



Bulletin number 20

**Profiles of Achievement: An
investigation into international
developments**

A background paper for SQA

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1 Summary

Methodology

The aim of this investigation was to look for examples of assessment and certification which would assist SQA in the context of recording formally how students in Scottish secondary schools progress in the four capabilities set out in A Curriculum for Excellence, ie becoming successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

The research was carried out using three approaches: internet searches; a search of the resources in the library of the University of Edinburgh; and through contacts in the UK and overseas. The work focused on the UK, the EU, Canada and the USA, Australia and New Zealand.¹

Two significant problems emerged in undertaking all three forms of research:

- ◆ First, terminology; in particular the use of the term ‘profiling’, used in relation to schools, proved problematic since it is increasingly associated with reporting on the performance of schools rather than the performance of students. This new focus, which is often associated with devolving powers and responsibilities to a local level and/or increasing parental choice, is associated with efforts to improve or maintain national quality assurance and appears to be wide-spread.
- ◆ Second, the unusual nature of the Scottish system of qualifications and certification; developments over the last 20 years, now being consolidated through the SQA portfolio review, have meant that the Scottish system tends to be a leader in certification or accreditation. Because of this, what appeared to be promising leads often turned out to be no more than countries considering, or moving to systems, which are already common practice in Scotland.

General findings and structure

The research did not discover any models of certification which would be of direct value to SQA in the context of the four capabilities set out in A Curriculum for Excellence, but it did find a number of systems where the curriculum was being reviewed to focus on capabilities similar to those of A Curriculum for Excellence, and in some cases work was under way on assessment and/or standardisation which may be of interest.

¹ In the end the report concentrates on Canada, rather than the USA. Investigations into developments in South Africa yielded nothing of use to the report. However, the Umalusi research report/discussion document on qualifications systems cited in the references section was a valuable resource.

A number of attempts to introduce profiling were undertaken in the UK in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. They tend to reflect an approach to profiling which is ambitious in scope. The following definition, from a paper produced in 1983 by the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association (AMMA)², is representative:

‘... a systematic, comprehensive description and assessment of a pupil’s academic and non-academic achievements, attributes and interests, set out in a format easy to interpret both by educational and non-educational users, and issued at the end of the student’s period of secondary education.’

This vision of a form of record which would provide comparable information about learners across a wide range of achievements and would be easily understood and used by selectors in education and industry, has not always been associated with certification, although SQA has continued to pursue the idea of a quality assured and standardised record which goes beyond academic achievement.

The pursuit of this kind of record appears to have produced three kinds of development:

- ◆ Where more detailed information is given by examining bodies through more complex certificates and/or transcripts or other supplements to certificates — discussed in section 2 of this report, ‘Profiling as more detailed certification’.
- ◆ Where students themselves are asked to undertake forms of evaluation related to their learning — discussed in section 3, ‘Profiling as personal development planning and reporting’.
- ◆ Where teachers are asked (or given the opportunity) to make judgements about non-formal, non-academic learning, usually to supplement the standardised (usually external, examination-based) assessment of the formal curriculum — discussed in section 4, ‘Profiling as formal reports on non-formal learning’.

The three further sections of the report are:

- ◆ ‘Wider activities and wider skills’ (section 5)
- ◆ ‘Issues associated with profiling’ (section 6)
- ◆ ‘Selected references by countries’ (section 7)

² AMMA. (1983) *Profiles and records of achievement: an introduction to the debate*. AMMA.

2 Profiling as more detailed certification

Work towards breaking down traditional marks into more detailed information was found in Australia, Canada and the USA, and New Zealand. These developments are associated with three purposes which may be interlinked:

- ◆ To make it easier for selectors — especially in higher education — to discriminate between applicants for places.
- ◆ To assist students and parents to gain a clear picture of their performance in relative as well as absolute terms.
- ◆ To give more detailed information about the performance of schools, departments and teachers.

This kind of development related mainly to academic achievement.

Transcripts in Canada

Although the systems in all of these countries are highly devolved, it is possible to make some general observations about them. All of these countries have a form of group award as the main school-leaving certificate. Students must achieve a certain number of credits based on national or locally developed courses, and the group award will have a core and options model of some kind. In each case, transcripts are issued to accompany what SQA might call ‘the commemorative certificate’ (such as a High School Graduation Diploma), and the transcript will give additional information about the courses or the modules which have been taken.

As a minimum, the transcript is likely to show course name and code; date of achievement; percentage mark (and, where applicable, the school and exam marks from which this is derived); the grade achieved for the course; and the credit value of the course. It may also show where credits have been achieved through equivalence schemes (recognising courses from other provinces or systems) or through some form of recognition of prior learning (RPL). The student’s ‘Honours Standing’ is based on a Grade Point Average and may show if a student has participated in ‘special programmes’. The focus here seems very much on selection, although all of this data is likely to be used in creating reports on schools to assist parents in making choices.

The New Zealand National Certificate of Educational Achievement

New Zealand issues a detailed certificate for its National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), but also issues a complex report called an 'Interim Result Notice' in January of each year. This indicates the level the students have achieved in each unit so far, in a format which indicates whether unit assessment is internal or external and also shows what proportion of students have achieved the unit at each level. This Notice also gives the total number of credits which the student has gained towards the NCEA and the student's grade average (which is not quite a simple average) both as a figure and as a position on a national scale.

New Zealand schools may also provide a student profile for leavers, which includes comments on progress in various curriculum areas, on personal qualities, and on involvement in school activities, as well as information on performance in national examinations.

The New South Wales School Certificate gives summary information about the component courses and indicates that the candidate has satisfied the requirements of the School Certificate (known as the Testamur). It is accompanied by:

- ◆ The Record of Achievement Part A — a cumulative record of all Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10) courses completed, showing grades and hours for all courses of 200 or more hours, and listing courses of more than 100 hours completed. It is issued whether the student has completed the School Certificate or not and it indicates whether or not each mandatory Certificate course has been completed. General grade descriptors (A — Excellent; B — High; C — Substantial; D — Satisfactory; and E — Elementary) are used in reporting.
- ◆ The Record of Achievement Part B — a record of results achieved for School Certificate Tests in English Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Australian History, Civics and Citizenship, and Australian Geography.
- ◆ The School Certificate Test Reports — details of performance in each of the School Certificate tests described in terms of standards of knowledge and skills typically demonstrated by students at a level.

Students who undertake Life Skills courses receive an individual profile containing the outcomes that they have studied rather than a grade.

No evidence emerged regarding the view of users on these forms of certification. However, it is notable that, at the same time as they appear to disaggregate information, they also re-aggregate it in the form of Grade Point Averages of some kind and that, in those cultures, this kind of measure appears to be seen as advantageous by users.

Europass

Although it comes from another continent and another sector, the EU Europass Diploma Supplement has a number of features in common with these elaborated certificates. It has been designed to provide enough independent data about students' achievements to improve cross-nation transparency and promote fair academic and professional recognition of higher education qualifications.

It sets out to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that the student has undertaken. It requires a range of information to be provided by the certifying body, including details of the content, level, and function of the qualifications, together with details of mode of study, programme requirements, modules or units studied and the grades/marks/credits obtained. This has to be supplemented by information about the system which has produced the qualification.

The Diploma Supplement is very clearly focused on the needs of the higher education community, but that clarity of purpose may give it a strength which has been difficult to secure in some of the wider-ranging attempts to profile learner achievement that have been found in this investigation. To that extent, it may be worth further consideration by SQA.

3 Profiling as personal development planning and reporting

The main examples of this approach that emerged from the research were from Scottish and UK practice in the 1970s, 80s and 90s — NROVA, the NRA and Progress File. These have the advantage of having been subject to evaluation and throwing up a number of issues which are still relevant. The National Record of Vocational Achievement (NROVA) was primarily aimed at young people on Youth Training Schemes (YTS) and adult trainees on other government schemes. It included space for personal planning, an assessment diary, and bringing together the different qualifications an individual might achieve.

In certification terms, SCOTVEC responded by developing the Record of Education and Training (RET), the precursor of today's Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC), on the basis that, in Scotland, most of the qualifications which these trainees would gain over their working lifetime would be awarded or accredited by SCOTVEC. Apart from the practical question of whether trainees would continue to use the NROVA after they completed the training scheme on which it was issued, the NROVA raised no major issues.

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) and Progress File in the UK

The NRA, introduced three years after NROVA, was more controversial. It was aimed at a wider range of students, particularly those in schools. It responded to the continuing concern that current assessment does not capture all that young people achieve, and in particular takes no account of what have recently been labelled (in the proposals of the Tomlinson Committee) 'wider achievements'.

The NRA was designed to encourage learners to capture these achievements in the form of their own reflections on their learning and personal development, and/or through testimonials of different kinds. At the same time, the NRA was promoted to users as an important document in recruitment and selection.

An evaluation undertaken by the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) in 1996 found that many schools had a high level of commitment to the NRA — both to the process of pupils' development of their record and to the final product — but there was a general lack of interest in, and awareness of, the NRA amongst users outside schools. The researchers suggested that this might undermine the value students were being encouraged to put on the document and therefore affect schools' commitment to the NRA. To some extent, these fears appear to have been borne out. Learners were often assured that the NRA

would be of interest to employers and admissions officers and would help them secure places. However, the evaluation found that employers, training providers, or admissions officers were not, by and large, supportive of the NRA, which they felt was too detailed. Employers, in particular, were happy with their existing selection methods and tended not to see how the NRA was helpful. One evaluation commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment found that most individuals who tried to use their NRA found it was not well received, being subject at best to ‘a cursory glance’, but another suggested that the NRA was gaining acceptance and could be particularly useful for young people seeking their first jobs.

There were also issues about pupils assessing themselves. As might be expected, questions were raised about the value of this evidence, although respondents to the survey on which the evaluation was based felt that the NRA could help employers to understand people’s personal qualities. But there was also an issue about the extent to which the NRA was a public document, or a private and personal developmental record. There was also a related, but broader, issue about whether a single record could be used across all kinds of organisations as a tool for selection and as a means of self-assessment and personal learning.

More recently, following a review of the NRA, Progress File was introduced. It appears to have less policy prominence than its predecessor, but is supported by a website with some degree of interactivity: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/progressfile/>, and a range of e-materials. Progress File is also linked to government initiatives such as citizenship education, and to bodies such as the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme. A SCRE evaluation in 2003 commented fully on the use of the file in assisting learners to evaluate their learning, but made no reference to its value or otherwise to end users.

The finding that the NRA could be a particularly useful support for young people who found it difficult to talk about themselves, or talk appropriately about themselves, is worth pausing over. At the beginning of this decade, the Army Headquarters Directorate of Educational and Training Services (Army) (HQ DETS(A)) set out to find ways of gaining civilian accreditation of military experience, training, and education and attempted to work with SQA on this.

The British Army Personal Development Record (PDR)

As part of this work, DETS(A) developed the Army Personal Development Record (PDR), a profile designed to encourage Army personnel to take individual ownership of their personal and professional development and assist them to sell their army achievements when re-entering civilian life. The PDR, in paper and electronic versions, has now been issued to all ranks of the Regular and Territorial Army, but it was not possible to see the current form of this profile as part of the investigation. The PDR was intended to record factual information such as the content and level of courses taken, and to help people to understand the outcomes of their non-formal and informal learning in terms

which would be of value beyond the world of the Army. What became apparent as this work was underway, was the importance of that understanding, because the crucial value of the record would be the use it should have in facilitating discussion — possibly at interview — between the individual learner/applicant and the selector who is trying to evaluate the learning in the context of their own requirements. If this communication does not take place satisfactorily, then selectors are likely to fall back on what they feel they can understand and interpret — the results of formal academic learning.

A lot of work has been done on personal development plans (PDPs) in higher education and 5–14 education, and on e-portfolios, but time did not allow these to be included in the investigation. The Australian National Training Authority report on employability skills, *Final Report — Development of a Strategy to Support the Universal Recognition and Recording of Employability Skills: A Skills Portfolio Approach* (Dec 2004), gives wide-ranging information on developments in this field.

4 Profiling as formal reports on non-formal learning

One way round the issues of communication and understanding discussed in the previous section, is to give reporting on non-formal learning a similar status to formal learning. The most likely ways of achieving this are by having the reporting done by the same professionals who assess formal learning; or developing standards for non-formal outcomes similar to those used for formal learning; or by using forms of assessment which are associated with trusted credentials. Examples of all these approaches have been found, but not always associated with certification.

The Pupils in Profile project in Scotland

The earliest work on profiling examined in this investigation was undertaken by the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) in the early-to-mid-1970s. This was initiated in response to concern expressed by the Headmasters' Association of Scotland³ (HAS) at a time when Scottish students were either following 'certificate' or 'non-certificate' courses.⁴ The research project called Pupils in Profile was initiated in 1973, following the publication of a report by the HAS, and reported in 1977. In the meantime, the Munn and Dunning Committees were established and the report of the latter, with its recommendations which led to the introduction of Standard Grades under the slogan 'Assessment for all', took attention away from the issues of profiling.

The objectives of the Pupils in Profile project were to enhance pupils' self-knowledge; to provide users with useful information; to orientate teachers towards a guidance model; and to support the school in its programme of total education. The project steering group wanted to give schools continued scope to develop local curriculums, and one of the key questions the project identified for their work was: Could the project set up comparable standards of assessment without having uniform curriculums? Additionally, and even more challenging, the steering group wanted to assess non-formal learning, 'giving teachers the opportunity of recording assessments of their pupils in community service, stage production, canoeing, etc.'⁵ The project also sought to include affective factors and non-cognitive behaviours, such as 'Humour ... Resilience ... Adaptability ... Sensitivity, etc' together with 'Perseverance', 'Reliability', 'Motivations' (sic) — but not 'Honesty', 'Truthfulness', 'or that great favourite Integrity'. Assessing these was necessary, 'in justice especially to our less academic pupils'. The project report claimed that teachers 'from New Zealand to Sweden'

³ This would become the Headteachers' Association of Scotland in 1974.

⁴ Although the 'non-certificate pupils' might be following courses leading to local certificates — which were sometimes vocational in content or orientation.

⁵ However, whilst it recognised that the curriculum extends beyond 9 to 4 on weekdays, the steering group decided not to include 'such situations as lunch-time, school buses, dances'.

(or, in a later report, ‘New Zealand to Norway’) were becoming concerned that such facts were not being taken account of. However, there is no evidence that this has led to significant changes in the certification practices in these countries, and this may be an important datum in itself.

Pupils in Profile has been described by Patricia Broadfoot⁶, who was one of the lead researchers on the project:

‘One of the earliest and best known profiling schemes was developed in Scotland in the mid-1970s. It is described in detail in a volume published for the Scottish Council for Research in Education in 1977, entitled *Pupils in Profile*. Whilst the scheme never achieved widespread implementation in schools, it was extremely influential in bringing the idea of profiling to a wide audience both in the United Kingdom and internationally, and has had a profound effect on later developments in the field.’

The project used a grid system, completed by teachers for curricular and extra-curricular activities, using a 1 to 4 grading on as many occasions as possible for each field, and the gradings were then averaged out. It was time-consuming and in the end did not yield useful information.

More recent work on profiling has tended to be carried out in areas other than mainstream secondary education. When no examples of profiling in the area of interest to SQA were found, the investigation was widened to consider higher education, primary education and the equivalent of NQ access level. The following examples of current profiling were found.

The UCAS tariff project in the UK

In developing its new tariff to try to cope with the increasing diversity in applicants and qualifications, the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) initially attempted to include a new dimension. The tariff has introduced a different calibration for A-level points, an entirely new calibration for Scottish qualifications, and a methodology for bringing non-traditional qualifications into the tariff. However, at the development stage UCAS also tried — with support and funding from the Department for Education and Science (DfES) — to create a means of calibrating wider achievements and representing these in the form of a visual profile which could be contrasted with any requisite or preferred skills or experiences identified by university and college faculties, schools and departments. The visual representation was shown to be impracticable in the developmental phase of the tariff project, but UCAS attempted to retain wider achievements as part of the tariff arrangements — both as information to be recorded by applicants, and as part of a more transparent system of admissions by the institutions. It was not supported and has been dropped from the tariff, although arguably some influence of the work can still be found in paperwork of the application process.

⁶ In Broadfoot, Patricia (ed). (1986) *Profiles and records of achievement*. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Like employers faced with the NRA, it seems, admissions personnel preferred to stick with a system which was familiar and which they found to be simpler.

The SWAP profile in Scotland

An example of profiling currently in use is the Student Profile developed for students following Scottish Wider Access Programme courses. This was introduced more than a decade ago and is still found useful. In some respects, the approach taken here matches that adopted for the Scottish Core Skills framework, with which it shares some origins. One of the strengths of this profile, which is intended to supplement Unit results by evaluating the learner's broader capabilities in the context of studying at a university, is its clear focus which arises from a relatively narrow, but unambiguous, purpose.

OCR's entry level profile in England

The National Skills Profile developed by OCR has been developed for learners with disabilities. This was the only result found when searching the websites of the main UK awarding bodies for profiles. It seems to offer no significant advance on SQA's Skillstart and other Access provision, but the conclusion which may be drawn is that the Skillstart/Access approach (which was itself a development of the Action Plan PSD approach) might be worth revisiting in the context of A Curriculum for Excellence.

Accrediting schools in Wales

In the 1990s, the Oxford Delegacy ran a successful scheme known as the Oxford Certificate of Education (OCEA), part of which centred round the idea of accrediting schools to offer their own courses under an OCEA quality stamp. No information on this now seems to be available, but the Welsh Joint Education Committee now offers accreditation to primary schools to offer Records of Achievement, and this kind of approach may be of interest to SQA.

Enquiries in the UK and the EU also pointed away from schools towards developments in Vocational Education Training (VET). Two of these, which seemed as if they might yield models, were pursued. These were the work of the Learning and Skills Council in England on Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) in non-accredited learning and in Europe, The European Framework for Work Experience (EFWE) project. In the event, neither produced any insights that had not already been explored fully by SQA or its predecessor bodies, or by the UK and Scottish Ministries responsible for education and training in the 1990s.

LSC's RARPA project in England

RARPA stands for 'Recognising and Reporting Progress and Achievement' and the project has been undertaken by the Learning and Skills Council in

collaboration with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), and the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE). Its primary function is to develop new measures of success for the learning and skills sector. However, there has been some speculation as to whether the approach could also be used to capture the wider skills now being explored by QCA (discussed in the next section of this report.)

The work is linked into the Common Inspection Framework which now operates in England, and LSC is currently exploring with the QCA, Inspectorates and others, the possibility of incorporating RARPA into the proposed shared process of approval for providers wishing to offer awards within the new Framework for Achievement. This will form the basis of a Distance Travelled (DT) measure for adults, learners on Entry to Employment (e2e) provision, and learners on provision at entry level and below.

The RARPA approach is intended to assure the quality of learners' experience on formal and non-formal learning programmes which do not lead directly to any form of external accreditation, award or qualification. It is part of the work on new measures of success which comes within 'Success for All' (the government's programme of reform and investment in the learning and skills sector). 'Success for All' is intended to raise standards, increase participation, and improve outcomes for learners and employers. It recognises that learning and skills providers and employers must work together to raise productivity and meet skills needs at the national, regional, and local levels.

RARPA is described as a five-stage process. The stages involve the identification of appropriate aims for learning; initial assessment to establish the learner's starting point; setting 'appropriately challenging learning objectives'; on-going formative assessment using criteria and norms to evaluate progress and achievement; and end-of-programme self-assessment by the learner and summative assessment by the tutor.

It is perhaps not surprising that the piloting of the staged process undertaken by NIACE found that 'staff [did] not see the staged process as additional to their normal practice'. The key elements of the RARPA programme from the point of view of SQA's intentions are that:

- ◆ 'evidence is likely to comprise *qualitative and quantitative information*' (emphasis added)
- ◆ RARPA should capture both planned learning outcomes and learning gains identified subsequently — elsewhere described as 'unanticipated outcomes'
- ◆ the application of RARPA to the 'wider activities' recommended by the Tomlinson Working Group on 14–19 Reform is to be investigated

An evaluation carried out by NIACE and LSDA found that 'a balance needs to be struck between structure and flexibility in the application of the staged

process.’ In other words, there was a tension between the flexibility for individual staff to develop their own approaches in the system and ensuring comparability within and between centres. However, they also found that where a single approach and documentation was applied, there could be problems applying this to certain types of provision.

The European Framework for Work Experience (EFWE) project

EFWE has been running since 2003. It targets undergraduate and post-graduate students who undertake paid or unpaid/voluntary work experience whilst studying, and is concerned with the assessment of employability skills. The project is Leonardo-funded and is co-ordinated by the CRAC (the UK Careers Research and Advisory Centre). The partners in the project are from the UK, Germany, Finland, Belgium, Spain and Romania.

The project has developed a range of materials and resources intended to help students to understand what employers are looking for, to reflect on their work experience, and to translate the skills they gain into sellable attributes using a common set of generic competences identified by employers. The project materials should also help those providing or supporting work experience.

Twelve core competences have been identified, defined by what employers said they look for in a graduate. These skills are within the range covered by most similar work and have some overlaps with the four capabilities of A Curriculum for Excellence. The project includes assessment of students’ capabilities carried out through work-based assignments of around 2,000 words designed to enable students to demonstrate that they can apply some management and work-based theory in a practical context through using examples from their work experience. This is followed up by an informal evaluation based on either a 5–10 minute presentation made by the student, or an interview using the 12 core competences (informal due to the difficulties of standardising the judgements).

These methods appear quite resource intensive and may be felt to be more appropriate to a scheme involving adult volunteers than to universal assessment of school students.

5 Wider activities and wider skills

The terms ‘wider activities’ and ‘wider skills’ come from the final and interim reports of the Working Party on 14–19 reform — the Tomlinson Committee. The learning they refer to is a concern in other parts of the world, notably Australia.

QCA’s current work on ‘Personal, employability, learning and thinking skills’ and curriculum development in Australia, with its focus on ‘Essential Learnings’ both share much with the aims of A Curriculum for Excellence, but in neither country is there yet a clear link to certification. In England, QCA has simply started a consultation to define these wider skills, and in Australia there do not appear to be plans, either federally or in the states and provinces, to develop any kind of formal certification. However, work on assessment tasks in Queensland, and on benchmarking in Tasmania, may be worth further investigation.

Wider activities and skills in England

In its interim report, the Tomlinson Committee recognised the role of ‘wider activities’ — defined as ‘activities usually undertaken outside formal learning time and include the arts; sports and recreation; science and technology; family responsibilities; community service; and part-time employment’ — as an important form of experiential learning and developing which they labelled Common Knowledge, Skills and Attributes (CKSA), ‘such as personal awareness, problem solving, creativity, team-working and moral and ethical awareness’.

In the final report, the Tomlinson Committee also emphasised the role of ‘wider activities’ which ‘provide the opportunity to enrich learners’ lives and support their engagement as active citizens within their communities.’ They sought to bring these wider activities within the proposed diploma framework and to ensure that the learner gains recognition for undertaking them and for the skills developed by them, but recognised a number of issues which made this challenging:

- ◆ The volume and range of wider activities available to young people.
- ◆ The unfairness of making wider activities a requirement of success.
- ◆ The difficulties of assessing wider activities equitably and appropriately.

For these reasons, they suggested that wider activities should be an entitlement of about 120 hours within the 14–19 programme and that the value of these activities for learning should be promoted to school students. The report concludes on the matter: ‘(82) Wider activities would typically not be assessed formally, but participation and skill development could be recognised and

attested on the transcript should the learner so wish. No young person should be penalised for not wanting to record their wider activities, for whatever reason.’

In the event, the Tomlinson Committee’s proposals were not accepted, but the value of what might be called ‘wider skills’ was noted by the government. In the 14–19 White Paper, personal skills and thinking and learning skills were highlighted (5.22). Personal skills were defined as ‘those which give young people the ability to manage themselves and to develop effective social and working relationships’; and thinking and learning skills ‘mean knowing how to learn independently and adapt to a range of circumstances’.

More fully, thinking and learning skills are broken down into:

Enquiry:

- ◆ Asking relevant questions.
- ◆ Planning.
- ◆ Testing conclusions.

Creative thinking:

- ◆ Suggesting hypotheses.
- ◆ Imaginatively challenging ideas.

Information processing:

- ◆ Locating and classifying information.

Reasoning:

- ◆ Explaining opinions, actions and decisions.
- ◆ Using deduction.

Evaluation:

- ◆ Assessing evidence.
- ◆ Judging against criteria and values.

Personal skills:

- ◆ Communication and personal presentation for a range of audiences.
- ◆ Diligence, reliability and capability to improve, includes:
 - organisation
 - initiative
 - willingness to learn

- ◆ Working with others, includes:
 - negotiating
 - awareness of others’ needs
 - leadership

- ◆ Moral and ethical awareness, which includes:
 - understanding right and wrong
 - responsibilities to family and community and their own potential

The White Paper goes on to say (5.23) that ‘these skills and attitudes are not confined to particular subjects, but can be developed throughout the curriculum at all ages. ... Taking part in wider activities beyond the curriculum can also foster these skills.’

QCA has been asked to give initial advice to the Secretary of State in December 2005 on a framework of skills of this kind for 11–19-year-olds. It is also to advise on embedding the framework in the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and across 14–19; the approach to assessing skills 11–19; any disjunctions with the national curriculum; and coherence with skills frameworks for adults. As a first step to discharging this, QCA has started a consultation on a framework of ‘Personal, employability, learning and thinking skills’.

The main skills (or capabilities, in Scottish terms) in the framework are: active investigator; creative contributor; reflective learner; confident collaborator; and practical self-manager. In a presentation on this consultation, QCA says that ‘this single framework, together with functional English, functional mathematics and functional ICT, will equip young people with the skills they need to be employable and to achieve success in life.’

Essential learnings in Australia

There is reported to have been intensive work on National Statements and Profiles in Australia in the 1990s, followed by work in all States and Territories to implement the Mayer Key Competences in the schools sector.⁷ This appears to have been impeded by industrial action resulting from the amount of change being undertaken. Tasmania is said to have made the most advance towards implementation.

The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 1999) gave a new impetus to work on generic skills in schools. The National Goals provide a broad framework for curriculum development in Australia’s schools and aim to ensure employability. The preamble to the Adelaide Declaration notes the importance of schooling in providing a basis for students’ participation in the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of

⁷ Described in SQA’s Research Bulletin number 3: *Key competences — some international comparisons*.

Australian society, and acknowledges the need for lifelong learning to enable continued participation.

This has led to a range of developments, often under the banner 'Essential Learnings'. Of these, three have been selected for more detailed consideration for this report: those in Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland.

Tasmania

The Essential Learnings Framework (ELF) in Tasmania is for all students from Kindergarten to Year 10 in the public education system. The curriculum is designed around a set of five Essential Learnings intended to produce young people who are inquiring and reflective thinkers; effective communicators; self-directed and ethical people; responsible citizens; and world contributors.

There are outcomes and standards for each of the key elements of the five Essential Learnings, but these are not tied to age or grade (as the equivalent are, for example, in Victoria). There are five standards for each key element that form the basis of whole school and individual teacher planning, assessment, monitoring and reporting.

These five Essential Learnings break down into eighteen Key Element Outcomes, and each of these can be assessed at five 'standards' (level descriptors) which describe student progress against the separate outcomes. To assist teachers, a set of illustrative examples of performance has been described under each standard. These describe typical things that students should know and be able to do at any particular level.

A 'calibration' process, involving the analysis of trial tasks and sample student responses, is being carried out between 2003 and 2006 to evaluate the validity and utility of standards.

South Australia

The Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework of South Australia sets curriculum outcomes through to Year 12. Essential Learnings for each area describe the values, dispositions, skills and understandings considered crucial, and there are standards at Years 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 which provide a common reference point for monitoring, judging, and reporting student achievement. Five Essential Learnings have been identified: Futures, Identity, Interdependence, Thinking, and Communication.

Queensland

The Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Framework for Queensland defines the Essential Learning Outcomes for all students from Pre-primary to Year 10. Outcomes are sequenced as points along the developmental continuum of student learning and are described in syllabuses organised around outcome levels typically relating to year levels, although no standards are prescribed to date. As the Framework develops, new standards will measure student

achievement and statewide assessment of Essential Learnings in Years 4, 6 and 9.

The Queensland approach is labelled ‘the New Basics’. These are four categories for organising the curriculum: life pathways and social futures; multiliteracies and communications media; active citizenship; and environments and technologies.

These are assessed using ‘Rich Tasks’ — integrated assessments which must draw on at least two of the categories. They must have both academic and practical elements; be problem-based; connect to the world beyond the classroom; and have face-value for educators, parents and community stakeholders.

6 Issues associated with profiling

There are a number of issues associated with profiles that seek to capture non-formal and non-academic achievements and attributes.

(a) **What are the purposes and who are the target users of the profiles?**

There can be conflict here and a danger that, because the aims are not clear enough, the profiling itself is not effective. Are the primary users to be the learners themselves? The schools? Selectors for education and employment? The government?

For example, from the evidence available, there appears to be great value in profiling that supports learning and personal development — and most of the projects and initiatives in this report are of this nature. However, it also appears that an intention to use a self-development tool for ‘public’ purposes such as reporting to selectors, may be seen as unfair, or may have a negative effect on the developmental use.

A related question is: **Are profiles to be completed by the student or the institution?**

(b) **Are profiles to be evaluative or descriptive?**

(Evaluative reports would include strengths and weakness and judgements about what is recorded; descriptive reports would focus on successes and simply present evidence.)

Again, there is a danger that unresolved tensions lead to a lack of clarity in the profiles and their implementation.

(c) **Are profiles and the quality assurance to be local or national?**

The research suggests that developments which allow customising, result in enthusiasm on the part of staff (and students), but also suggest that this is likely to be associated with individual leadership and is therefore temporary. National development shares the negative aspects of all top-down initiatives, but can be sustained.

One way to compromise could be to accredit institutions to act locally within a national framework, but this would not produce truly national results and statistics.

(d) **Are profiles for all students or for those who don’t get high status awards?**

This is partly about the intention, but also about market forces. If high status gatekeepers, such as university admissions officers, do not attach any value to profiles, it is unlikely that profiles will be taken up by students seeking to enter higher education or be supported by their parents, and as a

result they are unlikely to be seen by other students and parents as having any worth.

(e) **Are profiles to be formative or summative?**

There are issues of clarity here which are similar to those in (b) above. It is possible to develop profiles which use both formative and summative assessment (possibly at different stages), but this creates additional work associated with keeping formative (possibly cumulative) records and then interpreting and reporting these in summative (and possibly summary) form.

(f) **How detailed are the profiles to be, and will they be subject to national statistical monitoring?**

What is the value of detailed formative profiling if it simply leads to the reporting of a summative grade or standardised grade statement? On the other hand, will selectors make use of more detailed reports? One answer might be to record outcomes achieved, as in New Zealand, but how are these to be assessed and standardised — would they really be just a suite of very small units?

(g) **Are schools set up to deliver profiles?**

Can they do it at all? Can they do it in a way that is consistent and fair?

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