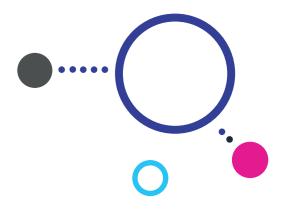
Insight #SQAfutures









Welcome

"SQA's qualifications and assessments are part of the life experience of all young people in Scotland. This life experience is changing in ways that were difficult to predict only a few years ago, and will continue to change with consequences that we cannot yet foresee.

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Young people have a very significant stake in how qualifications and assessment need to change to reflect our future society and economy. For this reason we asked Young Scot to capture the views of young people on the future of assessment. The members of the #SQAfutures Panel have enthusiastically risen to this challenge.

We are delighted with the quality of the insights the young people have generated and look forward to considering what practical steps we can take in response and how we engage with young people on a more systematic basis in future."

Dr Janet Brown, SQA Chief Executive

"At Young Scot we know that young people are deeply invested in the future of Scotland and how education can open up opportunities for young people across the country. The Young Scot #SQAfutures Panel have all experienced the positives and negatives of assessment and are committed to improving the way it works to benefit as many young people as possible. They know that assessment can be a gateway to a better life and a better future as long as it is inclusive and serving the needs of young people as well as employers and universities. This report has provided some excellent guidance on how to work towards this aim together."

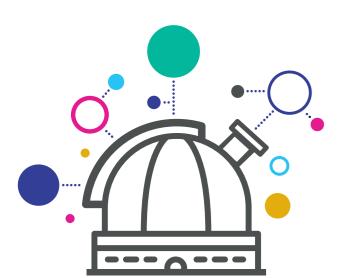
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Louise Macdonald, Young Scot Chief Executive

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Project background



In early 2017 SQA set out to develop '....a vision of the ways in which, over the medium to long term (5 years plus), SQA will develop and make use of new and innovative approaches to assessment in support of the objectives of the Business Change Programme and SQA's wider corporate objectives.'

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The key question this vision sets out to answer is:

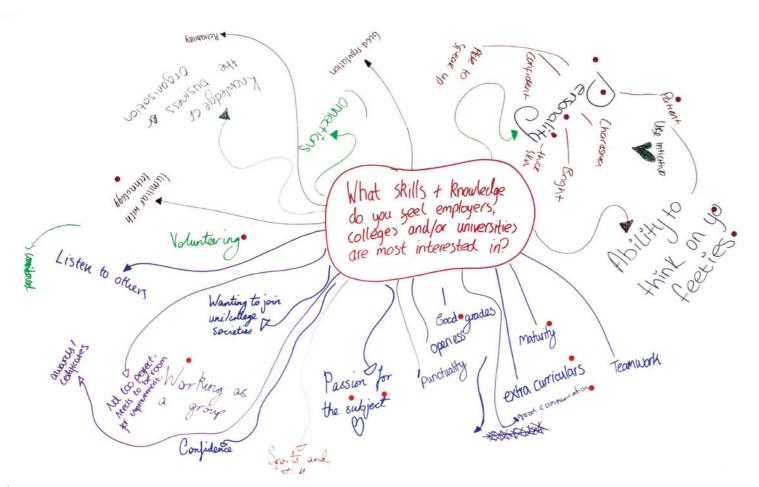
What are the most appropriate ways and contexts for learners to demonstrate their competence in a way that provides SQA with the information it needs to certificate their ability?'

From the start SQA recognised the importance of hearing the voice of young people on this question. Most of SQA's qualifications and assessments are taken by young people giving them a unique perspective. Thanks in particular to mobile digital technologies, the world young people inhabit is also increasingly and significantly different in major respects from that experienced by previous generations. This means that they have a distinctive contribution to make to our thinking about the future of assessment.

SQA also recognised that there is a skill in engaging and working with young people in a way that allows them to work together to articulate and share their experiences, views and insights.

It was for this reason that SQA invited Young Scot to undertake the work that has led to this report: to engage with young people to enable them to present their views in a way that allows SQA to take them into account as it develops its vision.

As we review the feedback contained in this report and the issues the young people have raised, we will be considering what action SQA can take in response in the short-, medium- and long term. We will also be reflecting on how we can engage more systematically with young people in Scotland in future.

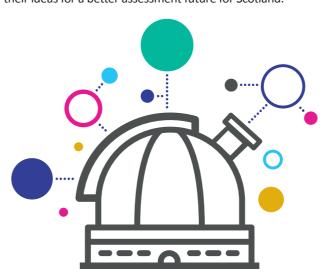


Young Scot Vision Panel



A Vision Panel of nine young people from around Scotland came together to work through Young Scot's co-design process to explore the future of assessment in Scotland.

The Panel branded the project #SQAfutures and set to investigate assessment and new technologies, reflecting on their experiences and those of their peers to find the key issues facing young people in assessment, and putting forward their ideas for a better assessment future for Scotland.



Outcomes for young people

- >> Young people have increased opportunity to shape and influence the future of assessment
- >>> Young people have increased access to information and opportunities, so they can better understand the delivery of assessments and qualifications
- Young people have opportunities to develop knowledge, understanding and learn from the organisations who are working to deliver assessments and qualifications

Summary



Following the Young Scot's co-design process, the #SQAfutures Vision Panel explored and reflected on their own experiences and stories, and those of their peers, around the positives and negatives of assessment in Scotland. They helped identify which barriers exist for young people having a good assessment experience, making recommendations on what needs to change.

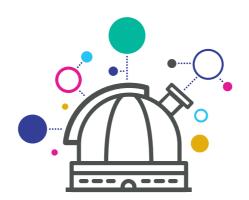
The Panel developed a series of Actions for Change to present to SQA and fellow young people at an Ideas Gathering event. The Actions for Change were grouped under four thematic areas:

- **Essays**
- >> Continuous Assessment
- >> Life Skills
- >> Inclusivity and Accessibility



Essays

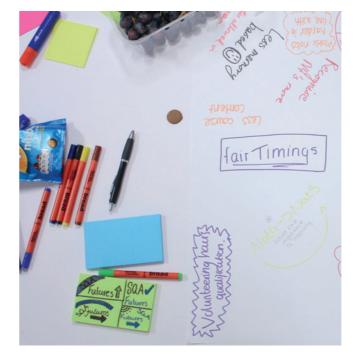
- >>> Exams should be seen as the start of a journey rather than the end. This would be more similar to the experiences of people in the workplace where assessment is focussed on how individuals can learn from that point forward.
- >> Assessment should be inclusive of different learner abilities, preferences and styles. This would allow young people to build on their strengths but would require flexibility and less structure in the existing framework.
- >> More time should be allocated in exams so that people don't have to rush and can work at their own speed.



Continuous Assessment

- >> Using more assessment techniques over longer time periods, such as creating a portfolio of work, provides opportunities for more students to take part and do well.
- **>>** Giving young people multiple opportunities to be assessed on a topic reduces the likelihood of one bad day in an exam hall having such a large impact.
- >> Scotland could look to other education systems around the world where you can gain qualification points in small increments across multiple subjects as a potential method for assessing cross-curricular skills.





Life Skills

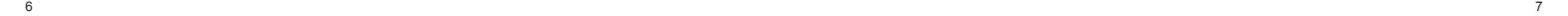
- >> Assessment methods should use activities and tasks more representative of those that would be asked of an employee in a workplace, to support the development of practical skills.
- >> Life skills should be taught in schools, from practical lessons on stress management, building a CV or interview practice, learning about taxation, credit cards, and healthy eating, to more socio-emotional skills such as the ability to think on your feet, communicate well, and speak up for yourself.
- >> Extra-curricular activities should be better recognised by employers, universities, and other opportunity providers, as equally important to academic qualifications.



Inclusivity and Accessibility

- >>> Everyone should have the opportunity to type exams which will enable those who struggle with poor handwriting, time management, anxiety or stress to do better.
- >> SQA should increase the number of resources that people can access online, with equal resources available for subjects with lower uptake, and these resources should be interactive, for example past papers that can be typed directly on to, or games that can assess current knowledge levels and support progress.
- >> Assessment methods should suit people of all abilities and those with additional support needs should not be segregated from the rest of the group.





Introduction from the Panel



The #SQAfutures project was important so that we could make improvements to assessment for the students who come after us.

Achieving a perfect experience for all is unlikely to happen as there is the constant challenge of standardising assessment despite the variety of ways and environments in which students learn - what is perfect for one person is someone else's worst nightmare. However, we remain certain that there is always an opportunity for inclusive improvement.



Becky sits on the Education and Lifelong Learning Subject Committee in her capacity as MSYP for Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse. She is currently sitting her Higher exams. – "This was an important project to me as I often feel as if young people's views are neglected when it comes to making important decisions about exams. I got involved as I had many ideas about the future of exams and thought that #SQAfutures was an ideal way to express these."

Becky, 16, Larkhall





Sarah is in S6 studying Advanced Higher English and Highers in Spanish, Politics and Religious, Moral, and Philosophical Studies. that a lot of young people I know shared a common view that things had to be sorted in assessment, and felt like it was the perfect opportunity to put these views forward where change could actually be made!'

Sarah, 17, Shotts

We can only tell one part of the story, that of the students, though it is a part that has, in the past, not really been heard enough.

We want the report to be taken seriously and not to be just tucked up on a shelf and left, and hope that the SQA considers the recommendations in the report with an open mind, understands out messages, and puts our ideas in practice to create concrete change.



Catherine, 18, Glasgow



Liam is currently studying an NC Working with Communities at college and has experience of attending a class D secure school, a residential school and a behavioural school. – "I feel this was an important project to be able to convey young people's views about assessments. I got involved because I have a passion for education and seen this as a great opportunity to have my say about the future of Scotland's assessments." Liam, 18, Falkirk







Caitlin is currently studying for her Highers and is in fifth year. - "I wanted to be involved in this project as the prospect of being able to influence and develop the way SQA courses and examinations are conducted sounded fantastic."

Caitlin, 16 Kirkcaldy





Nicole is in S5 and is studying for her Higher exams. – "I wanted to help make the exam process more fair for everyone and improve everyone's chances at success." Nicole, 16, Kirkcaldy





Lucy is currently studying Highers in Latin, Classical Studies, and Computing Science. -"Inclusivity was one of the main reasons I got involved; as someone who uses a word processor for some exams and studies an unusual blend of SQA subjects (Latin, Classical Studies, and Computing Science), I want all students to receive the level of encouragement and support I have had." Lucy, 18, Edinburgh



Katie is currently taking four Highers in English, French, History and Latin. – "I joined the panel because as a future teacher, I want my students to have a fairer and hopefully less stressful

> exam experience." Katie, 16, Kirkcaldy





"I chose to get involved in the #SQAfutures project as I am passionate about, and understand the importance of, our educational system and the vital role it plays in improving the lives of Scotland's young people. I chose to get involved in this project to contribute towards that effort and ensure young people's voices were being heard on key

decisions affecting them."

Maddie, 21, Dunfermline

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Kick-off Event Explore Create August 2017 September 2017 November 2017 Reflect & **Ideas Gathering Panel** March 2018 **Presentation** Recommend December 2017 November 2017

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Exploration workshops

The #SQAfutures Vision Panel started on the co-design process by exploring their own knowledge and stories, the Panel looked at the positives and negatives of assessment, what needed to change with the way that young people are assessed in Scotland, and what barriers exist for young people in having a good assessment experience.

SQA was pleased to present the Panel with an introduction to the 'fourth industrial revolution' and ideas about where work, education and society could be going in the next 30 years. The Panel discussed what skills would be most useful in the future, and how these skills might be demonstrated by young people when seeking opportunities.

The Panel reflected on what they had done so far and developed a range of Actions for Change to present to SQA and fellow young people at an Ideas Gathering event.

Ideas gathering

The #SQAfutures Ideas Gathering took place on the 28th March 2018 and was attended by Panel members, senior SQA staff, and Year of Young People Ambassadors who were interested in contributing to the discussion on the future of assessment. The Panel presented their Actions for Change to the assembled attendees and led discussions of their ideas, inviting feedback and the collaborative creation of new ideas from guests.

The Ideas Gathering presented an opportunity for the panel to talk through their ideas with SQA and other young people, and for SQA to hear directly from the young people who are the end-users of their work.

"It was good to be able to be heard in issues that are very relevant and prominent to young people. We don't seem to normally get heard in these discussions, and this needs to change beyond today."

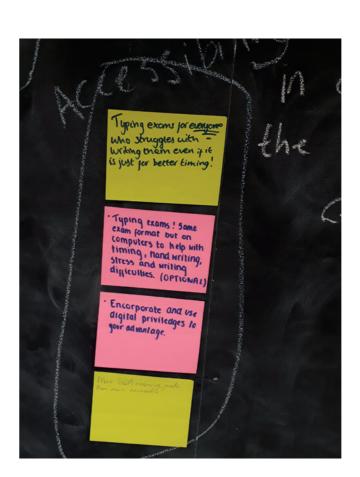
"New problems were certainly raised but so were new solutions, showing how useful collaboration between students and industry members is for innovation."

Developing the Actions for Change

Aspirations for the Future of Assessment in Scotland

Attendees at the Ideas Gathering were asked, towards the end of the event, to try and agree on a shared vision for the future of assessment in Scotland. There were multiple responses to this question, but all of them reflected two distinct ideas about the future of assessment.

- 1. Assessment should be fair, and inclusive a "level playing field" for all, but to achieve this assessment needs to be personalised, with a broad variety of assessment methods that young people can choose from over the course of a school year. We need to strive for equity, not equality.
- 2. Assessment should be about "opening up choices in life", providing young people with the opportunity to "showcase the best of [themselves]", whatever their interests and skills. Assessment should give opportunities for everyone to excel in some way.



Exploration and emerging themes

The Panel covered a wide range of topics and ideas during their research and the following three themes emerged from discussions:

Assessment for employment

Testing can help people identify their skills and abilities and challenge themselves, and is vital for certain professions and an important indicator for employers. However, subject specific knowledge and skills can easily become less useful as a person moves through different workplaces non-academic skills such as communication and team work are also valued by employers and developing such skills can set a young person up for success throughout their career.

Equity in assessment

The Panel agreed that the continuing commitment to unbiased marking standards and the reliability of the assessment process to be fair for everyone were vital principles to uphold. However, these principles of equality are not the same as equity, where young people receive appropriate support according to their needs and preferences.

Methods for learning and assessment

The final theme discussed by the Panel was how assessment methods need critical reflection, especially now that technology can and will have an impact on the future of assessment. Exams were identified as stress and pressure to achieve and be their best.

"This was a great event to be able to have many professionals from the SQA listen to what we had to say and take action on it."

Actions for Change

- >> Assessment for employment <
- >>> Equity in assessment
- >> Methods for learning and assessment <a>



Essays

Employment Equity Method





Essay writing in timed conditions forms a large part of academic assessment, but it may not be fit for purpose and can haves negative consequences for young people who are not suited to this form of assessment.

Area for Change

Action for Change

Results are seen as the end of the story, rather than a chance to learn and grow. This perspective creates too much pressure for students and teachers, resulting in high levels of stress.



• Using words like 'failure' creates the wrong mindset for assessment. Instead, candidates should be able to re-sit assessments and learn from their mistakes. This approach would enable teachers to identify where more support is needed

- Assessment should be handled in a more positive manner, with weakness seen as a chance to learn and promote different strengths.
- Exams should be seen as the start of a journey rather than the end. This would be more similar to the experiences of people in the workplace where assessment is focussed on how individuals can learn from that point forward.

Essay writing can be a useful skill but is not the most appropriate assessment method for all subjects. Essays may not be successfully capturing a person's written communication ability, and having so many of them may disproportionately disadvantage candidates who are not good at communicating this way.

- Assessment should be varied and interactive, with assessment used as a springboard for further exploration and learning.
- Technology has opened up new opportunities for learning and assessment where different skills can be measured in one task, and teachers can set interactive and challenging tasks for their students. Digital data collection could help reduce the burden of marking.
- Assessment could be broken down into smaller more manageable chunks, to give opportunities for reflection and self-development.
- The relative difficulty of assessments (from year-to-year and between grades) should be better monitored.
- Assessment should be inclusive of different learner abilities, preferences and styles. This would allow young people to build on their strengths but would require flexibility and less structure in the existing framework.
- Find alternative and creative ways to evidence knowledge other than essay writing.

The timing allocated to complete exams can often be too short for what is being asked of candidates and can be a source of additional stress, with restrictive timings increasing the pressure on candidates and preventing young people from producing their best work. Short exam timings can be more of a test of how fast you can write than how well you can formulate • Exams should have flexible timing arrangements. an argument, and although that essays may sometimes serve a useful purpose, exam conditions do not necessarily allow young people to demonstrate the skills that examiners are looking for.

- More time should be allocated in exams so that people don't have to rush and can work at their own speed.
- Exam timings should be clearly related to marking criteria.
- Assessment should be reviewed annually with input from students to ensure that mistakes are learned from.



Area for Change

Action for Change

Marking criteria in essay-based assessments is too often aimed at examiners, not learners. This means that candidates can struggle to identify what examiners are looking for, or how marks are allocated. This is particularly true when exams of different lengths are worth similar points.

 More online support around timings and marking should be provided for candidates

• Try and eliminate the vagueness and ambiguity of teacher assistance criteria.



Continuous Assessment







Continuous assessment gives young people the opportunity to showcase their skills in a number of ways and can support assessment for growth. Going into an exam knowing that coursework has already given you a passing grade can reduce the pressure and stress of the exam day.

Area for Change

Traditional assessment techniques do not allow for flexibility and person-centredness, and too much weight is given to one-off assessments, which often results in teaching to the test.

Action for Change

- Using more assessment techniques over longer time periods, such as creating a portfolio of work, provides opportunities for more students to take part and do well.
- Learning should incorporate practical skills, digital technology, and interactive tools, giving a wider range of people the opportunity to showcase their talents and take advantage of their aptitudes.
- Young people should be involved in co-designing assessment to have their say about what should be assessed and how this is done.
- Assessment systems should be tailored to individual candidates.
- Give young people choice on whether to undertake portfolio or exam-based assessment, not teachers.
- Encourage young people to demonstrate their creativity and personal interests through portfolio work, rather than choosing an assessment topic for them.
- There should be more clarity, transparency or explanation from teachers about why assessment is delivered the way it is and what the standards and expectations of learners are.
- A broader range of data and evidence should be used in assessment.
- The different weighting applied to continuous assessment and exams should be re-examined so that less weight is given to exams.
- Young people should be encouraged to pursue different pathways and the great diversity of students should be catered for, with assessment adapting to individual needs and preferences rather than being a one-size-fits-all system.





Area for Change

Exams are high-stakes events for candidates, with performance potentially having a large impact on final grades. This contributes to stress and poor mental health in young people as one bad day could disproportionately affect their future. The silence and atmosphere of the exam hall can add an extra layer of anxiety or stress for some candidates, affecting their ability to perform well.

Action for Change

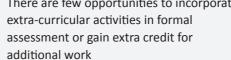
- Multiple assessments should be spread over the year and averaged. If continuous assessment and exams are both used, candidates should be
- aware of their marks from continuous assessment before entering the exam hall, as knowing that they had a passing grade would relieve some of the pressure.
- Giving young people multiple opportunities to be assessed on a topic reduces the likelihood of one bad day in an exam hall having such a large impact.
- Assessment situations should be tailored to individuals, allowing young people to choose their exam format and preferred environment so that they can perform at their best.

Exams that are written from memory do not necessarily test the skills they are intended to test, often being much more a test of memory recall or the state of knowledge on one specific day. Such an approach changes the focus of teaching and learning to be less about comprehension or the development of a skill, for example a student can achieve a high grade in a French exam but still leave school unable to speak it well. This challenges the idea that exams deserve the weight they are given.

- Portfolios in more subjects would give markers the opportunity to see a range of someone's work samples.
- Progress and knowledge should be tracked throughout the year, with a wide variety of learning and assessment methods being used to create a fully-rounded picture of a candidate's abilities.
- Candidates should have more freedom to choose topics to be assessed on, or be able to sit open book exams, to encourage in-depth and meaningful learning.
- Exam subjects should require critical thinking as opposed to simple recall of facts.

extra-curricular activities in formal assessment or gain extra credit for

- There are few opportunities to incorporate Extra-curricular activities could contribute to assessment in some subjects.
 - Extra-curricular activities should be assessed continuously to supplement academic skills.
 - More creativity is needed when thinking about methods of assessment and in what ways knowledge could be demonstrated, for example introducing multiple methods to assess skills.
 - Capturing extra-curricular activities could be a way to tackle the attainment gap.
 - Different subject areas need to be more interconnected young people are not just a 'science person' or just a 'languages person'. The curriculum and exams should reflect this, and skills should be developed across subject areas.
 - Scotland could take inspiration from other education systems around the world, such as the extra credits system in the United States, to create a system where you can gain qualification points in small increments across multiple subjects as a potential method for assessing cross-curricular skills.





Life Skills







There should be more opportunities to showcase practical skills in education and work experience should count towards qualifications in relevant fields. Non-academic life skills should be taught, and subjects adapted to make the content more relevant to real life. There should be a greater emphasis on volunteering, without turning this into a formal qualification.

Area for Change

Traditional assessment is not reflective of postschool working life and does not necessarily tell potential employers anything useful about a person. Assessment needs to reflect changes in society and interdisciplinary portfolio work would better prepare people for entering work.

Action for Change

- Learning should be taken 'out of the classroom', either in a digital sense or in real-life, so that knowledge and understanding can be applied to live scenarios.
- Assessment methods should use activities and tasks more representative of those that would be asked of an employee in a workplace, to support the development of practical skills.
- Young people should work with employers and educational bodies to routinely review and develop assessments.
- Young people should be supported to explore career ideas matched to their interests and skills, with regular opportunities to engage in work experience, and support to choose appropriate subjects for their aspirations.
- Employers should be brought into schools on a regular basis to promote opportunities for work experience and take part in career discussions.

Not everyone is academic and focussing on this aspect of learning side-lines the skills of many people. Non-academic skills can be more valuable for employers in a modern workplace, and while exams can test skills such as working within time constrains and condensing points down, there should be a greater focus on digital and life skills, including socio-emotional skills.

- Life skills should be taught in schools, from practical lessons on stress management, building a CV or interview practice, learning about taxation, credit cards, and healthy eating, to more socio-emotional skills such as the ability to think on your feet, communicate well, and speak up for yourself.
- It would be beneficial for some young people to be recognised for the effort they put into work. This would mean that individuals who are not as academic can still benefit from assessment.
- There should be a mandatory Personal and Social Education (PSE) curriculum where these skills are taught, with young people involved in co-creating the curriculum.
- Practical skills should be taught from primary school.
- Life skills, especially socio-emotional skills, should not be assessed using traditional techniques which risk turning them into a tick-box exercise and fail to account for individual differences in communication style, self-esteem, or social anxiety.
- If a life skills subject was assessed, it should not be graded or a pass/fail qualification as a failing grade at interview techniques, for example, could jeopardise a student's ability to get a job.

Area for Change

It is hard to validate learning that takes place outside of school despite the skills developed through these activities being valuable to potential employers or other opportunity providers.

Action for Change

- SQA quality assured awards like the Youth Achievement Awards and Dynamic Youth Awards should be delivered alongside traditional subjects and become much more mainstream. Awareness of these awards needs to be raised, with young people's involved in promotion.
 - Extra-curricular activities should be better recognised by employers, universities, and other opportunity providers, as equally important to academic qualifications.
 - Young people should be able to present a well-rounded portrait of themselves as an individual to potential employers and universities, reflecting their interests, hobbies, aspirations, and volunteering activity.
 - More value needs to be attached to the skills developed through practical volunteering experience and other activities.
 - Life skills should be embedded throughout core subject areas.
 - Schools could partner with youth groups to co-deliver a skills education programme.
 - A skills programme could be integrated to run alongside or in partnership with work experience opportunities.





Inclusivity & Accessibility





Technology should be used to improve and benefit all students, not just a few, and exams should be accessible and inclusive for everyone. Resources should be created with learners in mind, not just markers and teachers

Area for Change

Digital technology in education benefits some people more than others and is not being utilised to its fullest extent. Typing skills are likely more valuable in the modern workplace than good handwriting but this is not reflected in assessment.

Action for Change

- Everyone should have the opportunity to type exams which will enable those who struggle with poor handwriting, time management, anxiety or stress to do better.
- Technology needs to be implemented in a smart way, not just as a gimmick, and Local Authorities and schools could learn from young people and universities about how learning technology is already being used.
- Digital tools should be available to anyone who would prefer to use them rather than just those with a perceived 'good' reason.
- All young people need to have the same technology available and the digital skills to use it effectively.
- A benchmarking process needs to be introduced so that schools have a bar to measure their technology provision against. This could be done in partnership with other organisations to ensure provision is across the board.
- Schools need to use technology to connect schools and learners, which could be especially valuable for young people who cannot attend school regularly and otherwise miss out on a large proportion of school work.
- Interactive digital resources should be incorporated more fully into teaching and assessment.

Online resources to support revision and independent study are often too poor or too few to be much use

- It would be useful to increase SQA's online resources for subject with lower uptake so that all subjects have a similar level of content.
- Online resources for learners would benefit from being interactive, for example past papers that could be typed directly onto, or games that can assess current knowledge and support progress.
- Information on the SQA website could have more content aimed at learners themselves, and young people should be involved in developing such resources.
- The information and resources available to learners should be communicate to them directly.
- Young people have a lot to contribute to the conversation around using more digital technology in assessments and it would be beneficial to include them in this on a regular basis.

People with additional support needs are often separated from the rest of the group, or a group is split by ability in formal examinations, which can make people feel stigmatised.

- Assessment methods should be designed to suit people of all abilities without the need for adjustment for those candidates with additional needs, which would also mean that all candidates can sit together.
- If an assessment method is not giving everyone an equal chance to achieve, then it should be changed.

Conclusion

Throughout the #SQAfutures project, young people demonstrated a clear belief that the future of assessment in Scotland should be inclusive.

This inclusivity takes many forms, such as giving more young people access to digital technology in exams, and more choice in how they want to be assessed.

The Panel articulated the need for education to adapt to reflect the demands of the modern workplace and the careers that young people will embark upon. They looked at what skills will best equip young people to make the most of their opportunities and whether assessment methods were able to capture these skills.

The Panel were enthusiastic about the inclusion of young people in future work with SQA as there is great benefit and potential in young people being part of the continued conversation around assessment.



We would like to see SQA show consideration for our ideas but not take them at face value either.

This report may signal the end of a project, but it does not signal the end of discussion, debate, or decision-making on the future of assessment.

Just as we collaborated with SQA on #SQAfutures, so too could SQA use our report in conjunction with its other findings and collaborate with other stakeholders to promote real, meaningful changes in the examination process.

We ask that the SQA considers the recommendations in the report and how to put our ideas into practice.

The future of SQA assessment should be one which is accessible, exciting, and inclusive - everything that the #SQAfutures project symbolises, yet on a national scale.





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