

Policy and New Products

# Research Report 9



## **Recognition of Wider Achievement: Establishing Currency**

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# Executive summary

This report is the outcome of desk research and interviews to investigate how any future means of recognising wider achievement might be given currency. The research was conducted on behalf of SQA in December 2006.

The investigation involved:

- ◆ reviewing why previous developments of this kind have failed to gain currency
- ◆ documenting case studies of emerging good practice
- ◆ interviews with potential end-users, including employers and representatives of higher education

This report was written prior to changes in the recognised terminology.

## Main findings

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) and Progress File are the most recent examples of this type of development in Scotland.

The NRA had many benefits, including recognising achievements both in and out of school. However, teacher workload was seen as a significant problem and the NRA lacked credibility with employers. Its value was questioned because of its self-assessment by pupils approach.

Similarly, Progress File seemed to be successful in meeting several of its stated objectives. For example, it appears to have had a major impact in encouraging users to present themselves better. However, it did not achieve all of its aims: its impact on users' learning habits and behaviour was much more uneven and inconclusive, and there was very little evidence for it having any impact on users' attitudes to lifelong learning.

Several examples of good practice are worth further examination before developing a model for a future means of recognising wider achievement. These include:

- ◆ the Army's Professional Development Record
- ◆ the North Lanarkshire Diploma
- ◆ the Renfrewshire Certificate of Achievement
- ◆ Skills Passports, and
- ◆ Europass

It proved difficult to secure end-user agreement to take part in interviews or to complete questionnaires, so the sample of respondents was very small and cannot be taken as representative. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that within that small sample there was a consensus about what wider achievement should include: evidence of positive attitudes, self-efficacy and soft skills; the ability to manage,

lead and take the initiative; evidence of community involvement and positive establishment of relationships.

Amongst the small sample, there was a strong feeling that any new means of recognising wider achievement should:

- ◆ include both formative and summative assessment
- ◆ focus on evidence of achievements (these should be broadly defined and should identify the next steps for the individual)
- ◆ not be driven by checklists
- ◆ be 'light in touch' but evidence-based and verified by a tutor
- ◆ preferably be simple, straightforward and available electronically

There is an impression that the more the document is owned by the student and consists of his/her reflections of achievement, the less value and currency it will have.

## **Main conclusions**

The purposes of any future development should be clarified. In particular, a decision needs to be made as to whether it is feasible and/or appropriate for one mechanism to be used as both a tool for selection and as a means of self-assessment and personal learning. If the answer to this is 'yes', the mechanism needs to be promoted much more effectively.

Effective liaison mechanisms need to be developed between all involved.

The process must be designed to help young people develop skills in self-assessment and self-presentation, and to improve their self-image.

Ideally, the process should become a standard part of practice in assessment and recording in educational institutions.

## **Recommendations**

Before further investigation of how to establish currency for any means of recognising wider achievement, it is necessary to clarify and take decisions on:

- ◆ what is the main purpose of the recognition
- ◆ what is being recognised and what form the recognition will take
- ◆ what is the appropriate balance between practicality and robustness/reliability

When these points have been clarified, then models should be developed and tested with all potential stakeholders.

# 1 Terms of reference

This report was prepared in order to determine the appropriate form for recognising wider achievements. In particular, the report investigates how to establish value and currency for any future means of recognising achievement.

The investigation involved:

- ◆ establishing why previous developments of this kind have failed to gain currency
- ◆ investigating and documenting case studies of emerging good practice, for example, in certain education authorities
- ◆ establishing what end-users would want from a means of recognising wider achievement at the end of secondary education, when the learner is moving to further or higher education or employment

## 2 Methodology

The methodology included the following steps:

- 1 Establish why previous developments of this kind have failed to gain currency
- 2 Investigate and document case studies
- 3 Establish what end-users would want from a means of recognising wider achievement.

Establishing why previous developments of this kind have failed to gain currency, involved:

- ◆ consideration of SQA's Research Bulletin on Profiles of Achievement (Number 20)
- ◆ researching other evaluations of the National Record of Achievement and Progress File, for example evaluations by the Scottish Executive, Learning and Teaching Scotland, HMIE and the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE)<sup>1</sup>

Investigating and documenting case studies, involved:

- ◆ contacting North Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire Councils to discuss and document their model for recognising wider achievement
- ◆ documenting examples of other potential case studies from, for example: the Army, the Police, the Scottish Prison Service, and Skills Passports

Establishing what end-users would want from a means of recognising wider achievement, involved:

- ◆ compiling a relevant list of key stakeholders and networks from FE, HE and employers (for example, by using the Determined to Succeed (DtS) partnership database for a sample of employers as well as sampling views from some of the following — Scotland's Colleges, the higher education Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)/Universities Scotland, the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA), and Careers Scotland)
- ◆ reviewing and refining a brief questionnaire to be distributed electronically to a structured sample of these contacts
- ◆ interviewing a small number of contacts from each of the main stakeholder groups using telephone and/or face-to-face interviews

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<sup>1</sup> The National Record of Achievement in Scotland: An Evaluation, the SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow, Research Report 79, November 1996.  
Progress File: An Evaluation of the Demonstration Projects, John Hall and Janet Powney the SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow, Research Report 426, June 2003.

## 3 Findings and conclusions

### 3.1 Why have previous developments of this kind failed to gain currency?

#### Findings

Many profiling systems and attempts to capture wider achievement have been very ambitious in scope. For example, SQA's Research Bulletin Number 20, on Profiles of Achievement, quotes the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association (AMMA) which produced the following definition in 1983:

*...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*

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) and Progress File are the most recent examples of this type of development in Scotland. A review of the NRA in particular will provide enough information to pinpoint the kinds of benefits a good system will give us, as well as the obstacles to success and the issues we need to solve as we develop a new means of recognising wider achievement.

#### The National Record of Achievement (NRA)

This was a UK-wide initiative introduced jointly by the Employment Department and Department for Education and Science, together with the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office, in February 1991. It was intended to provide a single common format to summarise an individual's overall achievements in education, training and throughout life, and to provide a standard presentational style. It was aimed at a wide range of students, particularly those in schools. It was an attempt to address the fact that assessment does not capture all that a student achieves and does not take into account what Tomlinson<sup>2</sup> refers to as 'wider achievements'.

#### Benefits

Evaluation studies<sup>3</sup> indicated a range of benefits of the NRA. Schools mentioned that the action-planning process was beneficial, that the NRA recognised achievements both in and out of school, and that it raised pupils' self-esteem. The majority of schools agreed that NRA processes had increased pupil self-motivation in school, enhanced guidance, and made pupils more pro-active in their own learning. Moreover, the NRA was promoted as a really useful document for recruitment and selection.

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<sup>2</sup> Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform 2004  
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/documents/Final%20Report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> SCRE, 1996

## **Obstacles**

There were a number of obstacles to the effective use of the NRA. The main obstacle to a full implementation of the NRA with all pupils was the number of guidance staff and amount of subject-teacher time it required. This was cited by the majority of schools (72%)<sup>4</sup>. Staff in the case-study schools also emphasised that the NRA process was very time-consuming for both pupils and staff, and teacher workload was seen as a significant problem.

Staff in the case-study schools were very concerned about the lack of awareness of the NRA amongst employers. They believed there was an urgent need to market the NRA. The credibility of the NRA was seen to rest upon its currency with employers and further education/higher education (FE/HE). Almost all education authorities responding to the questionnaire also said there was a need for national marketing of the NRA to raise its profile amongst employers and other users. This was echoed by careers service personnel who said the currency of the NRA amongst employers and young people was a key issue and that its profile needed to be raised.

Concerns were also expressed by staff that pupils have difficulty writing positively about themselves. The pupils said they found writing positively about themselves difficult and embarrassing: it was difficult to know about yourself and it was seen as boasting to make positive statements about oneself.

## **General issues**

Although many schools embraced the initiative, there was a general lack of interest and awareness amongst the very end-users it was intended for — employers, training providers and admissions officers.

Very few employers, training providers or FE/HE institutions were asking young people for their NRAs in the process of selection. Those that said they were using the NRA in selection were mostly using it only when it was presented at interview or sent unsolicited with application forms.

Out of 95 employers and training providers approached<sup>5</sup>, only 45 agreed to be interviewed. The others said they had never used the NRA, had never heard of it, or felt it was not appropriate to their needs.

Of the 45 employers and training providers interviewed, 14 employers and 12 training providers said they were using the NRA in selection.

Twenty-four of the 34 FE institutions and four of the 18 HE institutions responding to the questionnaire said they were using the NRA in selection.

Very few schools had liaised with any other users of the NRA in order to promote the NRA to them, or to ask for feedback on it.

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<sup>4</sup> SCRE, 1996, Executive Summary, page xiv

<sup>5</sup> From SCRE Research Report No. 79, Executive Summary, page xii

Very few FE and HE institutions had been contacted by schools or had themselves contacted other users of the NRA in order to promote its use or to ask for feedback on it.

The careers service staff interviewed said they had marketed the NRA informally to businesses but that they received no funding to do so. Its value was questioned because of the self-assessment approach by pupils — although it was accepted by some users that it could help employers to understand people's personal qualities.

There was a lack of clarity and considerable differences of opinion amongst different stakeholders about the purpose and value of the NRA, post-school.

## **Progress File**

Progress File replaced the NRA in the autumn of 1999. It was supported with a range of e-materials and it was linked to other government initiatives like citizenship and to bodies such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

The new materials were introduced in order to help learners:

- ◆ check their progress
- ◆ set goals and targets
- ◆ develop and record Core Skills
- ◆ record qualifications, credits and awards
- ◆ write personal statements and CVs
- ◆ plan their careers

The intention was to encourage all education and training sectors, including community education, and also employers, to use the Progress File. It was also intended to be integrated closely with other initiatives such as the New Deal, the application system for entry to higher education institutions, and developments of the guidance and advisory services.

There were four National Objectives set for Progress File which fit comfortably with some of the objectives of the Curriculum for Excellence programme.

*National Objective One: to equip young people with the knowledge, understanding and skills to plan and manage their own learning, including making effective and sustained transitions within and between education, training and working life.*

*National Objective Two: to increase individual motivation and confidence to achieve, and promote a positive attitude to lifelong learning.*

*National Objective Three: to stimulate learning to gain knowledge and skills, including that not formally recognised in national qualifications.*

*National Objective Four: to assist people to best present those attributes they have relevant to future education, training and career goals.*

### **The impact of Progress File<sup>6</sup> against the National Objectives**

Progress File was generally successful in meeting National Objective One. It enhanced users' knowledge, understanding and skills, particularly their self-awareness, although it was less successful in promoting knowledge of local labour markets and entry requirements for further and higher education. Some Progress File users tended to know about these things when required, but not because of their use of Progress File. It also helped users to plan and manage their own learning and make use of target setting and action planning.

There were identifiable impacts of Progress File on users' transitions from one phase of education to another, although these were not found equally in all demonstration projects.

In National Objective Two, Progress File successfully worked to improve users' motivation, confidence and attitudes. However, its impact on users' learning habits and behaviour was much more uneven and inconclusive, and there was very little evidence for it having any impact on users' attitudes to lifelong learning.

In National Objective Three, there was no evidence of Progress File having any impact on the levels of certificated achievement of pupils in mainstream schools, as measured by examination successes, although it may have played a role in encouraging other forms of certificated achievement. It was more successful in encouraging users to recognise the value of their wider, uncertificated achievements, and this was particularly noticeable outside mainstream school-based education.

In National Objective Four, Progress File had a major impact in encouraging users to present themselves better. This has been particularly evident for written presentation through CVs, letters of application etc, but has also shown itself in oral presentation.

### **Conclusions**

The NRA had many benefits, including recognising achievements both in and out of school. However, teacher workload was seen as a significant problem and the NRA lacked credibility with employers. Its value was questioned because of the self-assessment approach by pupils.

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<sup>6</sup> Progress File: An Evaluation of the Demonstration Projects, John Hall and Janet Powney, The SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow, Research Report RR426, Chapter 2, June 2003.

Similarly, Progress File seemed to be successful in meeting several of its stated objectives. For example, it appears to have had a major impact in encouraging users to present themselves better. However, it did not achieve all of its aims: its impact on users' learning habits and behaviour was much more uneven and inconclusive, and there was very little evidence for it having any impact on users' attitudes to lifelong learning.

## 3.2 Investigating and documenting case studies

### Findings

#### **British Army Personal Development Record (PDR)**

The British Army introduced the PDR to all serving personnel between September 2000 and April 2001, and it is now standard issue to Army recruits at Phase 1 training. The PDR is designed to record all aspects of an individual's personal and professional development, providing specialist career information for individual trades and associated cap badges. The function of the PDR is to encourage personal development amongst Army personnel with a view to improving individual skills, widening employability — and therefore increasing retention. This appears to be a successful development (it is currently being evaluated) and might provide a useful model. More detail can be found in Appendix 1.

#### **The North Lanarkshire Diploma: Planning for the Future<sup>7</sup>**

North Lanarkshire's approach to raising achievement pre-dates *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, Edinburgh, 2004), but clearly provides a model that is worth further investigation. In general terms, it seems to be having an impact in the council's schools. There is reasonable, but anecdotal evidence, that its use helps the transition between primary and secondary — there is a primary version called Passport to Secondary Education — and from secondary into FE/HE or employment. A more formal evaluation of these transitions is required to gauge its real impact and potential.

The Diploma shows that students have been involved in a wide range of activities and have a number of achievements to be proud of besides academic qualifications. It gives an indication of the kind of people they have become as they make the transition into adulthood and the world beyond school. North Lanarkshire hopes that the Diploma will help young people to feel more confident about their achievements and qualities, and will give a more rounded picture of their interests, efforts and abilities to employers and to higher and further education bodies. The Diploma takes account of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Employability Template, and is endorsed with the CBI logo. More detail can be found in Appendix 1.

#### **The Renfrewshire Certificate of Achievement**

It is early days for this development, with only one school — Castlehead High School — involved in a pilot currently, but a great deal of thought and ingenuity is evident even at this early stage. The project partly grew out of collaboration

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<sup>7</sup> The information in this section was gathered from North Lanarkshire's website for: Raising Achievement for All at [www.northlan.gov.uk](http://www.northlan.gov.uk) and through discussion/interview with members of the Policy Unit at North Lanarkshire Council.

with Reid Kerr College and the Council's New Directions initiative<sup>8</sup>. This successful partnership led to the development of the Renfrewshire Certificate of Achievement which involves a profile for pupils linked directly into the four capacities of A Curriculum for Excellence. The council was keen to broaden the curriculum menu and offer a package that included appropriate SQA qualifications, but also other qualifications offered through ASDAN and City & Guilds that have real currency and value with end-users. A particular feature of the approach is that everything will be subject to some kind of verification with a drop-down menu leading to staff signatures.

## **Skills Passports**

A number of the UK's employer-driven Sector Skills Councils are now adopting variations of a Skills Passport. In 2003, PurplePassport Ltd developed a web-based, all-sector skills passport which provided a more efficient way for people to record their skills and qualifications that was more powerful and more versatile than the traditional CV. The result is a scheme that can be used by anyone and which enables people to maintain their personal skills and qualifications profile online and have their details confirmed as genuine by a network of registered verifiers.

The PurplePassport concept has now developed into a network of passport schemes which cover many different areas of employment (eg catering, retail, facilities) and more than eight million people. Because the various schemes are all part of the same PurplePassport network, if people change jobs, they can easily swap from one industry sector to another without having to renew their skills record. More detail is given in Appendix 1.

## **Europass**

Another initiative that is gaining currency is Europass. Europass was established by Decision No. 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single transparency framework for qualifications and competences.

It is worth looking at this development given its links to qualifications, qualifications frameworks and credit transfer across Europe. FE/HE institutions in Scotland are beginning to recognise and use Europass.

## **Conclusions**

All of the above examples of good practice are worth further examination before developing a model for a future means of recognising wider achievement.

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<sup>8</sup> Information in this section was gathered from websites and press releases for Renfrewshire Council and Reid Kerr College, [www.reidkerr.net/our\\_courses/new\\_directions](http://www.reidkerr.net/our_courses/new_directions) and [www.renfrewshire.gov.uk](http://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk).

### **3.3 Establishing what end-users would want from a future means of recognising wider achievement**

#### **Findings**

Responses to requests for interviews were disappointing, and only nine respondents agreed to take part (see Appendix 2 for more detail). The following findings, therefore, must be read with this in mind.

There was a consensus among the respondents about what wider achievement could include — evidence of positive attitudes, self-efficacy and soft skills; the ability to manage, lead and take the initiative; evidence of community involvement and positive establishment of relationships.

There was some interesting feedback from the respondents on how they currently decide between candidates who have similar qualifications. HE responses were mixed but did seem to suggest that qualifications and grades (tariffs) were critical, while evidence of wider achievement may be taken into account.

FE and employer respondents were much more likely to take softer skills and wider achievement into account, with one employer stating ‘it is my suspicion that a number of the lower qualified pupils have excellent wider achievements and may be more employable if they understood their importance and emphasised them to potential employers’.

The importance of optimism, confidence and an ability to express career goals were stressed by FE, employers and Careers Scotland. The importance of planning skills was emphasised by Careers Scotland.

Confidence and successful learning were pinpointed by all respondents.

The Association of Scotland’s Colleges (ASC) point out that whatever system is created needs to recognise that more and more students are studying part-time and for short periods. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, used to its full, would ensure that students could transport the credit they have gained for this learning into related additional studies. This process itself will improve the climate of acceptance for wider achievement.

A common theme was about the need for school leavers to understand the world of work, be prepared and able to work in teams, have a positive attitude and outlook, and be effective communicators. Raising career aspirations is also a vital part of recognising wider achievements.

Evidence of wider achievement could be used as an important part of the admissions procedure in FE (less so in HE but it would have a place).

Employers who responded see it as a way of supporting an application for employment; to differentiate between candidates; to identify future leaders; to

assess suitability for position and for ability to form positive relationships. It would also give the candidate an opportunity to be more prepared for the interview.

For Careers Scotland, it could be used as part of the Client Achievement Summary process with pre-NEET and post-NEET groups where the individual profiles him/herself and rates against employer needs. Careers Scotland could then arrange appropriate individual support linked to areas of need — eg personal presentation or timekeeping, and later check distance travelled. It could be used to improve enabling skills that would be helpful in employment — eg interview technique or decision-making skills.

There was a strong feeling amongst respondents that any new ‘Award’ should include both formative and summative assessments; it should focus on evidence of achievements (broadly defined) and identify next steps for the individual; it must not be driven by checklists; it needs to be ‘light in touch’ but it needs to be evidence-based and verified by a tutor; it should be preferably electronic in construction and simple and straightforward.

There is an impression that the more the document is owned by the student and is his/her reflections of achievement, the less value and currency it will have.

Quality assurance must be robust, credible and responsive at local and national level otherwise it will not be seen as having value or currency.

## **Conclusions**

The sample of respondents is very small and cannot be taken as representative. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that within that small sample there was a consensus about what wider achievement should include: evidence of positive attitudes, self-efficacy and soft skills; the ability to manage, lead and take the initiative; evidence of community involvement and positive establishment of relationships.

Amongst the small sample, there was a strong feeling that any new means of recognising wider achievement should include both formative and summative assessment; it should focus on evidence of achievements (broadly defined) and identify next steps for the individual; it must not be driven by checklists; it needs to be ‘light in touch’ but it needs to be evidence-based and verified by a tutor; it should be preferably electronic in construction and simple and straightforward.

There is an impression that the more the document is owned by the student and is his/her reflections of achievement, the less value and currency it will have.

## 3.4 General conclusions

Consideration of the findings of this report, particularly those on why previous developments of this kind have failed, points to the following general conclusions.

The purposes of any future development should be clarified, so that individuals, educational institutions and employers all share a common understanding of the way the process works. In particular, a decision needs to be made as to whether it is feasible and/or appropriate for one mechanism to be promoted as a record of lifelong achievement to be used across all kinds of organisations as both a tool for selection and a means of self-assessment and personal learning. If the answer to this is 'yes', the mechanism needs to be promoted much more effectively, particularly to employers, further and higher education, than either the NRA or Progress File.

Effective liaison mechanisms need to be developed between all involved. Schools, education authorities, further education, higher education, careers services, trainers, employers, individuals and even parents all have a role to play. The responsibilities of each of these stakeholders and their inter-relationships were very unclear within NRA and Progress File.

Everyone concerned needs to recognise that young people find it embarrassing, and therefore difficult, to write positively about themselves. The process must be designed to help them develop skills in self-assessment and self-presentation, and to improve their self-image. However, they will continue to need considerable support in this area at least until the process is sufficiently embedded in teaching and learning practice to bring about something of a culture change.

Ideally, the process should become a standard part of practice in assessment and recording in educational institutions.

## 4 Recommendations/next steps

Examining past models and case studies, and discussing ways of recognising wider achievement with potential end-users, cannot provide a clear way forward on their own. Evaluation of this kind of evidence can only be done in the context of ideas about the direction we want to go in. We therefore need to first clarify, and then answer, the following questions.

- ◆ What is the main purpose of the recognition (and therefore who is its main user): is the main focus on the process of personal development for the individual, or is the means of recognition intended to be used by employers and further and higher education in selection processes?
- ◆ What is being recognised and what form will the recognition take?
- ◆ What is the appropriate balance between practicality and robustness/reliability?

When these points have been clarified, models should then be developed and tested with all potential stakeholders, including: learners, teachers/lecturers, parents, education authorities, further education, higher education, careers services, trainers, and employers.

# Appendix 1: Further information on case studies

## British Army Personal Development Record (PDR)<sup>9</sup>

It is worth looking at the PDR as a model and how it operates because it is having a significant effect on Army personnel. Any system introduced for Scottish schools could link with this and provide an excellent starting point for those entering the armed services as a career. Likewise, as more Army personnel seek new careers in civilian life, the PDR will become more familiar to FE/HE and employers/training providers in the future.

The PDR is designed to:

- ◆ plan an individual's Army career
- ◆ plan the individual's personal development and lifelong learning
- ◆ keep a record of what was said to an individual during interviews
- ◆ review an individual's performance before he/she is reported upon
- ◆ store important personal qualifications and certificates
- ◆ start to make a really effective CV

The Army categorises the factors identified as influencing retention in terms of being either 'retention positive' or 'retention negative'. The Army anticipates that the use of the PDR will be a 'retention positive' factor, being of benefit to both the individual and the organisation, primarily by further developing best-practice career management by individuals as well as their managers. Through the proper use of the PDR, individuals will have an improved opportunity to influence and manage their Army careers, thereby supporting the 'psychological contract' between the soldier and the Army.

The PDR is a robust, cased box-file containing seven sections: Introduction, Personal Background, Military Record, Reports, Specialist Section, Assessment and Training and Development Plan. There is also a Users' Guide. It is designed to record all aspects of an individual's personal and professional development, providing specialist career information for individual trades and associated cap badges. Inherent in the content and layout of some sections are 'best practice' templates to guide individuals and their managers through the annual assessment process, particularly training and development planning.

It is clear from the data that the introduction and uptake of the PDR in the British Army has been remarkably successful.

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<sup>9</sup> See the British Army's website at [www.army.mod.uk](http://www.army.mod.uk)

# The North Lanarkshire Diploma: Planning for the Future<sup>10</sup>

## Rationale

For North Lanarkshire's directorate, staff and pupils, education is about much more than passing exams. By the time young people have completed their fourth year at secondary school, they have developed into unique individuals, with skills and experiences which go far beyond a list of academic credits. And while examination results are important, personal qualities are equally important.

Employers nowadays want to know that they have people they can rely on, who can think for themselves and show initiative, and who can work well as part of a team. A whole range of educational experiences, both inside and outside of school, will have helped students develop as active citizens, prepared to contribute in any way they can to the communities in which they live and work. North Lanarkshire wants to recognise and celebrate young people's achievements during their school career. They also hope that the process of working towards the Diploma will help students reflect on the kind of people they have become as a result of their own efforts and initiative.

## What is the North Lanarkshire Diploma?

The North Lanarkshire Diploma is a means of recognising the achievements of secondary students in a range of key areas including:

- ◆ values and citizenship
- ◆ enterprise
- ◆ environment
- ◆ community
- ◆ skills for the future
- ◆ health
- ◆ personal interests and activities

The Diploma takes account of Core Skills, involvement in extra-curricular activities, attendance and reliability. Students are also asked to write a personal statement reflecting on their achievements and on what they feel makes them special and unique individuals. The Diploma builds on the primary school experience of the North Lanarkshire Passport and is awarded to students on leaving secondary school.

The process covers the four capacities of A Curriculum for Excellence, either directly or indirectly.

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<sup>10</sup> The information in this section was gathered from North Lanarkshire's website for: Raising Achievement for All at [www.northlan.gov.uk](http://www.northlan.gov.uk) and through discussion/interview with members of the Policy Unit at North Lanarkshire Council.

### **Who is responsible for gathering the information required?**

Students themselves are responsible for deciding what should be included within a portfolio of evidence, year-on-year throughout secondary. In the final year of secondary they themselves will decide, in discussion with their parents and teachers, which achievements should be recorded via the portfolio.

The portfolio may comprise paper resources within a folder, notes on computer or CD-ROM, or a combination of such records.

### **What role do teachers play?**

Teachers in all subjects help students decide which pieces of work, contributions or achievements should be included in the portfolio of evidence. As part of this process, the Progress File is being replaced by a reduced and more focused set of activities for each year group. Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) teachers deliver certain topics within a structured programme of activities and also act as mentors to students in terms of advising on the gathering of suitable evidence.

### **What role do parents/carers play?**

Parents/carers are asked to discuss progress with the students — particularly the progress being made towards end-of-year summaries of evidence — and to help students decide on the final content of the portfolio prior to the award of the Diploma.

### **What form does the Diploma take?**

The Diploma takes the form of a certificate on which is recorded the areas chosen by the student as representing their best achievements under each of the categories. This is supported by the portfolio of evidence. In addition to the North Lanarkshire Council logos and the student's name and school, the Diploma also carries the badge of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). The Diploma is signed by the Head Teacher of the school and by the Director of Education.

## Skills Passports

Skills Passports are intended to provide the following benefits to individuals<sup>11</sup>:

- ◆ Owning a Skills Passport maximises an individual's chances of getting that really perfect job by making it easier for them to show their true capability
- ◆ It provides a verified record of personal achievement that is easy to share with both existing and prospective employers
- ◆ It helps motivate the individual to develop their skills by letting them set new goals and then helping to achieve them
- ◆ It enables an individual to highlight their practical ability and experience, as well as formal qualifications
- ◆ It provides an easy method of maintaining verifiable training records — no need to keep certificates or documents

Intended benefits for employers/training providers include:

- ◆ Skills Passports are intended to help provide protection against litigation (eg the Skills Passport proves that a member of staff is actually qualified to carry out a job or repair)
- ◆ They help reduce insurance premiums because they demonstrate best practice in keeping training records
- ◆ Providing your staff with Skills Passports underlines your commitment to training and demonstrates your willingness to invest in their development
- ◆ Skills Passports increase self-worth and employee confidence, which stabilises the work force and increases productivity
- ◆ Skills Passports help attract employees — and help retain employees
- ◆ Online Skills Passports provide an easy, cost-effective method of maintaining training records
- ◆ Better training records reduce the cost of unnecessary re-training

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<sup>11</sup> See the Purple Passport website at <http://pp.myskillsrecord.co.uk>

## Europass

The marketing materials for Europass suggest that whether you are planning to enrol in an education or training programme, looking for a job, or seeking experience abroad, it is important to be able to make your skills and competences clearly understood.

Europass is a new way of helping people to:

- ◆ make their skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe
- ◆ move anywhere in Europe

Europass consists of five documents: two documents (European Curriculum Vitae and European Language Passport) can be filled in by the individual; three other documents (the Europass Certificate Supplement, the Europass Diploma Supplement and the Europass Mobility) have to be filled in and issued by competent organisations.

Europass is supported by a network of National Europass Centres.

# Appendix 2: Establishing what end-users would want from a future means of recognising wider achievement

## Methodology

Using an electronic questionnaire, telephone and face-to-face interviews, responses were received and recorded from representatives of the FE and HE sectors, key organisations and employers.

There was a disappointing response to requests for interviews — particularly from the employers. Despite sending 15 questionnaires and trying follow-up calls, only two returned completed questionnaires. Given the findings of previous evaluations, for example NRA, this lack of employer response is not really that surprising. Nevertheless, employer support is vital for the future so a much more focused approach is needed when this work is taken to the next stage.

## Respondents

Responses were gathered from individuals in the following organisations.

Higher education sector:

- ◆ Department of Educational Studies, Glasgow University
- ◆ QAA Scotland/Universities Scotland
- ◆ Open Campus Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University

Further education sector:

- ◆ Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC) (including the views of several key Principals from Scottish FE Colleges)
- ◆ Scottish Further Education Unit (Scotland's Colleges)

Employment sector:

- ◆ 10BaseCom Ltd
- ◆ The Learning Game
- ◆ Sector Skills Development Agency
- ◆ Careers Scotland

## Responses

### **Q1 What do you understand by the term ‘wider achievement’?**

There was general consensus across all the respondents that ‘wider achievement’ meant going beyond attainment and certificated qualifications.

Wider achievement would include evidence of positive attitudes, self-efficacy and soft skills. The ability to manage, lead and take the initiative; evidence of community involvement and positive establishment of relationships; evidence of good time management and involvement in extra-curricular activities would be included.

It was suggested that we need to take a more holistic look at people’s skills and attributes; their ability to plan, particularly career planning and their skills to learn; their core skills, including study skills are vital. Generally the Core Skills agenda is about attainment. We need it to be more about achievement.

It was felt that we should take account of other qualifications not considered mainstream and perhaps not as yet credit rated by SCQF and completed programmes of informal learning attested by community tutors and others.

### **Q2 What do you currently do to distinguish between equally well-qualified applicants? Is there anything which would help in this process?**

Respondents felt that admissions officers in HE in particular are aware that ‘equally well-qualified’ is not as simple to define as it seems. In general they tend to look at tariffs and points from mainstream qualifications and ignore wider achievements — unless these can be related to areas of study in HE.

Generally FE tries to place students according to their needs and abilities and they take into account both formal and informal learning. There are also some excellent ‘supported selection’ models across the sector — particularly from colleges to the HE sector, but also in Glasgow on a community college to metropolitan college basis.

Some in FE would take into account the range of so-called soft skills — willingness to learn, communication skills, people skills — awareness of others and self, confidence, ability to reflect — someone who demonstrates robustness in their learning. Employers certainly focus on these softer skills and are keen on attitudinal style and approach.

A very important point echoed by employers and admissions officers (in FE) is that the idea of highlighting wider achievements is completely alien to many younger potential recruits. They seem to be encouraged to emphasise curricular achievements far more than wider achievements. It therefore becomes the task of potential employers/college tutors to try to extract this information from the candidate.

One employer who had been working with schools through DtS over the past couple of years said, ‘it is my suspicion that a number of the lower qualified pupils have excellent wider achievements and may be more employable if they understood their importance and emphasised them to potential employers’.

Paper qualifications may at best get a young person/adult to an interview but there is frequently a requirement for performance and presentation at interview stage. It is then that the skills like empathetic skills, focus on feeling, presentation skills, self-projection, vocabulary, and analytical skills come into play.

Careers Scotland pinpoints those who have career goals or those who seem to be able to make decisions. Those with career goals irrespective of qualifications seem to be more optimistic and have the ability to set other goals — vital skills. It is important to be able to articulate what you want out of life and learning.

**Q3 What would you like to see covered in any future means of recognising wider achievement? What would you most value, eg from the four capacities in A Curriculum for Excellence — successful learning, confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors?**

For HE, successful learning should be the cornerstone, and, in the wider sense, being able to equip individuals with the capacity to adapt and respond flexibly to the demands and pace of change in the fields of both learning and work. HE needs confident individuals, able to work on their own initiative and able to demonstrate an ability to be a successful learner.

One employer echoed the view that confidence is paramount:

*A confident employee is significantly more likely to be an effective contributor to the organisation they join. An employee who is confident and contributing strives for more and better achievements. With guidance, they learn that education is the key to progression. In learning this, they want to further their education and become better and more willing learners. An employee who is confident, contributing, successful and developing through education is highly likely to be or become a responsible citizen.*

An individual’s ability to be successful must feature an outward-looking attitude in order to broaden horizons and create a positive community. The ability to integrate successfully and positively in society should be for all young people, it should be a priority to raise young people’s expectations of life. Therefore the four capacities are of equal importance.

The ASC view is that it will be essential to create the simplest, least resource-intensive process of recognising wider achievement. If this is not the case, as in the initiative to establish a process of Accrediting Prior Learning at the time of Higher Still, the system will not be used. They go on to point out that whatever system is created needs to recognise that more and more students are studying part-time and for short periods. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, used to its full, would ensure that students could transport the credit

they have gained for this learning into related additional studies. This process itself will improve the climate of acceptance for wider achievement.

A very common theme which crosses all sectors is about the need for school leavers to understand the world of work, to be prepared and able to work in teams, to have a positive attitude and outlook and to be effective communicators. Raising career aspirations is also a vital part of recognising wider achievements.

#### **Q4 How would you use a future means of recognising wider achievement?**

Within HE, as the basis of a formative discussion about the future growth of an individual...and how this might be built into the employability agenda in higher education.

QAA Scotland and Universities Scotland, as the higher education partners in the development and implementation of the SCQF, are committed to the further extension of the applications of the SCQF (eg in the recognition of prior informal learning and continuing professional development) and would support the recognition of wider achievement as part of the ongoing development of the framework.

It could be used to put the right kinds of support in place for people entering HE.

For FE, it would be used as an important part of the admissions procedure.

Employers see it as a way of supporting an application for employment; to differentiate between candidates; to identify future leaders; to assess suitability for position and ability to form positive relationships. It would give the candidate an opportunity to be more prepared for the interview.

For Careers Scotland, it could be used as part of the Client Achievement Summary process with pre-NEET and post-NEET groups, where the individual profiles him/herself and rates against employer needs. Careers Scotland could then arrange appropriate individual support linked to areas of need, eg personal presentation, timekeeping, etc and later check distance travelled. It could be used to improve enabling skills, eg in terms of improving interview technique or decision-making, which would be helpful in employment.

#### **Q5 What format/presentation would help to make any future means of recognising wider achievement more useful to you?**

There was consensus that it should have several elements, for example strengths and areas for development; it should be both formative and summative; it should focus on evidence of achievements broadly defined and identify next steps for the individual.

It must not be driven by checklists. It needs to be 'light in touch'. It needs to be evidence-based and verified by a tutor. It should be preferably electronic in construction and simple and straightforward.

There is some agreement on ownership of the task being with the student but we must recognise that a significant proportion of the ‘customers’ of this document will potentially be those individuals who do not naturally work in a structured or traditional learning environment. Some explanation of purpose and content is required.

Several respondents want to see parts of the document independent of the student, ie a tutor-led section, linked to the quality assurance of the document. There is an impression that the more the document is owned by the student and is his/her reflections of achievement, the less value and currency it will have.

The format needs to be evidence based. The assessment for recognition needs to be both summative and formative, with one balancing the other. ‘Softer’ skills acquired should be supported by relevant evidence of tasks achieved.

If it could be incorporated electronically into the 14–19 Client database, which has a complete record of some 330,000 people, it would give a seamless system for that group from schools to Careers Scotland. An e-portfolio approach started in school which stays with individuals through school and into employment — and helps with the transition from school to work or FE/HE — would be really useful.

**Q6 What kind of quality assurance would you want to see to ensure that any future means of recognising wider achievement has value/currency/is taken seriously?**

Quality assurance (QA) must be linked closely to purpose and end-user needs.

QA must continue to be robust, credible and responsive at local and national level while taking account of the needs of recognising wider achievement; otherwise it will not be seen as having value or currency.

It is important that there should be a recognised national format which may be related to international/global trends for certain skill sets. Standards should be recognised as aids to entering further and higher education and the workplace both nationally and internationally. It must not be perceived as an insular Scottish mark as our young people will be competing globally for employment.

There is, of course, an opposing view to this, or at the very least a plea to be careful with QA procedures that are too robust. The learner must be at the centre of this process but the setting of standards may reduce the perceived validity of aspects of learning — if the learner records wider achievement not valued by the institution or validating body. This may narrow the options and devalue/dismiss perfectly legitimate and stretching personal experiences. SFEU (Scotland’s Colleges) reiterated the view expressed by some educationalists that in assessing, you lose the essence of what you are trying to achieve and for some learners, particularly those who are non-advanced, disengaging, or low in confidence, this could be a turn-off — losing the potential to motivate.