



A NEW ERA

Equitable Reliable Assessment

QUALIFICATIONS FOR A NEW ERA: EQUITABLE, RELIABLE ASSESSMENT

EXTENDED SUMMARY

THE CONTEXT

The Independent Assessment Commission (IAC) conducted a review of assessment and qualifications in England for learners aged 14-19, which intended to establish principles to underpin the future of assessment and qualifications in England. It was chaired by professor Louise Hayward and funded by the National Education Union.

THE CHALLENGE

Although qualifications in England have traditionally been highly regarded, rapid changes in society mean that England's approach to qualifications now needs to change. Evidence gathered by the IAC identified a desire across the country for every young person to have qualifications that open doors to future learning or employment opportunities.

THE IAC APPROACH

The IAC included commissioners from a wide range of communities. Commissioners included students, parents, teachers, employers, policy makers and researchers. Evidence was gathered from research and policy documentation, through three national and international seminars, and by commissioners who sought views from across their communities. The IAC published and consulted on an interim report. This final report draws on all these sources of evidence to present a framework for change that should begin with a national consultation.

A NEW ASSESSMENT ERA: EQUITABLE, RELIABLE ASSESSMENT

The design of a qualifications system that works for every student requires a strategy where equality, diversity, inclusion and health and wellbeing are at the heart of policy.

FRAMEWORK FOR A NEW ASSESSMENT ERA: EQUITABLE, RELIABLE ASSESSMENT

Real change takes vision, engagement, targeted resources and time. Clear agreement about why change matters and how practitioners, policy makers and researchers can work together to build strong alignment between vision and practice are as important as plans for what new ERA qualifications should look like. Yet it is not morally defensible to ignore the needs of one generation of students for the benefit of the next. Small changes, consistent with the longer term vision, should be made to improve opportunities for more students.

Change to assessment and qualifications in England should begin with a national conversation about the vision for their future and to agree on the principles that will guide vision into practice. To stimulate this conversation, the IAC offers:

- a vision statement
- principles to inform the design, development and evaluation of a more Equitable, Reliable Assessment system for qualifications in England.

VISION STATEMENT FOR A NEW ASSESSMENT ERA

Having a clear vision for future assessment and qualifications in England is a crucial first step towards a new Assessment ERA. This vision is the position statement from which principles are developed. The evidence that emerged from the IAC suggests that there is considerable consensus around a vision for the future of qualifications in England.

Assessment and qualifications in England should recognise the achievements of every young person both to allow every student to thrive in the next stage of their lives, be that in college, employment or university, and to support England to thrive socially, culturally and economically.

PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW ASSESSMENT ERA

Developing a shared vision is only a first step. It is how the vision emerges in practice that really matters and principles are important to establish characteristics of the vision in practice. They should be used as:

- the basis for the design of the new qualification system: is what is planned consistent with the principles?
- touchstones against which planned actions or actions in practice over time can be compared: do the actions being taken remain consistent with the principles?

IAC offers five principles, which include characteristics associated with each and of the kinds of evidence that would be available if this principle were being practised. In this summary, examples are included.

PRINCIPLE 1: QUALIFICATIONS SHOULD SERVE THE INDIVIDUAL

Example characteristic:

- qualifications should provide information to all young people, to their parents/carers and to users of qualifications about the knowledge, skills and competences young people have achieved to allow them to flourish, to participate in the community and to make good progress in the next stage of their lives, in employment, college or university.

Example of the kind of evidence available if this principle were being practised:

- every young person leaves school/college with evidence of what they have achieved and how and why these achievements will inform their future learning.
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**PRINCIPLE 2:
QUALIFICATIONS AND
ASSESSMENT SHOULD BE
RECOGNISED AS PART OF A WIDER
EDUCATION SYSTEM INCLUDING
CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND
ACCOUNTABILITY**

Example characteristic:

- care should be taken to ensure that approaches to accountability do not distort qualifications.

Example of the kind of evidence available if this principle were being practised:

- schools and education staff welcome visits from, and discussions with, those responsible for evaluation and accountability. Schools and colleges are not categorised and areas identified for further development are linked to resources to support development. Evaluation and accountability processes are viewed by all as an opportunity to share expertise and improve by learning collaboratively with peers.
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**PRINCIPLE 3:
QUALIFICATIONS AND
ASSESSMENT SHOULD SERVE
THE FUTURE NEEDS OF SOCIETY,
CULTURE AND THE ECONOMY
TO ENABLE THE NATION AND
YOUNG PEOPLE TO THRIVE IN LESS
PREDICTABLE TIMES SOCIALLY
AND ECONOMICALLY, NATIONALLY
AND INTERNATIONALLY.**

Example characteristic:

- education has a key role to play in the creation of a society that serves the nation and its citizens well. This includes the need to pay attention to culture, the economy and society. Qualifications have to change to respond to both global and local imperatives to support the nation and all of its young people to thrive in less predictable times economically and socially.

Example of the kind of evidence available if this principle were being practised:

- Planning for learning ensures that the curriculum represents the knowledge, skills, attributes and competences that young people need to thrive in future. Conversations about the curriculum at a national level are held with young people, their parents/carers, communities, colleges, universities and employers; a parallel process is undertaken at local levels. Qualifications are well aligned with what matters in the curriculum.
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**PRINCIPLE 4:
QUALIFICATIONS AND
ASSESSMENT SHOULD BE
INCLUSIVE BOTH IN PURPOSE
AND IN THE DESIGN AND
DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM.**

Example characteristic:

- to make this vision a reality for every young person in England, the new ERA must be designed and developed collaboratively, inclusively, with students, parents, teachers, employing organisations, policy makers and researchers. There needs to be sustained, informed dialogue between schools (students, teachers and parents) and qualifications users (employers, colleges and universities and policy makers).

Example of the kind of evidence available if this principle were being practised:

- student and parents/carers are at the heart of the change process. Their views are listened to and inform decisions about how assessment can be most responsive to their needs.
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**PRINCIPLE 5:
QUALIFICATIONS AND
ASSESSMENT SHOULD SUPPORT
PROGRESSION FOR ALL YOUNG
PEOPLE, BUT SHOULD NOT EXIST
ONLY TO ACT AS A MECHANISM
FOR DETERMINING THE NEXT
QUALIFICATION OR FOR
PURPOSES OF SELECTION.**

Example characteristic:

- to identify progress in all that matters, a range of approaches to assessment will be required. Examinations remain one important way of gathering evidence but the current system is too heavily reliant on a single assessment method with a heavy bias towards written papers. This single method cannot provide evidence of all that is important for young people as they move to the next stage of their lives.

Example of the kind of evidence available if this principle were being practised:

- qualifications are obtained in a range of ways, one of which is by examination. Students have a degree of choice of mode of assessment.

Finally, the IAC makes ten recommendations for the future of assessment and qualifications in England to ensure qualifications are equitable and reliable for every student.

Recommendation 1: recognise every student's achievements. Create a more equitable and reliable assessment system that optimises the potential and protects the health and wellbeing of all England's young people.

Recommendation 2: use the broad consensus for change that exists to initiate a national conversation on education with a particular focus on equitable, reliable assessment. Use the vision and principles in this report to stimulate that conversation.

Recommendation 3: design learning experiences and qualifications that encourage students to become critical, inquisitive, creative, autonomous and problem-solving learners, that better support their progression into employment, further and higher education and inspire life-long and interdisciplinary learning.

Recommendation 4: identify reliable, alternative, blended approaches to assessment that rigorously gather evidence of student achievement and competence. End high-stakes examinations as the only mode of assessing student achievement. Alternative approaches should be developed and trialled with schools to ensure that any new approach takes teacher capacity into consideration.

Recommendation 5: deploy existing and emergent technologies to support high quality student experiences in assessment and qualifications.

Recommendation 6: plan coherent pathways for all of England's young people between school, college, university and employment that include a coherent 14-19 assessment and qualification experience. GCSEs in their present form, where the qualification is based solely on high-stakes examinations, need to change fundamentally.

Recommendation 7: focus on qualifications as outcomes. Assessment should not be based around a fixed age of 16. Students should have opportunities to demonstrate achievements when ready throughout education 14-19.

Recommendation 8: design an integrated qualifications system that offers every student opportunities to include 'academic' and 'vocational' elements seamlessly alongside accreditation for skill development, extended interdisciplinary study and community contribution.

Recommendation 9: build a system of accountability that uses evidence to inform improvement and ends judgemental categorisation of schools.

Recommendation 10: recognise that successful, sustainable change requires genuine stakeholder engagement including all the communities which have been part of this commission.

IN CONCLUSION

The IAC would like to express thanks to all of those who have engaged with us in thinking through a better future for assessment and qualifications. Students, parents/carers, teachers, employers, policy makers and researchers all took part with enthusiasm and commitment. This is the beginning of the process and IAC commission members hope that this report will be used to support and encourage the conversations already underway.

This proposal for a new Assessment ERA cannot be considered in isolation. There are implications for assessment and its relationship with the curriculum and for wider issues, eg, the role of the teacher and how this new vision of what it is to be an education professional in the mid to late 21st century is reflected in roles, responsibilities and resources.

The IAC is not alone in attempting to tackle the challenge of assessment and qualifications. Rethinking Assessment, the Pearson Future of Qualifications and Assessment project, NCFE's Assessment Innovation Fund, and the Times Education Commission, are all working to inform a better system in ways that are complementary. Drawing on the evidence emerging within these groups, the English system is well placed to take this opportunity to improve every student's life chances and to create the kind of society to which we would all like to belong.

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