SQA's response to Young Scot's #SQAfutures report

Introduction

The background to SQA's work with Young Scot to gather young people's views of the future of assessment is set out in the introduction to the report:

'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.'

'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.'

Importantly the report reflects the views of the panel members as they were expressed: SQA has not exercised any editorial control or veto over the content. Some of the issues raised in the report ask fundamental questions about the nature of assessment and the way it currently operates. Others shine a light on the roles of different actors in the educational ecosystem in Scotland. All of them ask us to think hard about why the current system is as it is, and how it could or should be different in future to continue to meet the needs of young people, the economy, and society, as effectively as possible.

SQA's action plan in response to the report

The real test of the value of the report is what changes it can help to bring about. With this in mind, SQA has made a commitment to taking forward actions identified in the report in three areas. We will:

1. Continue to engage with young people on specific areas of work identified in the report
2. Co-design a new approach to assessing competence in the skills highlighted in the report, particularly in the area of life skills
3. Develop an overarching commitment and approach to engaging with young people which recognises them as a key stakeholder group

The following sections explain in more detail what these actions will entail.

1. Continuing to engage with young people on specific areas of work identified in the report

SQA's highest profile engagement with young people to date has been in our role as a corporate parent. We also have some experience of engaging with young people to inform aspects of our work, including development of website usability and content, mobile apps and PaperPlus, where trials have been undertaken with groups of school and college learners.

This new action will build on this work to date and will include addressing the following actions raised in the report:

'Young people should work with employers and educational bodies to routinely review and develop assessments.' (p.16)

SQA response: We will investigate how to involve young people alongside other stakeholders in Qualification Development Teams to inform the design of qualifications and assessments.

Target date: February 2019

'Everyone should have the opportunity to type exams.' (p.18)

SQA response: We will increase the involvement of young people in informing the development of our PaperPlus service, which is aimed at allowing all young people to capture exam responses digitally.

Target date: December 2018

'The information and resources available to young people should communicate to them directly.' (p.18)

SQA response: We will increase the involvement of young people in helping us to determine what information and resources SQA could and should provide, and in ensuring that the content is written and delivered in ways that engage young people.

Target date: March 2019.

'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.' (p.18)

SQA response: SQA already has an active dialogue with other key stakeholders around how best to make greater use of digital technology for assessment, and has engaged with young people as part of this process. We will, however, increase the level of engagement with young people.

Target date: December 2018

2. Co-designing a new approach to assessing competence in the skills highlighted in the report, particularly in the area of life skills

One of the aspirations for the future of assessment set out in the report is that:

'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.' (p.11)

This aspiration is supported by some of the specific 'actions for change', including the following:

'Young people should be able to present a well-rounded portrait of themselves as an individual to potential employers and universities.' (p.17)

'More value needs to be attached to the skills developed through practical volunteering experience and other activities.' (p.17)

'Extra-curricular activities should be assessed continuously to supplement academic skills.' (p.15)

'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.' (p.15)

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The thinking reflected in these points is consistent with the growing emphasis from organisations such as the World Economic Forum on the importance for future success of skills wider than those developed by the traditional academic curriculum.

SQA response: To address these points SQA will adopt in full, one of the other specific 'actions for change':

'Young people should be involved in co-designing assessment to have their say about what should be assessed and how this is done.' (p.14)

To achieve this, SQA will, by the end of 2018, commission a short, focused piece of work involving some young people and other stakeholders. We will define the scope clearly, based on some of the report's actions, and use a workshop to develop an outline of how a new approach in this area might look.

Target date: Work to be commissioned before end 2018.

3. Developing an overarching commitment and approach to engaging with young people which recognises them as a key stakeholder group

Our work with Young Scot, and the proposed follow-on actions above, are based on a recognition that young people form a key stakeholder group for SQA with a unique perspective, and that we should treat their views as having the same status as those of other stakeholders. While to date we have engaged with young people in some areas of our work, we have not adopted a consistent or systematic approach.

Over the course of the next year, we will undertake a review of stakeholder engagement and ensure that learners are treated with equal importance to other audiences. We will work with young people to understand the issues that affect them, and where we can, we will collaborate with them to identify and implement solutions to the challenges that they face.

We will use best practice community engagement approaches to work with young people, and we will then report on this activity to show how we are engaging over time and to allow us to further improve.

To ensure that in future we engage with young people consistently, and in a way that reflects their status as a key stakeholder, we will ensure that young people are reflected as a distinct group within our developing approach to strategic engagement.

Target date: work to begin before end 2018.

These are significant actions, as they commit SQA as an organisation to engaging with young people, and they will ensure that young people's views inform our decision making on issues that affect them in future, including the development of our products and services.

Find out more

www.sqa.org.uk/yoyp

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