tick one option.

Option A - At the end of S3 as part of the summer diet of examinations.

Option B - In the December of S4 as part of a winter diet of examinations.

Option C - At the end of S4 as part of the summer diet of examinations.

We would suggest a further option:

Option D - whenever they are ready for it. Just like the Driving theory test

Explanation: Examinations could be electronically based and completed at any time (electronic literacy has exponentially increased). It could be divided into different parts taken at different times. The idea of traditional pen and paper silent examinations with a time restriction is not fit for this purpose. If electronic, pupils could work themselves up through the levels of award from Primary onwards.

PROPOSAL 4

Increased flexibility to better meet the needs of young people. Suggestions include:

- studying National Qualifications over 18 months (or 2 years) as well as one year;
- introducing a winter diet of examinations; and
- encouraging the most able young people to bypass lower level qualifications and to study Highers from S4 onwards.

Q11. Do you agree with the proposal to allow the study of Highers and Advanced Highers over 12 months, 18 months and 2 years?

YES

Explanation: The maximum flexibility will widen opportunities for young people. Developing small packets of external assessment online may validate each unit reduce the need for cumulative exams. There will be a debate with some Universities who favour cramming as a measure of 'ability'.

Q12. Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a winter diet of examinations?

NO

We don't think this should be a priority. Instead SQA should implement electronically based external assessment when it is needed.

Q13. If you agree with the proposal to introduce a winter diet of examinations, what subjects and levels of qualifications might first be offered?

Suggestions: Begin the electronic assessment with Computing and Business studies, followed by Modern Languages.

Debate and discussion points within Highland
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't like the winter diet for reasons of disruption to courses that are going to be presented the following summer.• The 18 month option is a major concern. <i>What will this mean to appropriate pace? What happens to students who finish a course at Christmas....and stay on?</i>• The Highers remain the gold standard so universities need to be brought to the

table to discuss what they will accept i.e. how many in one sitting etc.

- We agree with the proposal for flexibility the headache would be how to deliver it.

Q14. Would you agree with changes to the system which allowed the most able students to bypass qualifications at lower levels and begin study for Highers from S4 onwards?

YES

Explanation: this should be the position for all students. The levels of award should be independent of the age of the student. However if pupils wish to go through a series of awards, they should be encouraged to do so. This is what choice and progression are about.

Debate and discussion points within Highland

- Bypassing qualifications can lead to no safety net.
- People like collecting badges and qualifications motivate many of them.
- Awards should reflect the choice and ability of pupils irrespective of age.

Q15. Do you have any other ideas for increasing flexibility within the senior phase (S4 to S6)?

Suggestions: encourage the use of Open University Short courses to seriously widen the range of curriculum and learning options and better prepare the bridge to university work.

TIMELINE

Q16. It is intended that planning for the new curriculum should commence in 2008/09, with approaches based on the new curriculum introduced from school year 2009/10. This suggests that the new and revised qualifications and any increased flexibilities would be required from 2012/13 onwards to ensure smooth progression between the curriculum and qualifications. Is this indicative timeline realistic? Please comment on any implications to be considered.

NO

Comment: There is a major investment required here to develop the outcomes through to 18 and to develop pilot, test and validate the radical suggestions being offered here. Developing learning and teaching for literacy and numeracy as the responsibility of all teachers across the curriculum to senior levels will be a major task in itself. Defining what is to be assessed and how will be a major task to begin with. Developing public support for an ambitious and inspiring scheme for recognising achievement through qualifications will be a major task for Government and Local Authorities.

Debate and discussion points within Highland

- Big no to being introduced in 2013

PROPOSAL 5

Investigate ways in which we can increase flexibility to better meet the needs of young people.

ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

More coordination required between SQA & LTS for provision of new courses.

Appendix:

Appendix: Curriculum for Excellence – Assessing the 4 Capacities

The absence of clearly stated generic outcomes particularly those relating to literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing at the senior level, represents a major constraint. This is particularly apparent when we consider outcomes for the 16+ Learning Choices and where the OECD report highlights inequality issues and reduced opportunities for a large disadvantaged group of young people.

We have made some suggestions for assessments in relation to the underpinning of the 4 capacities. These are purely speculative but indicate some possibilities and the great deal of work that has to be done here.

Successful Learners

Area	Possible Assessment
With:	
> enthusiasm and motivation for learning	Self assessment. Interview, folio of work, self-reflection, teacher reference, community, employer, voluntary reference.
> determination to reach high standards of achievement	Progress record against targets, achievement milestones recorded. Self and peer assessment approaches. Reflection on how formative assessment has been used.
> openness to new thinking and ideas	Interview, structured and recorded group discussion. Journal. Reflective commentary. Self assessment.
And able to:	
> use literacy, communication and numeracy skills	Interpretation of text, visual and listening experiences. Communication of comprehension to others verbally, in writing and through ICT. Examinations where appropriate.
> use technology for learning	Test proficiency in use of ICT. Accessing and competently using technological tools for learning.
> think creatively and independently	Individual project. Supervised problem solving tasks chosen by student. Examinations where appropriate.
> learn independently and as part of a group	Individual project. Recorded contribution to group work – uploaded to GLOW or equivalent. Problem solving exercises.
> make reasoned evaluations	Folio, recorded group discussions, problem solving activity involving interrogation of sources. Examinations where appropriate.

> link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations	Exercises with multiple sources, problem solving. Examinations where appropriate.
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Confident Individuals

Area	Possible Assessment
With:	
> self respect	Self – assessment. Interview, folio of work, self-reflection, teacher reference, community, employer, voluntary reference. Confidence questionnaires?
> a sense of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing	Self-reflection, interview, structured and recorded discussion. Health measurements?
> secure values and beliefs	Teacher judgement, Responses to problematic situations.
And able to:	
> relate to others and manage themselves	Recorded assessment of other team members. Recorded contribution to group work – uploaded to GLOW or equivalent.
> pursue a healthy and active lifestyle	Teacher and community observation and comment. Self – assessment of active targets. Health measurements?
> be self aware	Interview, folio of work, self-reflection, journal writing?
> develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world	Teacher judgement, Responses to problematic situations. Communication of grounded point of view verbally, in writing and through ICT. Examinations where appropriate.
> live as independently as they can	Self assessment. Test a set of life skills eg like the driving theory test. Interpretation of and response to problems relating to life skills. Communication of comprehension to others verbally, in writing and through ICT. Interview folio of work, assessed experience, self-reflection, teacher reference, community, employer, voluntary reference.
> assess risk and take informed decisions	Assessed problem solving activities involving individual and group decisions.
> achieve success in different areas of activity	Record of achievement, folio, personal profile.

Responsible Citizens

Area	Possible Assessment
With:	
> respect for others	Self – assessment. Recorded assessment of other team members. Recorded contribution to group work – uploaded to GLOW or equivalent. Teacher judgement, Responses to problematic situations.
> commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life	Self – assessment, Interview, folio of work, assessed experience, self-reflection, teacher reference, community, employer, voluntary reference.

And able to:	
> develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it	Folio of work. On – line assessments. Examinations where appropriate.
> understand different beliefs and cultures	Teacher judgement, Responses to problematic situations. Communication of grounded point of view verbally, in writing and through ICT. Examinations where appropriate.
> make informed choices and decisions	Assessed problem solving activities involving individual and group decisions.
> evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues	Teacher judgement, folio work, Responses to problematic situations. Communication of grounded point of view verbally, in writing and through ICT. Examinations where appropriate.
> develop informed, ethical views of complex issues	Assessed problem solving activities involving individual and group decisions.

Effective Contributors

Area	Possible Assessment
With:	
> an enterprising attitude	Self – assessment. Interview, folio of work and work experience, self-reflection, teacher reference, community, employer, voluntary reference.
> resilience	Progress record against targets, achievement milestones recorded. Recording barriers and how they have been overcome. Self and peer assessment approaches. Reflection on how formative assessment has been used.
> self-reliance	Self assessment. Recorded interview folio of work, assessed experience, self-reflection, teacher reference, community, employer, voluntary reference.
And able to:	
> communicate in different ways and in different settings	Interpretation of text, visual and listening experiences. Communication of comprehension to others verbally, in writing and through ICT. Examinations where appropriate. Presentation to others.
> work in partnership and in teams	Recorded assessment of other team members. Recorded contribution to group work – uploaded to GLOW or equivalent.
> take the initiative and lead	Recorded assessment of other team members. Self assessment. Recorded interview folio of work, assessed experience, self-reflection, teacher reference, community, employer, voluntary reference. Recorded observation.
> apply critical thinking in new contexts	Individual project. Supervised problem solving tasks chosen by student. Examinations where appropriate.
> create and develop	Individual project. Supervised creative tasks chosen by student. Examinations where appropriate.

> solve problems	Folio, recorded group discussions, problem solving activity involving interrogation of sources. Examinations where appropriate.
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The overarching challenge rests on the integration of the above capacities and abilities into course assessments at every level together with the consequent rebalancing of the assessments to reflect the purposes of *A Curriculum for Excellence*.