

# **Evaluation of the First Year of Scottish Baccalaureates:**

## **Report on Implementation and Operation**

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# Introduction

## Background and remit

In May 2010 SQA commissioned an evaluation of the implementation and operation of the first year of the Scottish Baccalaureates in Science and in Languages. The aim of the evaluation was to identify lessons that might be learned from the experiences of SQA, centres and learners in the first year.

## Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation covered:

- ◆ the development process
- ◆ the structure, model and content
- ◆ the implementation process
- ◆ operational implications
- ◆ quality assurance
- ◆ recognition and support from higher education (HE)

## Timescale

The work for the evaluation was carried out between May and September 2010.

## Methodology

The evaluation sought, by way of individual interviews and surveys, the views of:

- ◆ SQA staff
- ◆ SQA appointees
- ◆ staff in both participating and non-participating centres
- ◆ learners
- ◆ local authorities
- ◆ Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS)
- ◆ universities participating in partnership arrangements

## The sample for interview

The sample of SQA staff and appointees, centres and local authorities to be interviewed was agreed with SQA.

The sample of centres for interview included:

- ◆ schools, colleges and universities
- ◆ centres offering Science or Languages (or both)
- ◆ centres in partnerships and those not in partnerships

- ◆ centres which had originally intended to offer the Scottish Baccalaureate but had withdrawn

It was accepted at the start of the work that some of those selected as part of the sample might not be able to participate because centre holidays intervened. However, in the event, there was a very positive response to requests to take part in interviews, and in addition to SCIS the following participated:

- ◆ **schools:** 15 of the 18 schools contacted
- ◆ **colleges:** both the colleges contacted
- ◆ **local authorities:** four of the five local authorities contacted
- ◆ **universities:** both the universities contacted

There was also a survey of learners. All who had entered for the Baccalaureate were sent a link to the survey, and 75 responded.

The views of centres and external verifiers not included in the interviews were sought by means of surveys covering broadly similar topics. All were sent a link to the survey, and the following numbers responded:

- ◆ centres: 13 of 52
- ◆ external verifiers: seven of nine

Thanks are due to all those who made themselves available for a telephone interview at a busy time of the year, and to those who responded to survey.

# Section A: Structure and content, and skills developed

## 1 Structure

The two Scottish Baccalaureates have set specifications. Learners select their courses of study from defined groups of Courses. There had been discussion at the development stages about how restricted the contributing Courses should be, as specifying too tightly would limit the numbers of potential learners.

Most interviewees said that the Scottish Baccalaureate needs to be seen as a demanding qualification, with a definite structure, designed for high-achieving learners. They felt that there was a need for some constraint around the options and that any request to add further options to widen accessibility will need to be balanced against the need to ensure that the qualification has rigour and will be useful to those who are successful in it.

This response is echoed by the centre survey, where respondents were asked:

**What do you think of the mix of subjects in the Scottish Baccalaureate? (Tick only one option)**

Answer Options	Response Count
The options provided the learners with sufficient choice	10
There were insufficient options for learners	3
If there were insufficient options, please specify.	4
<b>Total who answered question</b>	<b>13</b>

Those who said there were insufficient options for learners noted that:

- ◆ in small schools some pupils may be debarred from attempting the Baccalaureate
- ◆ a lack of further options would mean that entries would always be limited

### 1.1 Content

There was a difference between the Science and Languages interviewees in terms of comments on the current content.

#### 1.1.1 Science content

Most interviewees said they were happy with the content of the Science Baccalaureate. Its range of options was said to be sufficiently broad to:

- ◆ appeal to learners in both schools and colleges

- ◆ generate good numbers of candidates with the necessary mix of Courses that would make them eligible for the Baccalaureate

Some interviewees, however, suggested the addition of two Courses — Geography and Psychology.

For the Scottish Baccalaureate in Science the number of presentations at Higher and Advanced Higher in each component Course last session was:

**Table: Science Courses achieved by candidates in the Science Baccalaureate**

Course	Higher	Advanced Higher
Applied Mathematics: Statistics	-	3
Applied Mathematics: Mechanics	-	4
Biology	17	54
Chemistry	9	76
Computing	8	3
Geology	1	-
Graphic Communication	6	2
Human Biology	21	-
Information Systems	2	1
Physics	9	51
Mathematics	45	46
Technological Studies	1	-
Managing Environmental Resources	1	-

### 1.1.2 Languages content

There was general agreement amongst the interviewees and survey respondents that the structure of the Languages Baccalaureate was more problematic. Having a qualification called *Languages* means that there needs to be more than one language in the mix, but interviewees noted that many schools now are unable to offer two languages, particularly at the relevant levels. This would always limit uptake.

However, a key purpose of the Languages Baccalaureate is to promote the study of languages, and several interviewees noted that, now that the structure is in place, it is possible that schools will start to work towards achieving this purpose.

As a counter to this, one respondent to the survey suggested that with the introduction of 'Curriculum for Excellence and change in the curriculum architecture, a lot of schools are moving towards one language only — making the Scottish Baccalaureate impossible'.



The content of the Languages Baccalaureate had raised concerns about breadth at the development stage. Discussions at the KPG in October 2008 noted that there was a mismatch between the number of eligible Courses for Languages and that for Science, with there being more choice for Science. However, the minutes of this meeting show that, in engagement events with stakeholders, there had been mixed views as to how wide a Languages Baccalaureate should be. Coherence was felt to be important, and that in itself would mean less breadth in the Languages Baccalaureate.

SQA interviewees also noted that any attempt to augment the existing Languages Baccalaureate will need to bear in mind the point of developing such a qualification in the first place. The aim is to equip young people with modern foreign languages skills so as to extend and widen their opportunities in later life and to allow them to compete in the job market with people from outside the UK.<sup>1</sup> The need for a wider Baccalaureate will therefore have to be carefully considered so that whatever is developed meets the expectations of learners and employers.

Interviewees variously suggested the addition of four other Courses — Drama, History, Modern Studies and Business.

For the Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages the number of presentations at Higher and Advanced Higher in each component Course last session was:

**Table: Language Courses achieved by candidates in the Language Baccalaureate**

<b>Course</b>	<b>Higher</b>	<b>Advanced Higher</b>
English	7	12
French	3	13
German	3	6
Italian	-	2
Latin	-	1
Spanish	4	5

### **1.1.3 Interdisciplinary Project content**

Most interviewees said that the balance of the IP is properly weighted more toward generic, rather than subject-specific, skills. They said that the aim of the IP is to increase learners' generic skills and extend confidence and capability, rather than subject knowledge: 'There are always Highers and Advanced Highers for extending subject knowledge in the Scottish Baccalaureate'.<sup>2</sup>

A significant minority said that the IP is a good mix of both generic and subject-specific learning. They think that it presents an ideal opportunity to learn new

<sup>1</sup> Objective 3.3 of the Lisbon European Council encourages the learning of at least two foreign languages.

<sup>2</sup> A member of SQA staff noted that there might be a case to be made for appointing generic external verifiers.

skills, eg research, communication, project management and so on, and to develop these, using the knowledge gained in Courses at Higher and Advanced Higher levels. The aim is to tie the work of the project to current and previous learning and to use that learning to solve problems.

Whatever side they came down on, most of the interviewees said that they were comfortable with their own view of the balance between generic and specialist knowledge in the IP. There were, however, a small number of interviewees who were not happy with the generic/specialist split and would have preferred to see less emphasis in the IP on the generic areas and more on the specialisms. For example, one interviewee said that the Languages IP could have been taken with 'next to no foreign languages', and another that the skills demonstrated in the Science IP were 'all non-Science'. Whilst such interviewees recognised that generic skills are important, they felt that they are too prevalent in the IP.

The survey of centres asked respondents to:

**Tick the one statement that applies most closely to your own view of the Interdisciplinary Project Unit.**

Answer Options	Response Count
The Interdisciplinary Project Unit is about demonstrating generic skills.	5
The Interdisciplinary Project Unit is about demonstrating subject-specific skills.	0
The Interdisciplinary Project Unit is about demonstrating an equal mix of generic and subject-specific skills.	8
<b>Total who answered question</b>	<b>13</b>

They were then asked:

**Whatever answer you gave in question 7, does SQA have the balance right between generic and subject-specific learning in the Interdisciplinary Project Unit?**

Answer Options	Response Count
Yes	10
No	3
Please use this space to provide a brief explanation of your response.	6
<b>Total who answered question</b>	<b>13</b>

Amongst comments added to the answers were the following:

- ◆ 'the focus is more on generic skills — the subject-specific skills are not so highly prioritised as the level of language may not be specific to Advanced

Higher and the report/presentation does not need to be in the foreign language'

- ◆ 'candidates [were] very disappointed at the lack of requirement for subject-specific skills which would have made the "scotbacc" more meaningful'

Therefore, although interviewees and survey respondents agree that the balance between generic and subject-specific skills is the right one, they differ as to what that balance is – interviewees electing generic, and survey respondents electing a mix of generic and specific.

## 2 Skills developed by the Scottish Baccalaureate

### 2.1 Centres' views

Interviewees said that they liked the approach taken to learning in the IP with the learners taking responsibility for the work and setting their own learning objectives while the teachers provided support and advice. This helped learners to develop 'life skills' such as working with others and taking responsibility, as well as fostering generic skills such as project management, time management and communication.

Respondents to the survey of centres were asked:

**What skills/knowledge did undertaking the Scottish Baccalaureate allow the learners to develop?**

Answer Options	Response Count
Subject-specific skills/knowledge	9
Project management	12
Research	11
Planning	11
Presentation	9
Time management	11
Other (please specify)	3
<b>Total who answered question</b>	<b>13</b>

In the 'Other' category respondents indicated interpersonal skills and cognitive and generic skills.

### 2.2 Learners' views

Learners were asked in the survey:

**Whether you completed the Interdisciplinary Project or not, what skills did undertaking it allow you to demonstrate? (You can tick more than one option)**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Subject-specific skills, eg languages or science skills	64.9%	48
Project management	77.0%	57
Research	83.8%	62
Planning	83.8%	62
Presentation	70.3%	52
Time management	77.0%	57
Other (please specify)	28.4%	21
<b>Total who answered question</b>		<b>74</b>

In the 'Other' category they variously reported that they had:

- ◆ gained communication and interpersonal skills
- ◆ improved writing skills both in the project report and in formal correspondence
- ◆ gained confidence in making presentations
- ◆ improved their IT skills

# Section B: Value and recognition of the Scottish Baccalaureate

## 1 Centres' views

Centre interviewees said that the Scottish Baccalaureate is valuable but they differed slightly over where the value lies.

All said that the IP is valuable, and that it gives focus to learning undertaken in S6 and has the capacity to keep learners engaged. They stressed the fact that it pushes high-achieving learners, who have done well throughout their school careers, out of their comfort zones and enhances their skills in the areas of communication, time management, practical activities, taking responsibility for learning and planning, and working autonomously.

Some interviewees thought the value of the Scottish Baccalaureate lay with its group award nature — the addition of the IP over any grouping of discrete Courses. These said that the IP is the key to allowing learners to make links across the Courses they are undertaking, as well as to broaden their learning by acquiring new skills beyond the specialisms.

Whatever their view on where the value lay, interviewees and survey respondents variously said that the IP provides a stepping stone between school and university and working life, and helps learners to:

- ◆ undertake independent learning
- ◆ demonstrate different and transferable skills
- ◆ develop self-discipline, self-study and self-motivation
- ◆ deepen the skills base
- ◆ work beyond the school environment
- ◆ experience the HE learning style
- ◆ experience the kind of research that they will require to undertake in HE and gain experience in meeting deadlines
- ◆ explore areas of personal interest
- ◆ gain confidence in working with others and in different environments
- ◆ provide evidence for personal statements and competitive interviews with HE
- ◆ prepare for personal development planning in HE

Those who valued the group award nature of the Scottish Baccalaureate also stressed the fact that it additionally helps learners to integrate learning at Higher and Advanced Higher levels, to experience cross-curricular project working, and to manage their workload in doing so. Starting to do this whilst still at school will, some respondents hoped, help to decrease the drop-out rate after the first year of university.

All interviewees also said that undertaking the IP as a stand-alone Unit would be beneficial to learners for many of the reasons given above.

As a contrast to these positive points, and whilst recognising the acknowledged benefits of the IP, a few respondents were less certain that the benefits would result in a strong uptake of the Scottish Baccalaureate. The issues they raised related to the value of the Baccalaureate in HE. They wanted to know more about how a Pass or Distinction in the Scottish Baccalaureate could help learners in ways beyond the acknowledged benefits.

## 2 Learners' views

In the learners' survey, learners were asked:

**Whether you completed the Interdisciplinary Project or Scottish Baccalaureate what do you now think the benefits are for you personally having undertaken the Interdisciplinary Project or the Scottish Baccalaureate? (You can tick more than one option)**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I have gained generic skills such as project planning	75.7%	53
I have extended my subject knowledge	70.0%	49
I expect it will be useful in further or higher education or employment	65.7%	46
Other (please specify)	21.4%	15
<b>Total who answered question</b>		<b>70</b>

Among the benefits learners gave in the 'Other' category were that, as a result of undertaking the Scottish Baccalaureate or the IP, they had:

- ◆ learned how to work on their own and manage their time efficiently under an increased workload — 'vital for any further/higher education'
- ◆ increased their self-confidence and gained confidence in using different research resources, speaking to new people, asking questions and using IT
- ◆ gained experience on carrying out a project
- ◆ learned how to evaluate themselves
- ◆ made contacts in universities
- ◆ worked with academics and helped to write a report for a medical journal

Some were less positive. Of the 14 learners (20%) who commented on the downsides to taking the Scottish Baccalaureate, ten made some form of comment on the extra workload involved. Six of these (8%) found the workload burdensome, but four seemed to be less troubled by it and, indeed, two seemed to think it was to be expected when working at AH level.

There were continuing concerns as to the Baccalaureate's standing in HE, and one respondent wondered whether it would be seen as a benefit for employment.

Out of all the respondents only one said that there had been no benefits and that undertaking the Baccalaureate had wasted the learner's time.

### **3 Centres' views of their learners' expectations**

Centres, and local authority interviewees too, were asked about the learners' views on the Scottish Baccalaureate. Their views are broadly similar to those of the learners, but the fact that the interviewees had had contact with groups of learners over the year may have given them a wider perspective. They variously reported that the learners:

- ◆ saw the IP as something that set them apart from other learners and that would take them in different directions from learning they had been used to hitherto
- ◆ saw the distance they had travelled in terms of project management, working with others and collaborating with other members of the group
- ◆ liked the idea of being out of school and working with others who were not their teachers
- ◆ thought that the Baccalaureate would give them additional skills in a competitive environment for jobs and entry to HE
- ◆ said that the IP was preparation for interviews with HE

On the less positive side, one centre said that its learners had dropped the IP because their perception was that the Scottish Baccalaureate gave them no extra benefit for entry to HE. Conversely, another said that it gave 'additional points for comparatively little extra work.'

## **4 Recognition by higher education**

### **4.1 Destinations of learners**

All centre and local authority interviewees said that their Scottish Baccalaureate and IP learners were intending to go to university and were mostly aiming to study what one interviewee called 'high tariff' courses, such as Medicine, Dentistry and Law.

The learners themselves gave a slightly different picture, although it is possible that there was some confusion over their understanding of the difference between FE and HE. It is interesting to note that, as yet, none of the learners is intending to enter employment directly. The learners answered:

### What do you intend to do next?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Further education	22.7%	17
Higher education	77.3%	58
Employment	0.0%	0
<b>Total who answered question</b>		<b>75</b>

As noted earlier, a recurring theme from both centres and learners is the light in which the Scottish Baccalaureate is viewed in HE, the issues being:

- ◆ Will it help admission to heavily-subscribed HE courses?
- ◆ Has it made young people more ready for effective learning in HE?
- ◆ Will it provide some form of enhanced entry?
- ◆ Will it provide learners with the skills employers want?

## 4.2 Entry to higher education

Highers are the entry-level qualifications for HE. However, SQA and universities recognise that possession of the Scottish Baccalaureate could enrich and add value to a learner's entry application.

SQA interviewees said that SQA works with its HE stakeholders to ensure that it continues to provide qualifications of the appropriate level for entry. As part of that role SQA has been engaging with universities over the Baccalaureate and discussing how it might be considered as one of the factors for entry.

For example, might a Pass or Distinction in the Scottish Baccalaureate enable a learner to go straight into the second year of HE, or provide exemption from subjects in the first year? Interviews indicated that some centres thought this might be an attractive option — indeed, one centre said that there was an expectation that the Baccalaureate would provide some degree of advanced entry.

SQA has begun to review the websites of a number of Scottish universities to identify how the Scottish Baccalaureate is considered for entry/advanced entry. These demonstrate different approaches to the Baccalaureate by different institutions. Some universities have made specific reference to the Baccalaureate and say that, depending on the degree course sought and the grade achieved:

- ◆ some form of exemption might be given for some first-year subjects
- ◆ fast tracking into the second year might be possible for some learners

Whether the learners themselves would want to take up either option is currently unknown. The view generally from centres, local authorities, and SQA, is that learners coming straight from school might be unwilling to separate from their cohort or to join with a group of older and more experienced learners.



It is possible that learners would simply prefer the Scottish Baccalaureate to improve their entry chances for the first year rather than give them some form of advanced entry.

In the survey learners were asked:

**Whether you completed the Interdisciplinary Project or Scottish Baccalaureate what do you now think the downsides are for you personally having undertaken the Interdisciplinary Project and/or the Scottish Baccalaureate? (You can tick more than one option)**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Increased Workload	72.7%	48
Unsure of how it will be viewed in further or higher education or employment	31.8%	21
Other (please specify)	27.3%	18
<b>Total who answered question</b>		<b>66</b>

The explanations that the learners gave when expanding on their answers to this question do not touch greatly on recognition by HE, and none mentions employment. Those who did comment specifically on recognition by HE noted it as a concern that either the Baccalaureate gave them no benefit for entry, or the universities to which they were applying seemed unaware of the qualification.

None of the centres interviewed gave evidence of exemption or fast tracking being offered yet to learners taking the Scottish Baccalaureate in the first year.

Some, however, had anecdotal information on admission. For example, several interviewees quoted evidence from learners saying that the IP had been a positive feature at HE interviews – indeed, one candidate had said that admission had been granted on the strength of undertaking the IP.

The absence of evidence on the way in which the Scottish Baccalaureate is viewed by HE could affect its uptake in future. For example:

- ◆ One centre noted that although many of its candidates had been awarded Distinction for the Scottish Baccalaureate, HE institutions had not differentiated between those who had the Baccalaureate and those who had achieved Higher and Advanced Higher Courses. Therefore there was nothing tangible to show for the extra effort that the Baccalaureate candidates had made.
- ◆ Another centre noted that if success in three Advanced Highers were to result in an unconditional entry, many learners might simply opt for that route, avoiding the need to undertake the Baccalaureate and the additional work for the IP.

# Section C: Participation in the Scottish Baccalaureate

## 1 The factors considered in deciding whether to offer Scottish Baccalaureates

### 1.1 Centres electing to offer

Interviewees in centres said that, in deciding to offer the Scottish Baccalaureate, they saw the benefits as noted above in Section C, and felt that it was necessary simply to get involved early. A few, in addition, said that parents and learners had thought the qualification worthwhile and had been keen for the centre to embark on it.

### 1.2 Centres electing not to offer

The interviews with local authorities and SQA's Baccalaureate Development Manager considered reasons behind centres deciding not to offer the Scottish Baccalaureate.

One local authority noted that some schools might not have been able to offer the right mix of Courses in Sciences or Languages (although they could still have offered the IP). This would be a continuing problem unless the schools could form partnerships.

One partner institution reported encountering a negative reaction to the Scottish Baccalaureate in one area. Teachers had suggested that what schools wanted was something for 'more ordinary' learners.

One local authority noted that, in the current financial climate, schools might need to rein in some work. This could mean electing not to offer the Baccalaureate at all, or dropping it after one or two years. It was suggested that if it came to a choice between keeping classes smaller further down a school and offering Scottish Baccalaureates, it would be likely that the Baccalaureates would be cut.

Additional reasons for not offering the qualification were:

- ◆ the argument for the Scottish Baccalaureate had not been made strongly enough and the school did not see it as a priority
- ◆ innovation fatigue
- ◆ the Scottish Baccalaureate was new and the school preferred to wait and learn from the experiences of others
- ◆ too few potential learners
- ◆ lack of commitment in school senior management

## 2 Numbers of entries

The entry numbers and results provided by SQA are:

Qualification	Entries	A	B	C	No award
Science IP	125	63	35	22	5
Languages IP	19	15	1	2	1

Qualification	Entries	Distinction	Pass	No award
Science Baccalaureate	119	45	45	29
Languages Baccalaureate	19	11	6	2

## 3 Withdrawals

There were instances of:

- ◆ centres which had embarked on the Baccalaureate withdrawing along the way
- ◆ drop-out even amongst the schools which did present candidates for assessment

### 3.1 Centres deciding to withdraw

In centres which had originally intended to offer the Scottish Baccalaureates, but were unable eventually to do so, interviewees said that they had withdrawn for a range of reasons including:

- ◆ moving to a new building and therefore deciding to defer offering the Baccalaureate till the next year
- ◆ learners not having the right mix of Courses required for the Baccalaureate as a result of a misunderstanding
- ◆ low learner numbers originally and all dropping out
- ◆ remoteness and the difficulty of forming partnerships in such circumstances

### 3.2 Individual learners deciding to withdraw

Interviewees in SQA said that it was not easy to identify the number of learners who had dropped out in the first year of the Scottish Baccalaureate. This was because the entry date for assessment (the first time that SQA would have an accurate view of numbers) was comparatively late on in the year. By the time entries were received some learners might have embarked on, but already have dropped out of, the qualifications. Therefore the withdrawal rate of around 30% of learners provided by SQA is an estimate.

Some centre interviewees gave drop-out numbers in the course of the interviews but, again, they used different bases for counting. For example, some counted

the potential learners from an expression of interest in May/June 2009, others counted from the numbers who embarked on a Baccalaureate in August 2009, and others gave the number who had made entry — not all of whom ended up going the full length of assessment.

Therefore while drop-out numbers seemed high, it is not easy to identify what they were for session 2009–10. SQA commonly only counts withdrawals of candidates who have been entered.

Centre interviewees said that individual learners decided to withdraw for a range of reasons which can be categorised as follows:

- ◆ Offers from HE — learners with unconditional offers who decided that they did not need to continue; those with conditional offers who decided to concentrate on individual Courses rather than the Baccalaureate as a whole.
- ◆ Other priorities — learners preparing for university entrance examinations; those attempting other kinds of project; those with workload issues; those with part-time jobs.
- ◆ Confidence issues — learners who had been over-ambitious and who failed to deliver ultimately; those daunted by the planning process; those who found the work required was more than they had expected; those demotivated by receiving a lower grade than anticipated in the early stages<sup>3</sup>; those who lost heart when the companies contacted did not want to help; those attempting group projects from which the other team member(s) dropped out.
- ◆ Maturity — younger learners who had withdrawn as they had felt less comfortable with the partnership arrangement with a college; those who could follow, provided a teacher led the work, but who were unable to take responsibility for managing and sustaining the project by themselves.
- ◆ UCAS — one school noted that some learners had put the IP on their UCAS applications but withdrew when they realised that they would have to have done some work on the project before the UCAS application went in.
- ◆ Messages on value of the Scottish Baccalaureate from HE at the time — some learners were told that the IP would not be of help to them for entry to HE; for example one local authority reported that a learner, who then withdrew from the IP, was told by an HEI that taking an additional Advanced Higher would be preferable to undertaking the IP.

The survey of learners asked:

**If you did NOT complete the Interdisciplinary Project can you give your reasons for not doing so? (You can tick more than one option)**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
You were working on other subjects at Higher and Advanced Higher	100.0%	13

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<sup>3</sup> See H2.

You were preparing for entrance examinations for HE	0.0%	0
You had a conditional offer which did not include the Scottish Baccalaureate	30.8%	4
You had received an unconditional offer	53.8%	7
You found the Interdisciplinary Project did not give you what you had expected	38.5%	5
You found that the Interdisciplinary Project took up too much of your time	92.3%	12
You lost focus or interest in the work	38.5%	5
Other (please specify)	23.1%	3
<b>Total who answered question</b>		<b>13</b>

The three learners in the 'Other' category said that they had withdrawn:

- ◆ to concentrate instead on Investigations
- ◆ because of not understanding until late on what needed to be done
- ◆ because universities did not recognise the Scottish Baccalaureate

The learners' survey asked those who failed to stay the course what might have encouraged them to continue. They said that they might have continued had the following been available:

- ◆ more detailed guidance for learners and teachers on the development of the project, its planning and its execution
- ◆ more credit for the qualification
- ◆ greater recognition of the Scottish Baccalaureate/IP by HE
- ◆ access to a mentor or 'on-line focus group with other students
- ◆ making a better and more relevant choice of project topic
- ◆ less demanding conditions for the award of Distinction

Whilst some of these information and facilities might already be available it seems possible, from the learners' responses, that they were not aware of them.

# Section D: Implementing the Scottish Baccalaureate in centres

## 1 Partnerships

The interviews with centres and local authorities, and the responses to the centre survey, revealed that schools worked with a wide range of partners in the first year of offering the Scottish Baccalaureate. The partners identified by interviewees and respondents included local authorities, colleges, other schools, universities and employers.

In addition, some schools had elected to enter into formal partnership with a college or university for the provision of assessment and/or support in the IP, whilst others had entered for the IP on their own account.

SQA interviewees said that SQA worked with centres to promote partnerships and facilitate links between centres offering the Scottish Baccalaureate.

### 1.1 Partnerships with a college or university

The partnerships varied according to the requirements of the different schools and the partner institutions, and included some or all of the following:

- ◆ induction of learners
- ◆ guidance from subject specialists
- ◆ facilitating learners' project work
- ◆ helping to provide access to contacts for projects
- ◆ supporting and assessing learners undertaking the
- ◆ supporting internal verification of the IP
- ◆ work experience
- ◆ providing access to libraries and laboratories and other facilities
- ◆ providing mentoring and supervision for learners

Interviewees from schools involved in partnerships were very positive about them. They said that the partner institutions had helped to share the workload and to make implementing the Scottish Baccalaureates more manageable. They also pointed out that partnering with a college or university allows schools with only one or two learners to offer the Baccalaureates, and for these individual learners to meet others undertaking the same qualification.

The interviewees said that learners liked the more adult atmosphere of the college or university. They had been given student cards, which gave them access to libraries and other student facilities. There were social benefits, too, in that young people from different schools had been able to team up and work together on their days in college. Interviewees noted that the partner institutions

had recognised that learners from schools have different needs from mainstream college students, and had taken account of these.

The only problem noted by a college was that, where a day had been set aside by the college for learners to attend, not all had been able to do so because some schools had timetabled activities for the IP learners on these days.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring arrangements worked by pairing learners with supervisors (PhD students). This afforded learners the opportunity of one-to-one discussions with their supervisors — something that, as one interviewee pointed out, they are unlikely to encounter as first-year students at university. Schools that had used mentoring services, provided by HE, spoke well of the arrangements. However, they noted that whilst these worked effectively for many learners, they had not done so for all; when accessing the supervisor had become difficult, the learners had become demotivated.

### **Capacity**

Interviewees from partner institutions indicated that interest on the part of schools in partnership arrangements is growing, and that there is evidence of additional schools seeking to join partnerships and of partnerships extending. However, some interviewees said that they were concerned that partner institutions might need to cap numbers in the current economic climate, or might not even be able to provide partnership facilities at all. They said they were worried that, as a result, not all schools wanting to form partnerships with colleges/universities would be able to do so.

## **1.2 Schools operating on their own**

Some schools that were not in formal partnerships with a college/university had started to work together in other ways to support the IP. For example, some schools had worked in networks brought together by a local authority to strengthen quality assurance. In addition, individual schools interviewed noted that they had made connections with local businesses, employers and HEIs to help provide learners with useful links.

A number of interviewees said that the location of a school has implications for partnership – for example, one school had been unable to enter into a partnership because of remoteness. A rural location could also make it harder for schools to find partners in business and industry. In such locations, many businesses tend to be small and therefore less able to help more than one learner at a time.

## **2 Support from SQA**

The support provided by SQA fell into three categories:

- ◆ support by SQA staff

- ◆ guidance documentation
- ◆ events

Interviewees and survey respondents were asked to comment on these. They also made suggestions about further guidance which might be useful and the form it should take. It should be noted that the interviews and surveys were being carried out at the same time as SQA was further developing and amending its support and guidance material.

## 2.1 Support by SQA staff

Interviewees greatly appreciated the individual support and assistance provided by SQA staff.

Survey respondents were asked:

**Please rate the undernoted guidance publications and support provided by SQA.**

Answer Options	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Response Count
Support from individual members of SQA staff	4	5	1	0	10

## 2.2 Guidance documentation

### Centres' views on guidance material

As far as guidance documentation was concerned, centre and local authority interviewees, as well as respondents to the centre survey, were largely very positive. They had found the project templates and exemplars useful and were looking forward to SQA's publication of additional exemplar material on the SQA website. Those interviewed after the new material was published spoke highly of its quality.

There were some aspects of the documentation which interviewees felt might be improved. For example:

- ◆ An interviewee suggested that reviewing some of the terminology in the templates might be necessary. For example, the terms *research methodology* and *cognitive skills* were thought to be jargon.
- ◆ Interviewees suggested that the Proposal, Planning and Evaluation processes could be reviewed to identify and remove repetition and thus help to reduce both the learners' and the assessors' workloads.
- ◆ One interviewee noted that the Languages template included a space for the assessor's comments under each section of the criteria whereas there was none in Science.
- ◆ One interviewee wondered whether the exemplars are sometimes over-optimistic, and gave as an example a statement that learners might spend a



week out of school in industry or HE. In the opinion of the interviewee this might raise expectations that cannot be met for all learners.

Respondents to the centre survey were asked:

**Please rate the undernoted guidance publications and support provided by SQA.**

Answer Options	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Response Count
Scottish Baccalaureate Interdisciplinary Projects (IP): A Guide to Quality Assurance Processes for Centres and their Representatives (2009-10)	2	9	1	0	12
The Assessment Support Pack	5	4	1	0	10

In comments on the ratings, one respondent said that more variety in style of exemplar projects was needed to demonstrate clearly how the criteria were met.

### **Learners' views on guidance material**

The learners were asked whether they had seen any SQA documentation about the Scottish Baccalaureates and the IP. Of the 74 learners who answered, only three said 'No'.

Those who had seen the documentation were asked:

**How informative was this documentation?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent	9.7%	7
Good	50.0%	36
Fair	27.8%	20
Poor	12.5%	9
<b>Total who answered question</b>		<b>72</b>

Many of those who gave comments explaining their answers indicated that they would have wanted more exemplar material for the project.

They were also concerned about the way in which guidance material was expressed. There were several requests for terminology to be defined. One said, 'the information given seemed somewhat convoluted. For higher interest levels, the documentation might be kept simpler and more understandable.' Another asked for an 'idiot's guide approach to the support materials'.

### **3 Events**

It was clear from interviews and from the centre's survey responses that the events offered by SQA throughout the first year were seen as having been very useful – indeed, one interviewee said that if assessors had not been able to attend these meetings they would have struggled to know what was required of them.

Most interviewees particularly marked out the Quality Assurance event, run in February 2010, as invaluable. It had helped assessors in centres to understand the national standard and to see where the lines should be drawn in grading. They said that, whatever other workshops SQA offers in the new session, this Quality Assurance event will be essential for new centres. However, they all suggested that it should be offered much earlier in the session – for example, around October or November.

One interviewee raised a note of caution. Whilst the events had been generally helpful, one had provided presentations on both Baccalaureates to all participants rather than a separate presentation to each group. This interviewee felt that the time might have been used more effectively. A similar point was made by a respondent to the centre survey who asked for 'more small-group discussion to allow mutual support, sharing of practice etc, rather than a few presentations, since not all were relevant to everyone (eg partnership arrangements not relevant to us this year)'.

## **4 Other guidance wanted by centres**

### **4.1 Assessment skills**

#### **Assessors' comments**

A number of interviewees sought additional guidance on writing assessor's comments. This guidance was required for two reasons:

- ◆ First, to ensure that the assessors provided the information that was required, but not so much as would make the assessment task impracticable.
- ◆ Second, to clarify the purpose of the assessors' comments at different points — ie where, in the documentation, the assessors are directing their comments to the learners and where they are explaining their decisions to the internal verifier and the external verifiers.

One interviewee suggested that some additional guidance on different project presentation approaches would be useful, and gave, as an example, poster presentations.

#### **Giving feedback**

Two interviewees asked for more guidance on giving feedback that does not over-direct the candidates.

- ◆ In the first case the interviewee said that some candidates had been concerned that asking questions of assessors or supervisors would indicate a weakness which would need to be reflected on.
- ◆ The second interviewee said that the staff were unsure how much help they could give when commenting on work at its earlier stages and when undertaking formative assessment.

It should be noted that the External Verifiers' report for the Languages IP specifically commended 'frequent mentoring and monitoring of candidates'. It is clear from the report that such mentoring and monitoring had not detracted from the autonomous work carried out by candidates, but had in fact enhanced it.

Seeking guidance relates not only to candidates in centres. An external verifier interviewee made the point that if assessors and internal verifiers in centres are in doubt about the quality or approach of a project, they should contact SQA for advice. It was suggested that doing this could help to obviate the danger of a candidate going off course and working a whole year to no effect with a project that did not meet the criteria.

### **Managing and marking group projects**

Guidance material was also requested on managing and marking group projects.

### **Supervisors'/mentors' guidance**

It was suggested that SQA might develop a short guide for supervisors and mentors, as they would struggle to read the full guidance.

## **4.2 Events**

An SQA interviewee suggested that teachers are nervous about the standards they need to apply when assessing a number of different projects that each include both generic and subject-specific matters. There was a need, therefore, for more CPD workshops in assessing generic skills and providing diversity in assessment.

Several interviewees spoke highly of understanding standards workshops and suggested that similar events would be helpful when considering the grading of the IP.

### **Format of events**

Many interviewees stressed the value of attending events offered by SQA but said that running these in a central location means that teachers need to be absent from their work for a whole day. Increasingly, some interviewees said, this might be neither practicable nor affordable.

There was no common view on how to overcome this difficulty. Interviewees variously suggested:

- ◆ arranging weekend or evening events
- ◆ running events on a local basis several times a year at relevant times

- ◆ whole-day events

Most interviewees agreed that whatever format was adopted, events should, wherever possible, be supplemented and supported by material/activities on SQA's website and SQA Academy.

# Section E: Quality Assurance — the Process

SQA's quality assurance system for the assessment of the IP comprises:

- ◆ approval of centres to offer the IP
- ◆ robust internal assessment and internal verification in centres
- ◆ external verification by SQA

## 1 Approval of centres to offer the Interdisciplinary Project

Centres required to be approved to offer the IP. They were asked to confirm on an Approval Application form whether, for the IP, they had documented procedures for:

- ◆ supporting and standardising internal assessment
- ◆ recruiting staff to assess and internally quality assure assessment
- ◆ identifying and acquiring necessary physical resources
- ◆ establishing and confirming relevant partnership agreement(s)

A review of a sample of forms submitted by centres seeking approval revealed that centres were in differing states of readiness to operate internal assessment and internal verification: some had systems in place; others were clearly very much at the start of the development process.

SQA staff said that they reviewed the forms and if systems were not yet in place, or if there were any concerns about a centre's application, it was visited by SQA staff to discuss and deal with these concerns. After these visits SQA approved the centres for the IP. However, there was no follow-up to see what action had been taken as a result.

When asked about the approval process, and how they had sought and gained approval, the majority of centres interviewed said that they had experienced no difficulties. Only one centre said that the requirement to have documented procedures in place had been a concern. This had been discussed with SQA, and a strategy for getting approval had been agreed. This had subsequently been implemented.

It was clear from the interviews that centres had had ready access to SQA for any approval concerns and that these had been dealt with on an individual basis.

## **2 Robust internal assessment and internal verification in centres**

SQA interviewees were aware of a need for the assessment of the IP to be rigorous and to be seen to be so. Any doubts about rigour could undermine the standing of the IP and the Scottish Baccalaureate.

SQA interviewees said that concerns about rigour could be addressed by partnership working; the evidence was that such partnerships had helped partners to develop and operate robust internal verification.

### **2.1 Centres' internal assessment and internal verification processes**

#### **Centre interviews**

Almost all centres stressed the importance of providing clear assessors' comments and linking these to the grade criteria. The degree of reliance that is placed on the assessors' comments had come as a surprise to a number of respondents, several of whom remarked that they had only realised the true significance of this at the Quality Assurance event in February 2010.

One interviewee noted that the Quality Forum run in May 2010 (see part 3.1 of this Section) had shown that there had been a wide variation in the quantity of information given in assessors' comments. Some schools had written 'pages and pages' whilst others' comments had been brief. This was a concern as the centre wanted to be sure that the quality of its own assessor's comments was sufficient for SQA's purposes. With such different approaches on view it was hard to know what would be the right approach.

All the centre interviewees confirmed that their centres operate an internal verification process for the IP. These differ according to local arrangements and depending on whether the centre is in a partnership. Examples of arrangements described included:

- ◆ a cross-marking day to review the work of all the candidates
- ◆ Science and Languages cross-verification
- ◆ arranging groups to carry out joint marking of the candidates' work
- ◆ events organised by local authorities
- ◆ partner schools and other partners working together on assessment and standardisation
- ◆ setting up a team to assess presentations

There were mixed views as to the robustness of these processes. For example, one interviewee noted the range of internal verification systems described during the Quality Forum and wondered about the comparability of their rigour.

By contrast, another interviewee was confident that teachers in schools either already operate assessment and internal verification systems or have begun to

do so — it was possible to say, therefore, that the processes have worked effectively during the first year.

Interviewees generally approved of the steps that SQA is taking to encourage schools in developing robust internal systems. However, several noted that such arrangements have a cost attached to them and, in the current financial climate, it might be difficult for schools to sustain the effort. This could be a threat to the standing of the IP in the longer term.

### Centre survey responses

The centre survey asked centres about their arrangements for internal quality assurance and they answered as follows:

**The arrangements you had to make for the internal quality assurance (internal verification) of the Interdisciplinary Project Unit were, in your opinion: (You may tick more than one)**

Answer Options	Response Count
Rigorous	10
Lacking in rigour	1
Easy to implement	4
Difficult to implement	1
Helpful to learners and teachers	4
Other (please specify)	3
<b>Total who answered question</b>	<b>11</b>

In choosing the 'Other' category, one respondent said that arrangements would be time-consuming with a large number of candidates, and two described their own procedures.

Survey respondents additionally said that:

- ◆ Moderation by two or three members of staff ensured rigour.
- ◆ Where a local authority had organised internal verification, this had allowed meetings between schools and the sharing of good practice. This was a good preparation for external verification.
- ◆ Internal verification had been time-consuming — 'we used one morning to internally verify two projects, one Languages and one Science'.

### External verifiers' reports

The evidence from the Senior Verifier's Reports shows that the majority of assessors in both Science and Languages had a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of the National Standards. The external verifiers for both Courses had made recommendations on amending grades of some centres, but it is clear from the reports that the external verifiers were, in

the main, satisfied that the assessors had carried out assessment in accordance with the evidence criteria supplied by SQA.

An SQA interviewee confirmed that feedback from the external verifiers to individual centres had specified the areas where improvements would be necessary in future. The clear message was that, next session, these centres will have to show that they have made good any weaknesses identified in assessment and/or internal verification.

The external verifiers for Science had noted that 'rich assessor comments' had been helpful, and that the small number of centres that had not supplied these had been advised to do so for the future.

Similarly, the external verifiers for Languages had noted that the high quality and range of assessors' comments, matched against the criteria, had been useful and had also helped to show how the candidates' skills had developed throughout the project.

### **3 External verification**

Some stakeholders had been concerned, at the development stage, that the IP was not to be subject to external assessment. However, the overall view was that the wide and diverse nature of the IP required it to be internally assessed and externally verified by SQA.

SQA therefore devised the model that was implemented in 2009–10. This comprised:

- ◆ a development event – the Quality Forum — for all centres offering the IP
- ◆ a separate central verification event for the external verifiers

#### **3.1 The Quality Forum**

The Quality Forum was held on 12 and 13 May 2010. Its purpose was to bring centre representatives for each Course together and give them the opportunity to:

- ◆ outline the assessment and internal quality assurance processes used in their centres and learn about those used in other centres
- ◆ develop their understanding of the national standards of competence for the IP when considering and reviewing a variety of candidate evidence along with assessors' comments
- ◆ share examples of good practice and alternative approaches to the delivery and development of the IP with colleagues in their centres after the event

Individual centres were allocated to groups, and external verifiers were paired to work with these groups. Each group was chaired by an SQA Quality Enhancement Manager. The centre representatives described their internal



verification activities and the external verifiers noted these. The external verifiers' notes were retained by SQA so that they might be referred to if required at central verification.

Centre representatives brought with them the five pieces of evidence for the sampled candidates. These were reviewed by peers on the day. Peers' comments on the evidence were passed to SQA to provide a view of the range of issues identified by peers, but did not contribute in any way to the central verification.

## **3.2 Views on the Quality Forum**

### **Centres**

Interviewees and respondents to the survey were largely positive about the Quality Forum, although there were one or two suggestions for improvement.

All said that they had found the Quality Forum informative, supportive and reassuring. It provided an insight into what other centres had done in approaching the assessment and internal verification of their candidates. They had been interested to see the evidence supplied by other centres, and to find out whether there was consistency between their own grading and that of others. They also liked the fact that the external verifiers were there, listening to contributions by participants.

The following points were noted from interviewees and survey respondents:

- ◆ One interviewee said that the Quality Forum had given a strong message from SQA that verification and quality assurance are important.
- ◆ One interviewee had been hoping for the chance to discuss individual projects and to undertake a 'standards workshop' rather than separately reviewing the five pieces of evidence and deciding whether the grades were merited or not. (This interviewee said that it would be useful in future to undertake some form of 'understanding standards' workshop for the IP.) Much the same point was made by a survey respondent who said that it would have been better to have worked together with someone in reviewing the candidates' evidence.
- ◆ A small number of interviewees said that they had felt unsure as to whether they had got the assessment of their candidates right during the year. The Quality Forum had helped to reassure them — albeit late on in the year.
- ◆ Almost all participants interviewed said that they would have preferred not to have commented on the grading of another participant who was sitting close by in the room. Even though they were writing their comments, they said that they felt hampered in making comment on the evidence supplied.

The survey asked centres about SQA's external quality assurance. The following individual responses make it clear that when they responded they were referring largely to the Quality Forum:

**SQA's external quality assurance of the internally-assessed Interdisciplinary Project Unit was: (You may tick more than one option)**

Answer Options	Response Count
Rigorous	6
Lacking in rigour	0
Supportive	5
Intimidating	1
Reassuring	5
Other (please specify)	3
<b>Total who answered question</b>	<b>13</b>

In choosing the 'Other' category, one respondent said that the speed of introduction had led to a lack of certainty and clarity, but gave no other detail; two said that they did not know because they had not been involved in the process.

**External verifiers**

The external verifiers interviewed were all very positive about the Quality Forum. They had welcomed the opportunity to exchange views, to network with others and, as one said, to think about their own grading approaches. They felt that it had been useful to hear the schools' descriptions of their assessment and internal quality assurance arrangements, although one verifier would have preferred to have heard this once the external verifiers had had a chance to review the material.

One external verifier noted that centres' descriptions of internal verification at the Quality Forum were very varied in form and content. It was suggested that it might be useful to centres to provide a guide or form to encourage the descriptions to be given in the same way. This would help centres to compare systems easily at the Quality Forum and might also help external verifiers when referring to such material at central verification.

The external verifiers' survey asked:

**Which one of the following statements best reflects your view of the Quality Forum as it operated this year?**

Answer Options	Response Count
It provided support to centres and allowed them to share experiences on assessment.	4
It supported and informed central verification.	2
<b>Total who answered question</b>	<b>6</b>

In explaining their selection, external verifiers said that the Quality Forum had provided the opportunity for:

- ◆ centres to explain particular issues to the external verifiers
- ◆ external verifiers to question centres about their internal verification processes to ensure that these were understood and noted properly
- ◆ centres to compare work
- ◆ centres to share views on candidates' work and gain an understanding of the standards required for the IP

### **SQA staff**

SQA interviewees said that the Quality Forum has the capacity to work well as a support event but, if it is to contribute to central verification in future, the format and operation will need to be re-examined and refocused. (There is more about this in Section G, Quality Assurance – Issues, part 4.1.)

## **3.3 Central verification**

Central verification of the IP started the day after the Quality Forum, and operated according to SQA's usual processes for central verification.

SQA staff and the external verifiers interviewed confirmed that the central verification event worked well in practice. The central verification of Languages was completed in a day, and that for Science in two days. The Senior Verifier's Reports for each say that the time given to the central verification process had been found to be 'quite short given the length and individuality of the projects'. It was stressed in the report that any increase in the number of candidates would need to be balanced by an increase in the time allocated to central verification.

The external verifiers interviewed and those who responded to the survey agreed that the sample supplied at external verification was the right sample and sufficient in allowing them to come to a decision.

The external verifiers who responded to the survey also indicated that they found:

### **SQA's external quality assurance of the internally-assessed Interdisciplinary Project Unit was: (You may tick more than one option)**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Rigorous	6
Lacking in rigour	0
Supportive	3
Intimidating	0
Reassuring	2
Other (please specify)	0
<b>Total who answered question</b>	<b>6</b>

# Section F: Quality Assurance – Issues

The evaluation also took note of quality assurance issues identified by all interviewees and respondents to surveys.

## 1 Time needed for assessment

Centre interviewees and respondents who made additional comments in the survey variously made the following points about assessors' comments:

- ◆ Assessment had taken longer than anticipated because of the need to supply such detailed assessors' comments. If candidate numbers increase, there is a concern that having to write lengthy assessor's comments will, as one interviewee put it, become 'time-consuming, over-burdensome and unworkable'. This could lead to assessors writing comments that are more formulaic and thus less helpful to learners, internal verifiers and external verifiers.
- ◆ The foregoing view was counterbalanced by one centre which noted that, as assessors become more confident, their ability to write apposite comments will increase.

## 2 Assessment of process not product

Although most interviewees were comfortable with the method of assessment, some still had concerns that the assessment looked more at the process than the product. They recognised that these concerns might be allayed in time, as centres gain experience, but they said that for the moment they were uncomfortable with the emphasis.

- ◆ First, the concern is that candidates have to provide a considerable amount of written evidence about the process. Those whose writing skills are more limited might be downgraded on the strength of their expression rather than their ability to plan and manage a project.
- ◆ Second, there is a concern about the quality of the research itself. If the outcome of the project does not contribute to the evidence of the assessment and is not presented for external verification, is it possible that a good presenter (or someone with excellent written skills) who had familiarised him/herself with the criteria, might get good grades even with a disappointing product? As one interviewee said, assessors and external verifiers need to be on guard against the articulate candidate who can write well and who, therefore, tends to sound good but might not have quality evidence backed up by strong research.

As a counter to this last concern, one centre specifically stressed that staff had been struck by the honesty of candidates in reflecting on their performance and abilities. The interviewee said that this is hard to do, and yet candidates had been very honest and open about their weaknesses.

One interviewee, who had originally been in favour of assessing the process, felt less sure of this at the end of the first year. The interviewee had seen both the processes and the products of assessments in the centre. This had made it easier to feel confident in the centre's assessments. The interviewee wanted reassurance that assessments in other centres were of a similar rigour.

### **3 Suggestions for other assessment models for the IP**

A few centre interviewees suggested other models of assessment and external verification for the IP. These were:

- ◆ an interview of the candidate carried out by a teacher from a neighbouring school
- ◆ SQA undertaking the assessment itself by means of visiting assessment
- ◆ recording the candidates' presentations for including with the evidence

## **4 Different ways of operating the Quality Forum and central verification**

### **4.1 SQA staff**

SQA staff suggested two possible variations to the current process.

In one, the centres would have a part to play in external verification:

- ◆ SQA would receive the submissions of evidence by the end of March
- ◆ external verifiers would review the submissions in the course of April
- ◆ the Quality Forum at which decisions would be taken would be held in May, with external verifiers leading peer reviewers in the verification process

In another, the Quality Forum would remain separate from central verification and the process would be:

- ◆ approach to assessment and internal verification described, shared and discussed at the Quality Forum in February
- ◆ peer review (quality assurance) process in May

This would allow centres to take action on feedback from peers before submitting results to SQA.

It was suggested that peers might be able to view evidence or descriptions of systems on line beforehand, thus reducing the need for a whole-day event.

## **4.2 External verifiers**

Three external verifiers interviewed suggested that for the future it would be possible to change the format and reduce the number of days given to the whole Quality Forum/central verification process. They variously suggested:

- ◆ offering the Quality Forum in the morning of the two days and carrying out the central verification in the afternoon and evening of each day
- ◆ offering the Quality Forum on one day and the central verification on the next

In both cases there would probably need to be a further day given to central verification, but there was a feeling that reducing the time given to the Quality Forum could obviate the need for a further **two** days to be given to central verification.

## **4.3 Additional material required?**

External verifiers noted the following:

- ◆ It would be helpful if centres could provide information about their internal verification processes along with the evidence submitted for sample candidates. This information was provided orally at the Quality Forum this year, but that might not always be the case and having the internal verification process defined on paper would be helpful to external verifiers. It was suggested that SQA might develop a form for providing the information. This would mean that it was always provided in the same format and so would be easy to refer to at central verification.
- ◆ It would be helpful to add to the documentation a box for the centre to confirm that the candidate's assessed work has been subject to internal verification.

# Section G: Grades

## 1 The grade for the Scottish Baccalaureate

Most interviewees said that they were comfortable with the grades of Pass and Distinction for the Scottish Baccalaureate. Only one interviewee wondered why Merit as a grade was not available.

## 2 The grade for the IP

A large proportion of the interviewees said that they were concerned at the possibility that getting a B or a C grade at the Proposal and Plan stages (two stages at which candidates can re-submit their work) would later prevent a candidate from gaining an A grade for the project as a whole.

They said that candidates might be slow at the beginning or might miss the point at the start of the work, but that many are likely to grow and progress. Indeed, several said that it would be very unlikely anyway for a candidate to gain an A grade right at the start. Candidates need, therefore, to be able to gain credit for the journey that they have made.

SQA confirmed that this concern had arisen at the Quality Assurance event in February 2010. It therefore had given guidance that assessors should give feedback on the Proposal and Plan stages to make sure that they were completed properly. SQA said, however, that no stage should be graded until **all five stages** were complete.

SQA said that, at the early stages of the project, assessors simply needed to ensure that the Proposal and Plan at least met the C criteria before the candidates moved on. Planning would continue throughout the project as candidates adjusted plans, solved problems, used contingencies and so on. Therefore by the end of the project there would be strong holistic evidence, showing the distance travelled, on which to base a candidate's grade for the Plan stage.

It is clear from the interviews that this message had not been understood by all centres.

SQA staff confirmed that they intended to cover the assessment of the Proposal and Plan stages at an event for new centres due to be held in September 2010.

## 3 Grade criteria

### 3.1 Centre interviewees

There were mixed views about the clarity of the grade criteria. Many interviewees found them clear and easy to use and said that applying them holistically was a professional decision for the assessor. Others were less comfortable with them and raised the following points:

- ◆ There is repetition in the criteria which could be tidied up so that candidates and assessors do not repeat themselves.
- ◆ Four interviewees noted the absence of criteria for grade B and said they felt that these should be developed — for them the difficulty lies in deciding what to do when a candidate gets some As but not all — at what point is a B grade awarded?
- ◆ One interviewee said that the assessor’s comments explaining a candidate’s superior performance might need to be extensive.

### 3.2 Survey of centres

The survey of centres asked:

**Which of the following reflects your views of the grade criteria for the Interdisciplinary Project Unit? In allocating grades to the work of candidates for the Interdisciplinary Project Unit I found the grade criteria:**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Easy to use	69.2%	9
Difficult to use	30.8%	4
Please use this space to provide a brief explanation of your response.		8
<b>Total who answered question</b>		<b>13</b>

The respondents gave mixed feedback. Some said that the criteria were easy to use whilst others:

- ◆ felt that there was not enough exemplification
- ◆ found taking a judgement on the overall grade difficult — especially where an A grade was to be awarded
- ◆ thought that the criteria lacked clarity, and had difficulty in relating these to a candidate’s project
- ◆ would have wanted exemplification of a B grade in the exemplar material

### 3.3 External verifiers

The external verifiers who responded to the survey all said that they found the grade criteria easy to use. Those external verifiers who were interviewed said



that the idea of holistic assessment did not appear to have caused any problems in centres, and that the grade criteria had been generally understood by assessors.

One external verifier noted that providing criteria for the B grade would not be necessary. Deciding the grade of a piece of work was a professional holistic decision by the assessor and internal verifier and, ultimately, the external verifier.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation exercise began in May 2010, before the first year of operation of the Scottish Baccalaureates was even over. It therefore represents very much a snapshot of events over the year rather than a detailed retrospective.

This means that, for the moment, any findings, conclusions and recommendations emerging from the evaluation are of necessity somewhat tentative. After the Scottish Baccalaureates have been offered for a few more years there will be stronger evidence on which to base more detailed conclusions.

It should be borne in mind that at the same time as the interviews with centres were in progress and the surveys were being responded to online, SQA was preparing to support the next year of the Scottish Baccalaureate. It is possible that changes implemented between the first and second year of operation will have taken account of issues raised in the evaluation. However, as these issues were identified by centres at the time of the evaluation being undertaken, they and any recommendations arising from them are recorded here.

The evaluation shows that the qualifications were developed, with the agreed content and structure, in time to be offered to learners at the start of the 2009-2010 session; support was provided for centres; the agreed quality assurance was implemented when it was required; and the successful candidates were certificated at the end of the session. SQA was therefore successful in implementing the Scottish Baccalaureates. The evaluation identified some matters which SQA may want to review and reconsider over the next year or two. These are indicated in the main body of the report and, where appropriate, recommendations relating to these issues have been made.

How successful the Scottish Baccalaureates will themselves be it is too early to say, given that there has been only one year of operation. While they appear for the moment to have been largely welcomed by learners and centres, their ultimate success and uptake will depend on how they are perceived in terms of assisting learners to prepare for higher education and employment. Therefore, it will only be once learners are in higher education or, indeed, once they have graduated and are in employment, that the full effectiveness of the Scottish Baccalaureates will be known.

## **Section A: Structure and content of, and skills developed by, the Scottish Baccalaureate**

- 1 The structure of the Scottish Baccalaureate is generally thought to meet the needs of the learners. However, for each qualification users have queries about the content – more so in the case of Languages. In Languages, users suggested including Drama, History, Modern Studies and Businesses Courses whilst in Science they suggested including Geography and Psychology Courses.

- 2 There is a balance to be struck between widening the options for learners so as to ensure that those who merit it have access to a high status qualification, and circumscribing the options to ensure that achieving the qualification is seen as something valuable.
- 3 SQA supplied statistics about the contributing Courses taken by Scottish Baccalaureate candidates in the first year. The candidates have not yet 'used' all the options currently available within either Baccalaureate.
- 4 It is understood that other work is progressing in SQA to identify whether options might be added or a further Scottish Baccalaureate developed.

**Recommendation:** SQA should keep uptake of the current courses as used in the Baccalaureate under review to help to inform its development activities. Further, in considering any additions or amendments, SQA should bear in mind the way in which the Baccalaureates in Science and Languages are perceived by HE and employers. Developing additional Scottish Baccalaureates, or widening the scope of the current Baccalaureates before these perceptions are known, could raise expectations in learners which are then not met. It could also result in more Courses being included in Baccalaureates with no resultant increase in learner numbers. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

- 5 Centres and learners seem generally to be comfortable with the mix of generic and specific learning in the IP. Even although they do not all agree as to what that mix is, they recognise and value the additional skills that are gained by undertaking the IP.
- 6 A possible consequence of this difference of opinion is that learners might develop projects with very different approaches — some very generic, and others much more grounded in the specific subject. It is not clear whether the different approaches taken by learners would be a problem in the longer term, but SQA may want to keep this under review in case further guidance is needed on what is expected of learners in undertaking their projects.

## **Section B: Value and recognition of the Scottish Baccalaureate**

- 7 Interviewees in centres and local authorities were largely positive about the Scottish Baccalaureate. They see an intrinsic value in undertaking the IP as a preparation for work in HE and employment. Some also think that a Pass or Distinction in a Scottish Baccalaureate could add value to an application for HE.
- 8 Learners were also positive about the benefits of the IP as a preparation for HE, and they valued the experience that undertaking the project had given them. However, a few noted that some HE institutions seemed unfamiliar with the Scottish Baccalaureate and the IP component within it.
- 9 It is too early to say whether expectations of the Scottish Baccalaureate or the IP in relation to entry to HE will be met. The Higher remains the qualification for entry, and whilst the Advanced Higher and Scottish

Baccalaureate may give some form of advanced entry to some institutions, the view, generally, is that advanced entry is unlikely to be attractive to learners, although it might be attractive to those who support and fund them in HE.

- 10 If learners' expectations as to the value of the Scottish Baccalaureate in giving entry to HE are not met, there could be a decline in uptake.
- 11 SQA has started discussing the new qualification with HE. Institutions have already started to take account of it in their literature and on their websites.

### **Section C: Participation in the Scottish Baccalaureates**

- 12 Interviewees in centres which opted to undertake the Scottish Baccalaureates in the first year were enthusiastic about the benefits and keen to get involved early.
- 13 There was a much less positive tone in the reported reasons for deciding not to offer the qualifications. Whilst there were some schools whose learners did not have the right mix of Courses, or which were remote from partners, there were also those which reportedly had not embarked on the qualifications because of a lack of commitment or innovation fatigue. This could be a concern for the continuing implementation of the Baccalaureate. Either such centres could continue to hold back, thus limiting potential candidate numbers, or if they did come forward with candidates, they might need even greater support than has been supplied to centres in the first year.
- 14 It is too early to say how the current economic climate might affect the uptake of the Scottish Baccalaureate in the longer term.

**Recommendation:** SQA may want to consider the range of issues associated with centres either dropping out or not getting involved at all, so as to identify possible barriers to learners in accessing the Scottish Baccalaureates. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

- 15 It is not easy to count the number of learner drop-outs since they do not have to commit until they make entry. The reasons for learners dropping out given by centres and learners are varied, and it is probably too early to come to any firm conclusion about them.

**Recommendation:** SQA might want to review the reasons identified for learners dropping out to see whether there are recurrent themes and, if so, to identify whether there are any actions SQA could take to address the issues identified.

### **Section D: Implementing the Scottish Baccalaureate in centres**

- 16 Partnerships with colleges and universities worked well in the first year. They allowed partner institutions to share their expertise with schools and provide a range of services for learners undertaking the IP. Partnership provided a bridge between learning at school and studying at university. Learners

welcomed the opportunity to meet with others undertaking the IP and enjoyed the more adult learning experience the college/university provided.

- 17 It is possible that the current economic situation may limit the number of partnerships, or may cause existing partnerships to cap numbers. A high learner drop-out rate would have implications here. With numbers of places in a partnership limited, there would be a need for centres to ensure that only those who were going to stay the course were accepted. It is not clear how centres could identify such learners, but it needs to be borne in mind that significant numbers of drop-outs not only would make managing partnerships impracticable in the longer term, but could also block other learners with staying power from getting involved in them in the first place. This could have implications for the further take-up of the Scottish Baccalaureates.
- 18 Some centres in remote locations found making any kind of partnership difficult if not impossible. Such centres are likely to have smaller numbers of candidates for the Scottish Baccalaureates, and might struggle to offer them at all.
- 19 SQA ensured that there were staff, documents and events in place to support the implementation of the Scottish Baccalaureates.
- 20 Centres spoke highly of the support provided by SQA staff
- 21 As new centres seek to offer the Scottish Baccalaureates, there will be a need to offer them support in doing so. SQA will want to ensure that new centres (especially those that might struggle more to offer the Baccalaureates) receive the support they require.

**Recommendation:** SQA may want to consider how to build capacity to support the Baccalaureates. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

- 22 Centres found the guidance material supplied by SQA to be very useful. It was a considerable task to develop and provide this in time for the implementation. SQA has already begun to augment its exemplar material.
- 23 Centres say that learners may be unsure about how to ask for feedback on their projects without this being seen as a weakness, and assessors may be uncertain about how to give support without being over-directive.
- 24 It was noted that some learners had found the *Assessment Support Packs* complex and difficult to understand. They thought that the documents were too technical and used off-putting terminology.

**Recommendation:** SQA may wish to consider developing material on assessment addressed directly to the learners to assist them in undertaking the IP. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

- 25 Events offered by SQA were much appreciated by centres. Interviewees said that the Quality Assurance event (run in February 2010) would need to be

offered to new centres for session 2010-11 but should be offered much earlier in the session. At the time of writing It is understood that SQA is offering some aspects of this event in the course of September/October 2010.

- 26 Several respondents said they would have welcomed more workshop activity at events, and suggested some form of 'standards workshops'.

**Recommendation:** SQA may want to review its future events to see whether it can offer further elements of group work so as to allow teachers to participate in more discussion about standards in the IP. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

- 27 In current and future years SQA is likely to want to:

- ◆ offer workshops/events to new centres
- ◆ provide updates and refreshers to existing centres
- ◆ market to potential centres

The activities offered in these three types of event are different, and therefore SQA will need to provide tailored events to the different user groups.

**Recommendation:** SQA may want to review the range of events to be offered to support the further implementation of the Scottish Baccalaureates, to ensure that their aims meet the needs of the intended audience. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

- 28 There were concerns about finding time to attend events and given the current economic climate, these concerns are likely to increase. Some interviewees have a preference for half-day events and others for a full day. Preferences relate probably to how easy it is for an individual to attend an event and also to be present at work for some of the day concerned. There is probably no one way that will suit all. However, supplementing workshops/events with activities on SQA Academy might be helpful.

- 29 There are already presentations about the Scottish Baccalaureates and associated case studies on the SQA website. Augmenting these, and making them prerequisites for attending events, could help to ensure that workshop activities on the day are to the point and based on the understanding that some of the preliminaries have been undertaken by the participants in advance.

**Recommendation:** SQA should review the events to be offered to current and new centres to identify the most efficient use of time in undertaking them, and whether some activities can be carried out online or through SQA Academy. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

- 30 The evaluation identified a range of assessment issues which centres suggested as possible topics for future guidance and support.

**Recommendation:** SQA may wish to review the assessment issues identified when considering work plans. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

### **Section E: Quality Assurance – the process**

31 SQA developed a process to quality assure the IP. This process was predicated on approval before offering, centres operating internal assessment and verification processes, and external verification by SQA.

32 SQA staff visited any schools which had problems meeting the approval criteria to agree a means of overcoming these problems. Once the visit had been made approval was given.

**Recommendation:** SQA may want to ensure that there is a way of confirming that advice given to centres is acted upon. Otherwise it would only be at the time of external verification that any problems with internal assessment and verification would be identified. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

33 Interviewees from centres said that they operated a range of internal assessment and verification systems — some in partnership with others, and some on their own. They described a variety of ways of assuring the quality of assessments. Opinions as to how effective these systems were varied amongst centres. No recommendation is made for this point at this stage in view of the external verifiers' comments at paragraph 42 below. However, SQA should keep this matter under review.

34 The IP is subject to central verification. In the first year, SQA offered a development event — the Quality Forum — as a lead-up to the central verification event. The Quality Forum allowed centres to discuss the operation of their internal assessment and verification systems with others, and to review each others' candidate evidence for the IP. The Quality Forum was well received by centres, who welcomed the chance to see how others were applying the criteria.

35 At the central verification event the sample evidence for the IP, supplied by centres, was considered by the external verifiers for the Scottish Baccalaureates in Science and Languages.

36 The Senior Verifier's Report for Science and the Senior Verifier's Report for Languages show that, in the main, internal assessment and verification were working in centres and that the external verifiers for both specialisms were broadly satisfied that assessment had been carried out in accordance with the assessment criteria. However, some centres were found not to be applying the criteria appropriately, and these were informed that they needed to improve their processes for the future.

37 There was no time in this project to carry out an exercise to relate the information on approval decisions to the findings about individual centres at external verification.

**Recommendation:** SQA should undertake a project to compare approval decisions with the findings at external verification. This will help to inform approval activities for the current year, and may also identify areas where centres generally require support, which might be supplied by SQA, or which should be highlighted as areas of importance in guidance. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

**Recommendation:** SQA should arrange for centres which were found at external verification not to be applying the standard appropriately to be visited in the next few months to ensure that they have plans in place for improving their practice and are acting upon these. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

38 The Quality Forum was well received by centre interviewees and external verifiers, although there were one or two suggestions for improvement. They valued sharing their internal verification systems with each other and having the opportunity to review other centres' evidence. However, some had been expecting more of a 'standards workshop' approach. There is more on the future structure of the Quality Forum in Section G, and so conclusions and recommendations about the Quality Forum are shown there.

## **Section F: Quality Assurance — issues**

39 There are concerns about the quantity of information that assessors need to supply for each candidate and the time that supplying this will take. As the number of candidates increases, the worry is that the assessment task could overwhelm assessors. One interviewee presented the opposite view — that increasing familiarity will ease the assessment task. Therefore it seems that, despite SQA's guidance and support, many assessors are still concerned about what, and how much, to write. Many of these views were, however, expressed before the recent publication of the additional exemplars. Assessors in centres might already be benefiting from that material.

40 In the main, centres are satisfied with the method of assessment of the IP. However, a number of interviewees still have reservations about this because of concerns that:

- ◆ assessing the process might inadvertently bring into the assessment aspects that are not directly related to the assessment criteria
- ◆ the robustness of assessment and internal verification in different centres may be variable

41 This makes it important to ensure that assessors are clear in their comments about what the candidate did and why particular grades were awarded. Whilst this information is helpful to the candidate, it is essential for the internal verifier and the external verifiers in their decision making.

**Recommendation:** SQA should keep the matter of guidance on assessors' comments under review to identify whether the recently-published exemplars have helped to reduce concerns about:



- ◆ the quantity of information required
- ◆ the purpose of providing such information
- ◆ internal quality assurance in centres

In the longer term it might be necessary to develop more guidance, but for the moment no recommendation is made to this effect. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

42 SQA interviewees recognise that the model of the Quality Forum is likely to change over the coming years. They are already considering other ways of sharing information on assessment and internal verification practices in centres, as well as facilitating some form of peer review. They outlined two models for different ways of doing this by means of the Quality Forum. In addition, the external verifiers suggested more effective ways of using the time for the Quality Forum and central verification.

43 The Scottish Baccalaureates are only just into their second year, and there are still concerns about the rigour of internal assessment for the IP. As centres become more confident, both in their own internal assessment and that of other centres, and as SQA receives information from approval and external verification activities that centres operate robust systems, it may be possible to consider developing models of external verification that are more inclusive. Such models might include involving centres in external verification. However, it is too early to start to do this at this point.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the Quality Forum and central verification processes remain separate for the second (and possibly subsequent) years of operation. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

**Recommendation:** SQA might want to give some consideration to the external verifiers' proposals to make the most effective use of time at the Quality Forum. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

44 Centres saw a value in participating in the Quality Forum, especially one including some form of 'standards workshop'.

**Recommendation:** In developing the format for the Quality Forum in the second year of operation, SQA might want to consider including more of a workshop approach in reviewing evidence supplied by centres. In any event, SQA should ensure that, at such workshops, the delegates reviewing and commenting on the work of others do so separate from the delegates of the centre whose work is being considered. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

45 The external verifiers suggested amendments to assessment and internal verification documentation to improve operations. Particularly, they suggested developing a form to allow centres to describe their internal verification systems.

**Recommendation:** SQA may wish to consider developing a form for centres' internal verification. In addition SQA should review existing documentation to

ensure that centres are able to confirm that internal verification has taken place. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

### **Section G: Grades**

- 46 Some centres were still concerned at the time of the interviews that getting a B or C grade at the Proposal and Plan stages could later prevent a learner from gaining an A grade for the IP as a whole.
- 47 Although SQA had clarified the situation to say that grades should only be given at the very last stage, it seems that some centres may still be unsure. SQA was going to cover the assessment of the Proposal and Plan stages at an event for new centres in September 2010.

**Recommendation:** SQA should ensure that any advice and guidance arising out of the September 2010 event is passed on to all centres that offered the Scottish Baccalaureates in the first year of operation. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

- 48 Assessors and internal verifiers are continuing to develop their understanding of the grade criteria and some still find difficulty with them. There is a difference of opinion as to whether developing criteria for the B grade would be helpful or not. Most are comfortable with making the professional judgement, but others want more guidance.
- 49 SQA has recently developed additional exemplar material, and this may provide further help to many of those who identified problems during the interviews. Therefore, while no formal recommendation is made, it is suggested that SQA keep this matter under review and reconsider it after a further year of operation.

# Annex 1: History of development of the Scottish Baccalaureates

In its manifesto for the election of May 2007, the Scottish National Party stated its intention to introduce Scottish Baccalaureates in Science and in Languages. The qualifications were intended to reward high achievement for young people studying Higher and Advanced Higher courses in Science and Languages, and to improve their employment prospects. Increasing the number of highly qualified people in these two areas would, it was hoped, contribute to Scotland's sustainable economic growth.

SQA had already undertaken research for other projects that touched upon possible models for Baccalaureate-type qualifications. This work had included:

- ◆ reviewing Baccalaureate models in use in other countries
- ◆ developing outlines of possible models for such qualifications

By May 2008, the Scottish Government had agreed a model for the Scottish Baccalaureate, built on Higher and Advanced Higher Courses and an Interdisciplinary Project (IP). SQA was asked to:

- ◆ develop proposals for the specification and assessment of the Interdisciplinary Project (IP)
- ◆ agree the final structure of the Baccalaureates
- ◆ engage with partner organisations and key stakeholders, including higher education (HE), further education (FE) and employer organisations, in developing and implementing the qualifications

By August 2009, SQA had implemented the Scottish Baccalaureates and centres had started to offer them to learners.

## The development of the qualifications

Responsibility for developing the new qualifications lay initially with SQA's Policy and New Products Team. As the qualifications moved towards implementation, the Development Teams took over more of the work.

The IP was validated, and both Baccalaureates were put through operational validation (the process which ensures that operational requirements for implementation are met).

SQA was able to carry out engagement with stakeholders through meetings with individuals and discussion with particular bodies and groups. It also set up three stakeholder groups to manage the development of the new qualifications. These also provided a means whereby stakeholders would be able to be involved in the development of the Baccalaureates.

The groups were:

- ◆ The BaccaLaureate Key Partners Group (KPG). The remit of this group was to work with SQA at a strategic level to provide advice and guidance during the development of the Scottish BaccaLaureates. Membership was drawn from schools, universities, colleges, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Government, local authorities and employers.
- ◆ Two Qualification Design Teams (QDTs) – one for Science and one for Languages. The remit of these teams was to advise on the design of the BaccaLaureate Arrangements documents, the IP specification and support materials. Membership was drawn from schools, colleges, universities, HMIe and local authorities.

## **The specification of the Scottish BaccaLaureate**

In May 2008, the proposed specification of the qualifications was an IP at Advanced Higher, Mathematics/English at Higher, two sciences/languages at Higher, and one science/language at Advanced Higher. The proposed criteria for Distinction were an A grade in the Advanced Higher, and at least a B in all other components.

As SQA began to discuss the Scottish BaccaLaureates with stakeholders it became clear that there were reservations about the proposed specification. It was suggested that:

- ◆ offering three languages was impracticable — two specialist Courses provided a more realistic option
- ◆ one Advanced Higher was not ambitious enough — two would be preferred
- ◆ Advanced Higher Mathematics should be included as an eligible subject in the Science BaccaLaureate

Following discussions with Scottish Government it was agreed that SQA should undertake ‘focused engagement’ on the specification with key individuals and groups. SQA therefore developed an ‘Options’ paper, and put it out for comment to a number of stakeholder groups. It provided:

- ◆ three options for the specification of the BaccaLaureate, asking for comments on currency and practicability
- ◆ the option to substitute free-standing Units in Language for one Higher Course
- ◆ the possibility of broadening options in the Languages specification to include Business Courses

The stakeholder groups comprised, in addition to the Key Partners Group itself:

- ◆ Science Qualifications Development Team
- ◆ Languages Qualifications Development Team
- ◆ Head Teacher Forum
- ◆ SCIS Head Teacher Forum
- ◆ Deans of Science
- ◆ SFEU Curriculum Managers

SQA's Summary Report on the 'Options' paper noted that a total of 31 out of a possible 140 responses to the consultation were received. The responses were discussed at KPG's second meeting in October 2008. These showed a preference for the option which had the following specification:

- ◆ two Advanced Higher Courses from the list of eligible Courses
- ◆ one different Higher Course from the list
- ◆ in Science, one of the Courses must be Mathematics; in Languages, one of the Courses must be English/Gaidhlig/ESOL
- ◆ Advanced Higher project (80-hour SQA Unit, with 16 SCQF points at SCQF level 7)

Following discussions at the KPG, SQA reported to Scottish Government on the outcome of the engagement activities and:

- ◆ recommended amendments to the proposed Baccalaureate specification
- ◆ recommended amendments to the proposed criteria for Distinction
- ◆ outlined the proposed approach to the IP
- ◆ outlined further work on the quality assurance model proposed by the KPG

The specification recommended by SQA, and subsequently approved by Scottish Government, was:

### **Science**

- ◆ Two Courses from the eligible list of sciences
- ◆ Mathematics Course
- ◆ Interdisciplinary Project

### **Languages**

- ◆ Two Courses from the eligible list of languages
- ◆ English/Gaidhlig/ESOL Course
- ◆ Interdisciplinary Project

In both Science and Languages any two of the Courses would be taken at Advanced Higher level, with one at Higher. The IP would be at Advanced Higher level.

The criteria for Distinction recommended by SQA and subsequently approved by the Scottish Government, were:

- ◆ Grade A in one eligible Advanced Higher Course
- ◆ Grade A in one other component
- ◆ Grade B or above in all other components

On 27 November 2008, the Cabinet Secretary announced the revised specification of the Scottish Baccalaureates, including the criteria for Distinction.

## Assessment and quality assurance

During November 2008, two residential meetings took place to develop the Assessment Support Pack for each Scottish Baccalaureate. The writers developed:

- ◆ templates to meet the five pieces of mandatory evidence required for the IP
- ◆ exemplars of projects

On 28 November 2008, SQA ran an Information Event on the Scottish Baccalaureate. This event provided key stakeholders, including representatives from local authorities, Scotland's colleges, HE, employers, and other stakeholder groups, with information on the background to the development of the Baccalaureate and the revised specification.

There were questions from delegates about the assessment and quality assurance model for the IP. SQA representatives outlined the likely model and used the occasion to gather delegates' opinions on it.

Delegates expressed support for the introduction of Scottish Baccalaureates and the specification presented, and for working with SQA to develop a robust model of internal assessment and quality assurance for the IP.

In January 2009, the assessment and quality assurance model was agreed and information on it was sent to all centres. It was based on:

- ◆ approval of centres before they could offer the IP
- ◆ centres having and operating internal assessment and internal verification systems
- ◆ SQA providing external verification associated with an element of peer review in the form of a *Quality Forum*

## Support for centres

In December 2008, SQA sent the *Scottish Baccalaureate Information Pack* to all centres. The pack included:

- ◆ the background to the development
- ◆ rationale
- ◆ details of the Baccalaureate specification and the IP
- ◆ information on the support available to centres
- ◆ information for parents and learners
- ◆ a response form for centres planning to offer the Baccalaureate in August 2009 (the 'early adopters')

In March 2009, SQA ran a support network event for 102 delegates from 63 centres wanting to offer Scottish Baccalaureates in 2009 –10. The aim of this event was to:

- ◆ provide centres with information on the development and structure of the Baccalaureates
- ◆ support centres as they prepared for the assessment and quality assurance of the IP

Feedback from those attending was that they had been reassured by the support they had received and by the information provided on verification.

Concerns expressed centred on the time required:

- ◆ to set up partnerships and internal verification processes in the first year
- ◆ for teachers' professional development

In April 2009, SQA formally launched the Scottish Baccalaureate in Science and the Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages, and published on the SQA website:

- ◆ the Unit specifications for the IP
- ◆ the *Arrangements* documents for the Scottish Baccalaureates

At the end of May the *Assessment Support Packs* for the Baccalaureates were published on the SQA website.

In June 2009, the approval application form for the IP was made available to centres. The deadline for centres to submit applications was 18 September 2009.

## **Working with higher education stakeholders**

In March 2009, SQA offered a Scottish Baccalaureate information event for HE stakeholders. The aim of this event was to provide those attending with detailed information on the new qualifications, and to give them an opportunity to discuss their relevance to HE. The feedback from the event was that:

- ◆ the Baccalaureates, and in particular the IP, would provide an excellent transition programme from school to HE
- ◆ HE wanted to recognise the Baccalaureate, but would need to think of creative and equitable ways to do this

In June 2009, the UCAS tariff rating of the IP was confirmed as 45 points for a C grade, 55 points for a B grade and 65 points for an A grade — the equivalent of half an Advanced Higher Course.

## **Marketing**

SQA included the Scottish Baccalaureates in its marketing and communications for Curriculum for Excellence. It developed a promotional plan for supporting the implementation and operation of the qualifications. The plan covered facilitating HE recognition, increasing learner uptake and the numbers of centres offering, and encouraging partnership working amongst established centres. It included a range of marketing, public relations and research activities.

This promotional plan is still in operation. There are specific activities which are aimed at teachers and managers in centres, appointees, parents, learners, universities, employers, stakeholder groups and SQA staff. The emphasis moves from one group to another as the implementation of the new qualifications progresses.

Some of the activities in the plan were only just starting at the time of the interviews. For example, SQA, having seen the first Baccalaureate candidates certificated, was beginning to increase its engagement with employers. It was intending to build on the recently-published case studies to emphasise to employers the benefits of the Scottish Baccalaureate and the skills that learners develop as a result of undertaking the IP.

There had been coverage in the national press during the first year. This had reflected on uptake figures, the response of universities to the new qualification, and the cost of development. Coverage in the local press had tended to focus on celebrating the achievement of the learners.

### **Conclusions and recommendations on the development process**

- 1 To develop and implement a qualification in a little over two years was a tall order, and SQA must feel a real sense of achievement in having done so successfully.
- 2 Because of the tight schedule, some development activities were approached differently from those usually followed when developing qualifications. The qualifications contained only one new element, in the form of the IP, and this was validated.
- 3 It is clear that SQA took opportunities to consult on the structure and content of the Baccalaureates — the ‘Options’ paper being an example of this. As a result SQA was able to amend the structure of the qualifications in the development stages to meet concerns raised by stakeholders.

**Recommendation:** SQA should put any amendments to existing Baccalaureates or any development of new Baccalaureates through validation. **This recommendation has been actioned.**

- 4 Once the Scottish Baccalaureates’ qualification structure and quality assurance arrangements were confirmed, SQA was able to start to develop a range of processes and publications to support their implementation. In view of the tight timescale, implementation followed closely upon development.
- 5 SQA began discussions with HE institutions and UCAS on the matter of recognition. UCAS points were agreed and HE gave a positive response to the development of the Scottish Baccalaureates. However, HE is still considering the extent to which recognition can be given.



## **Annex 2: Interviewees**

The following organisations participated in interviews for the evaluation, and thanks are due to them for their time and assistance.

### **Representatives from the following areas of SQA:**

Marketing and Communications

Baccalaureate Development

Policy and New Products

Quality Assurance

Science and Technology

Approval and Verification

### **External verifiers**

### **Representatives from the following schools**

Arbroath High School

Breadalbane Academy

Bridge of Don Academy

Clydebank High School

Craigholme School

Crieff High School

Dollar Academy

Eastwood High School

Holyrood Secondary School

Langholm Academy

Portobello High School

St Joseph's College

St Modan's High School

Trinity Academy

Williamwood High School

### **Scottish Council of Independent Schools**

### **Colleges and Universities**

Forth Valley College

Langside College

Abertay University

University of the West of Scotland

### **Local Authorities**

Dumfries and Galloway

Dundee

Edinburgh

North Lanarkshire

## Annex 3: References

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