



**Isle of Man
Government**

Reiltys Ellan Vannin



Consultation on 14-16 Qualification Reform

Consultation Response

**Department of Education and Children
Rheynn Ynsee as Paitchyn**

July 2014

Consultation on 14-16 Qualification Reform

Introduction

In June 2013, the UK Minister for Education announced extensive reforms to the GCSEs studied by 14-16 year olds in England. These reforms will lead towards the introduction of a new grading system and the end of both coursework/controlled assessment and tiered (differentiated) papers in nearly all GCSE subjects from first teaching in September 2015. Following consultation, these changes were rejected by the ministers for education and the examination boards in both Wales and Northern Ireland, resulting in the break up of the long standing "three country awards".

Faced with an end to the current GCSEs in England, and a range of alternative ways forward, the Department of Education and Children made a decision to consult as widely as possible on the best way forward for schools in the Isle of Man. A consultation period extended from 2 April until 16 May 2014. Responses were gathered to ten key statements that related to the principles and issues involved.

The consultation identified the following options:

- i) The new GCSEs being introduced in England – GCSE (England)
- ii) The International GCSE – IGCSE
- iii) The Scottish qualifications – National 4 and National 5

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to express their concerns or preferences and, in the expectation of large number of responses, were asked to keep their comments as brief and focussed as possible.

A total of over 840 responses were received, 92% responding through an on-line survey. A request for respondents to indicate the main capacity in which they were offering a response showed that 64.8% of responses came from parents, 24.2% from teachers, 6% from students and 4.8% from employers. Some respondents answered as a spokesperson for an organisation or group.

The ten statements offered responses on a 5-point 'likert', attitude scale from 'strong agreement' to 'strong disagreement'. All of the statements made it possible for individuals to make their views, including strong disagreement with the statement, clear through their chosen response.

There was some item non-response but most statements attracted over 820 responses. Just over 50% of respondents offered an additional written comment ranging in length from 1 line to several pages.

Summary of Responses

1. Statement 1

Educational Qualifications offered in schools in the Isle of Man should be as politically independent of other governments as possible.

	All Respondents	Teachers
Strongly disagree	5.5%	7.9%
Disagree	14.6%	13.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	20.9%	19.2%
Agree	31.6%	32.1%
Strongly agree	27.4%	27.1%

- 1.1 Over 59% of all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Fewer than 15% disagreed, with a further 5% expressing strong disagreement.
- 1.2 Over 59% of teachers responding to the consultation agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Fewer than 14% disagreed with a further 8% expressing strong disagreement.
- 1.3 There was no consistent thread in the comments that could be construed as relating to the issue of the political independence of examinations. A few respondents referred to the UK Secretary of State for Education by name, some supportive of his "striving for excellence" and some concerned that his "political promises have been watered down". Others claimed: "...education has for far too long been a political football in England – if it is possible to escape from that situation we should"; "We are an independent nation, we must make independent choices for our children, not just blindly follow England". The term "political football" was used by many respondents. A number of respondents voiced their concern over political uncertainty in England: "The future of education in the UK is very uncertain, with the next general election it is highly likely the reforms could be reversed or the system changed significantly again". One of the secondary headteachers commented: "I agree strongly with the basic premise in (the question)... - education should be as politically independent as it can be". One respondent commented: "Exams should not be able to be changed at the whim of each new minister or political party".

2. Statement 2

Education is primarily more about 'learning' than about the qualifications that young people obtain at the end of it.

	All Respondents	Teachers
Strongly disagree	8.1%	5.9%
Disagree	28.6%	15.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	16.8%	21.9%
Agree	31.9%	39.9%
Strongly agree	14.6%	17.1%

- 2.1 The purpose of the statement had been to gather views on the purpose of education and the place of learning and qualifications within education.
- 2.2 The total responses showed a bi-modal distribution in that the two most common responses were 'agree' and 'disagree'. Nearly 37% of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that education is more about learning than about qualifications. Over 46% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.
- 2.3 Responses from teachers showed a different pattern. Over 57% of teachers who responded to the consultation agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Fewer than 22%

disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- 2.4 Only a small minority of respondents offered written comments that could be related to this statement.
- 2.5 Some comments from teachers included: "I do not teach to an exam. I teach for understanding – no matter what the exam board may be" and "Good teachers teach their subject, not the exam paper.."
- 2.6 The importance of learning, over qualifications, was supported by some employers: "Careers are no longer linear with many employers looking for transferable skills as opposed to specialist qualifications"; "As an employer, we don't need people who are good at passing exams. We need people who can learn new concepts and skills, apply them to new and complex situations and relate to others – working well in a team as well as individually".
- 2.7 Such a view was supported by other responses: "I feel there is way too much emphasis placed on teaching children how to pass exams, and not enough placed on teaching them how to reason and apply the skills they are taught"
- 2.8 Other respondents stressed the importance of qualifications: "...rightly or wrongly... employers will look firstly at the qualifications someone has when applying for a job"; "While learning is very important, grades are also important in order to get university places..."; "... qualifications are important as they are used by employers, HE/FE providers and others for selection".

3 Statement 3

Qualifications should be based solely on end of course examination papers where possible.

	All Respondents	Teachers
Strongly disagree	36.1%	33.8%
Disagree	40.1%	41.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	10.0%	11.7%
Agree	10.2%	8.3%
Strongly agree	3.5%	5.0%

- 3.1 Over 76% of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea that qualifications should be based solely on end of course examinations. Over a third of all respondents strongly disagreed with this statement. Fewer than 14% of all respondents agreed with the statement.
- 3.2 The response from teachers was almost identical. 75% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Fewer than 14% of teachers agreed with the statement.

4 Statement 4

Qualifications should be based on a variety of forms of assessment including coursework

	All Respondents	Teachers
Strongly disagree	2.7%	2.9%
Disagree	7.7%	6.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	6.6%	7.5%
Agree	37.6%	41.8%
Strongly agree	45.5%	41.0%

- 4.1 Question 4 was very closely linked to Question 3 – making a similar statement in reverse. The response was even stronger.
- 4.2 83% of both all respondents and of teachers agreed, or strongly agreed, that qualifications should be based on a variety of forms of assessment including coursework. Approximately 10% of both all respondents and of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.
- 4.3 Responses to questions 3 and 4 were more strongly supportive of qualifications that used a broad assessment base than had been expected. There was a very strong steer here in support of retaining some element of coursework/controlled assessment in the Island's 14-16 qualifications
- 4.4 Support for retaining coursework came from a wide range of respondents. A response from the Department of Economic Development offered: "It is the Employment and Skills Group's view (DED) that qualifications based solely on end-of-course examination papers do not necessarily help employability skills. It is important to the Department of Economic Development that whichever option is chosen, it ensures that the Island's young people have good skills for employers and good, well-respected grades for them to go on to higher education."
- 4.5 In a set of submissions identified as from members of the School Council at Castle Rushen High School, 8 out of 9 pupils agreed or strongly agreed that qualifications should be based on a variety of forms of assessment including coursework.
- 4.6 Many respondents spoke of pupils who can demonstrate their learning better in coursework than in examinations: "Not all children flourish under exam conditions, the ability to submit coursework is surely a helpful part of the mix"; "... not all pupils learn/retain knowledge to the same standard; coursework and exams seems the fairest way to achieve a qualification"; "My son (like me) will thrive on a pure examination approach, but my daughter does not operate the same way and demonstrates her ability much more effectively via coursework/assessments"; "It would be a tragedy to move away from having a coursework element. Students learn in different ways and many would be disadvantaged if qualifications were dependent on memory".
- 4.7 Other respondents recognised the benefits of using coursework to broaden the base of assessment: "...assessment should take place over the period of studying as opposed to just a final exam"; "Coursework is absolutely no doubt a very positive part of learning and research for a child"; "I strongly feel that qualifications should be based on a variety of forms of assessment including coursework in order to...give a truer reflection on overall performance"; "I strongly disagree with the move to exam only based assessment. As an employer and also a parent, the ability to regurgitate a text book does not mean that a person is equipped to deal with the real world".
- 4.8 There were many comments that supported the idea that: "A mixture of coursework and examinations is the best option" and several respondents that believed, "To return to a system that relies solely on examinations is a step backwards".
- 4.9 A significant number of responses made a plea for students with special education needs: "I am very concerned as a mother of a child with dyslexia and who has Asperger syndrome. In a purely exam based situation he would panic considerably and not be able to show his full potential"; "I work a lot with lower ability students and the English GCSE system would limit what they could access on the paper and achieve...Students all learn in different ways and as educators we should use this to show the student to the best of their potential".

- 4.10 The minority view, that disagreed with the statement that qualifications should be based on a variety of forms of assessment including coursework, appeared to be based on two main points: that coursework may involve unfair practices and that it generates an enormous amount of worry. Some respondents suggested that "Coursework is not always done by the student"; "Coursework... is too open to abuse"; "Coursework can be, and is, manipulated by the teachers to improve grades and therefore should go". One teacher observed that "I feel that the inordinate amount of time and effort, stress and worry, generated by coursework in my subject area vastly outweighs any gain in terms of student learning".

5. Statement 5

The Isle of Man should be prepared to follow qualifications other than those in England if there are clear advantages to our students in doing so.

	All Respondents	Teachers
Strongly disagree	3.7%	3.3%
Disagree	3.9%	2.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	3.1%	2.5%
Agree	34.8%	37.6%
Strongly agree	54.6%	54.1%

- 5.1 The question behind Statement 5 was whether there would be a strong determination for the Island's education system to maintain its tie to the core qualifications in England. The views of all respondents again differed very little from those of teachers. Fewer than 8% of all respondents and 6% of teachers disagreed with the statement and did not wish the Island to follow qualifications other than those in England even if there were advantages in doing so. Over 89% of all respondents and almost 92% of teachers expressed the view that the Island should be prepared to follow qualifications other than those in England should there be advantages to our students in doing so.
- 5.2 The strength of these responses provided a clear mandate for countenancing change from the tie to the examinations used in England.
- 5.3 There appeared to be a wide range of reasons for the willingness to consider a move away from the qualifications in England if it might be advantageous to do so. Some respondents took the line that the GCSE changes in England involve too much political influence: "English GCSEs are too politically driven"; "Having seen how education policies can be quickly changed and reversed I believe the IOM should separate itself from England"; "It concerns me that the English changes coming into force could very well be changed yet again upon the outcome of the next general election". Several parents spoke of personal experience: "My daughter (Year 11) has already been disadvantaged by UK government interfering in English spoken word which now no longer counts as part of her GCSE".
- 5.4 Other respondents took issue with the focus of the curriculum and the nature of the assessment: "I find Gove's proposals to be ill advised and motivated by the wish to return to an outdated and undesirable O level type exam"; "my least preferred option is the GCSE England as I think this will lead to a curriculum which, at best, is dull and knowledge based from primary upwards, while not developing learning skills"; "I believe qualifications should be tiered to ability levels"; "It seems wrong that all abilities would sit the same exam under the GCSE England as this would be totally demoralizing for the less academic students".
- 5.5 The minority of respondents who expressed the view that the Isle of Man should follow the English changes also offered a wide range of views: "My child is currently in Year 8... For him, the least disruption would be to follow the English system"; "I am concerned that a move away from England cuts us off from a vast network of support"; "Mr Gove is striving for excellence... we would need a compelling reason to sever our link with the London-led

qualifications"; "As our children are likely to go to University in England and/or get jobs over there, I feel it could damage their prospects with employers if we did not follow what England do"; "We are not large enough to move away from the system in England".

6. Statement 6

Following the Scottish education system would mean pupils obtaining Scottish National 4 and National 5 qualifications (in place of GCSE) and Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers (in place of A levels). I would find this acceptable.

	All Respondents	Teachers
Strongly disagree	23.5%	23.8%
Disagree	27.8%	23.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	18.2%	17.1%
Agree	20.7%	21.7%
Strongly agree	9.8%	13.8%

- 6.1 Views on Scottish qualifications were mixed but over 51% of all respondents and nearly 48% of teachers indicated that they would not find it acceptable for schools in the Isle of Man to deliver Scottish qualifications. Teachers were marginally more supportive of the Scottish qualifications with over 35% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would find these qualifications acceptable compared with just over 30% of all respondents.
- 6.2 This question brought many and varied responses from educationalists in particular. The Island's secondary headteachers were divided on the Scottish qualifications. One headteacher responded: "My strongly held view that the Scottish model would provide the best basis for our future education system is founded on three premises: 1 It is the only option that is coherently and recently planned for all students of school age. 2 This option is the only one that genuinely puts life success outcomes first. 3 This option is the only one that has enough differentiated flexibility built in to meet the needs of 16-18 year olds." A second headteacher commented: "I feel that the Scottish Exam system is a step too far". Another suggested, "The Scottish education system most closely matches my views of how students should learn in schools. Unfortunately, the system is still untried in that we have yet to see the results from the first cohort of students... Teachers trained in England may not want to join a system with which they are unfamiliar".
- 6.3 There were numerous comments weighing the educational benefits and the drawbacks of using the Scottish qualifications: "While I believe that the Scottish qualification system is both effective and successful, a change to the Scottish system would require major reorganisation and retraining"; "Our Manx curriculum is dispositions-led; the Scottish model is the best 'fit' for this, but my view is that there are currently too many questions and potential issues with moving to this in the timescale"; "Scottish system, whilst an excellent system is a step too far in the current economic climate and once taken could not be reversed".
- 6.4 Opposition to using the Scottish qualifications was based on many different concerns. "I would be most unhappy with introducing the Scottish system as this is such a fundamental change from where we are now"; "Scotland hasn't bedded its new system in fully yet"; "I feel a move to the Scottish education system would be more disruptive and could impact on recruitment and retaining of teachers"; "I cannot believe you are even considering moving to the Scottish system when they're about to have a referendum on whether to be part of Britain or not"; "The Scottish system... leaves the Island exposed to the political will of the Scottish parliament"; "To adopt the Scottish system would have a massive impact on the history that we teach".
- 6.5 Support for the Scottish qualifications also brought varied arguments: "Scotland has always

produced a quality education system and we should be open to learn lessons there rather than purely focusing on a politically-driven English education agenda"; "I believe that adopting the Scottish system would give the Island the opportunity to develop a more inclusive and cohesive curriculum for all key stages – one that focuses on the needs of the learner"; "The Scottish system is excellent and attractive because it provides a clear progression throughout primary and secondary school with up to date thinking and a well individualized assessment structure".

7. **Statement 7**

Following the International GCSE would mean moving away from qualifications linked to an individual jurisdiction at 16 but pupils would progress to A levels or International A levels. I would find this acceptable.

	All Respondents	Teachers
Strongly disagree	2.1%	2.1%
Disagree	5.4%	4.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	11.6%	13.2%
Agree	47.6%	49.4%
Strongly agree	34.6%	31.3%

- 7.1 Views on the International GCSE were overwhelmingly supportive. Over 82% of all respondents and nearly 81%% of teachers indicated that they would find it acceptable for schools in the Isle of Man to deliver the International GCSE. Just 7.5% of all respondents and 6.2% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The strength of support for the IGCSE was stronger than anticipated by the Department, but not unwelcome.
- 7.2 One secondary headteacher wrote: "I feel the IGCSE offers a reasonable compromise that would allow the option to continue fairly closely to the position we are presently in. This would allow more time to see if the English system settles down and actually begins to make sense".
- 7.3 The perceived stability of the IGCSE was seen as beneficial by many respondents: "My preference would be to go with the IGCSE... it seems that this is the route with the least amount of upheaval for everyone involved"; "We need stability with a system that challenges our students at all levels... I believe the IGCSE will do this without political intervention"; "The clear format for the Department to follow in this instance is the IGCSE. These comments are made for a number of reasons, principally that it allows the Department, parents and pupils a stable, well-recognised system... None of the other systems offers this long-term stability"; "IGCSE – the only option that is tried, tested, proven and used by a high proportion of independent schools, ie those that have choice"; "The IGCSE seems similar to the current system, which I feel is quite acceptable".
- 7.4 Other respondents were attracted to the breadth of assessment: "I prefer the IGCSE as it is suited to all abilities with the inclusion of coursework and tiered papers;" "IGCSE appears to cater for all individual pupils' needs. If we opt for a system that just offers assessment in the form of a final examination we are saying that one size fits all, which we all know is incorrect".
- 7.5 A sense of the appropriateness of an international qualifications for an international business centre was apparent in some responses: "The IGCSE is more attractive to business/ employers as an international qualification which sits well with the IOM as an international centre"; "The IGCSE appears to be a better option as we retain our status as international and not tagging along with other countries".
- 7.6 The relatively small minority who disagreed with the acceptability of the IGCSE expressed

concerns such as the "...potential disadvantage that the A* grading may be perceived as being below the GCSE England grade 9" and "I believe that the IGCSE will not be accessible for many of the middle/low ability students".

8. Statement 8

Following the new GCSEs in England would mean a reduction in tiered papers and coursework and a move to exam grading designed to reduce the number of students who achieve a higher grade. I would find this acceptable.

	All Respondents	Teachers
Strongly disagree	34.1%	30.6%
Disagree	33.2%	38.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	11.7%	14.9%
Agree	14.7%	11.2%
Strongly agree	6.3%	5.4%

- 8.1 Only 21% of all respondents, and 16.6% of teachers, indicated that they would find the new GCSEs in England acceptable. Over two thirds of all respondents and of teachers disagreed, or strongly disagreed, with this statement.
- 8.2 Some of the respondents expressed concerns about the movement away from tiered papers in the GCSE England reforms. "I can't see how a single exam can serve all purposes i.e. to differentiate between the very ablest, but also allow the less able to demonstrate their ability"; "it seems wrong that all abilities would sit the same exam... as this would be totally demoralizing for the less academic students"; "I am concerned that education should allow all to do their best".
- 8.3 Most of the respondents who commented were critical of assessment based entirely on written examinations in most subjects. "The new GCSEs would be a step backwards – varied assessment methods give more students a chance, as many do not perform well under exam conditions", "Not all children flourish under exam conditions, the ability to submit coursework is surely a helpful part of the mix"; "Restrictions on including coursework are not acceptable under the GCSE England option – assessment should take place over the period of studying as opposed to just a final exam"; "It would be a tragedy to move away from having a coursework element. Students learn in different ways and many would be disadvantaged if qualifications were dependent on memory"; "Students all learn in different ways and as educators we should use this to show the student to the best of their potential"; "The English system would be a disaster for many children who find exams extremely stressful and not an accurate picture of what they can really do"; "There needs to be a balanced approach to qualifications using a variety of methods to show a child's ability"; "The new GCSEs in England do not prepare students adequately for the real world of work, where skills other than retention of knowledge are needed"; "Being of the older generation who undertook O levels, I do not feel that a totally final exam-based culture is going to benefit the whole of our student body and should be avoided".
- 8.4 The minority view of those who would find the GCSE reforms in England acceptable included suggestions that the qualification should be more demanding: "I believe toughening up the GCSEs is the way to go as they have become devalued over the years"; "Exams are a leveler between students. Exams are harder to manipulate than coursework".
- 8.5 One secondary headteacher argued the case for allowing individual schools to enter pupils for either the GCSE England qualifications or the IGCSE alternative: "I think we need to retain professional choice. Subject leaders can presently choose from at least 6 different syllabuses. Both Scotland and an IGCSE core would be very restrictive and both contain

some very “dated” topics. I see no problem with some qualifications graded A*-G and others graded 9 – 1. It is no different from the current status quo”.

9. **Statement 9**

It would be harder to recruit and retain teachers in the Isle of Man if our schools moved away from the qualifications used in England.

	All Respondents	Teachers
Strongly disagree	12.3%	12.1%
Disagree	37.0%	31.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	24.4%	22.5%
Agree	17.8%	22.1%
Strongly agree	8.4%	12.1%

9.1 Opinions were divided over this statement and many respondents were unsure. Almost half of all respondents and over 43% of teachers disagreed, or strongly disagreed, with the statement that that the recruitment of teachers would be harder if schools moved away from teaching English qualifications. Over 26% of all respondents and over 34% of teacher agreed with the statement.

9.2 Few people commented on the recruitment issue. The following comments were all noted.

9.3 “As a teacher from Ireland, I have adapted and learned a different national curriculum and regularly changed schools... Teachers from the UK will still teach in the IOM if we do not follow UK”.

9.4 From a teaching union representative: “We recruit significantly from England and most movement is to and from England...so I reluctantly believe that the English system would be best in the long run, although not in the short run”.

9.5 “Good teachers teach their subject, not the exam paper and would not be deterred from working in the Isle of Man if the Department of Education and Children can continue to maintain the quality of our education system and the teaching environment”.

9.6 One secondary headteacher suggested that: “I think there may be an issue in recruiting teachers if (the Scottish) option were to be taken up.”

10 **Statement 10**

It would be harder to recruit and retain key personnel (ie with families) working in the Isle of Man if our schools moved away from qualifications used in England.

	All Respondents	Teachers
Strongly disagree	13.0%	11.7%
Disagree	37.6%	32.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	27.3%	29.5%
Agree	14.7%	17.0%
Strongly agree	7.4%	10.0%

10.1 Opinions were again divided over this statement with well over a quarter of respondents and teachers alike neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Whilst over 50% of all respondents disagreed, or strongly disagreed, with the statement that the recruitment of key personnel would be harder if the schools moved away from teaching English qualifications, more than 22% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

10.2 A limited number of responses were received from employers. These did not take the view that recruitment would be harder if the schools moved away from teaching English qualifications. The response from the Managing Director of a large telecom company, for example, suggested that: "Recruiting off-Island key employees is often directly linked to quality of life and education. The International GCSEs would be more appealing".

11 Outcomes of the Consultation

11.1 The Department, having taken into account the views expressed by headteachers and teachers as well as those views gathered through the formal consultation process, has made a decision to follow the International GCSE across a core of subjects unless, in individual subjects, there are good reasons for using an alternative such as equivalent WJEC (Wales) or CCEA (Northern Ireland) GCSE qualifications. It has been agreed that schools will not use the new GCSE England qualifications.

11.2 Entries for IGCSE will increase over a four year period between 2014 and 2018 until an expected 80% of school 14-16 qualifications will be IGCSEs. The remainder are likely to be predominantly.

11.3 These decisions will be presented to Tynwald at the July sitting 2014.



Isle of Man
Government

Reilys Ellan Vannin



Department of Education and Children
Hamilton House, Peel Road, Douglas IM1 5EZ