

## Chapter 5: "Higher Still" - The Government's Solution

It took longer than anticipated for the Government to produce its own response to the Howie Report. Initially, the Secretary of State had said that his response would be available in the spring of 1993. At an SEB Board meeting on 4 March 1993, one of the Assessors from the Department (i.e. the SOED) stated that the response was unlikely before early summer 1993. At the next meeting of the Board on 28 October 1993, the same Assessor indicated that it was hoped there would be a Ministerial announcement before the end of 1993. The publication of *Higher Still: Opportunity for All* was eventually announced on 3 March 1994, almost two years to the day after the publication of the Howie Report. The thickness and complexity of the files of the various branches within the SOED, which were charged with processing the responses and advising Ministers on a possible way forward, give a good indication of why it took so long.

Two groups, both quite small, were involved in directing this work. One of these groups operated at "political" level, preparing papers and advice for Ministers. It consisted of three or four senior mainstream civil servants, along with HM Senior Chief Inspector of Schools Nisbet Gallacher and HM Chief Inspector Ron Tuck, who spearheaded the Inspectorate's input. The overall co-ordinator of this group was Mrs Valerie Macniven, an Assistant Secretary in the SOED.

The other group was called the Development Unit Executive Group, with the suffix "(H)" for "Howie" to distinguish it from a similar group which had masterminded the implementation of Standard Grade. DUEG(H) was chaired by HMCI Tuck, and he was assisted by a staff Inspector and four civil servants in addition to Mrs Macniven. This group dealt with the processing of the findings of the consultation process and the various feasibility studies which were commissioned. Just as there had been no involvement of officers from either the SEB or SCOTVEC in the writing of the Howie Report, so there was none either in this analysis or in the preparation of *Higher Still* on the grounds that the process was one of preparing papers for Ministers and helping them formulate their decisions for ultimate publication.

DUEG(H) held its first meeting on 7 September 1992, and the aim was to have solid advice to give to Ministers by March 1993. Lord James Douglas Hamilton, the Education Minister, was advised on 12 October 1992 of the steps the Department was taking to produce that advice. The first task was to scrutinise, analyse and summarise the 330+ responses to the Howie Report, 100 of which put forward alternatives to Howie's recommendations.

Even before the publication of the Howie Report, HM Inspectorate of Schools had been involved in a series of small studies which covered such things as: different ways of achieving a single assessment system using a mixture of internal and external assessment; the interface between the 5-14 Programme and Standard Grade courses starting in S2 instead of S3; the concept of levels; the identification and description of key skills; how to organise group awards; the likely shape of Advanced Highers; the modelling of a possible Development Plan; and the possibility of developing a National Assessment Bank which would help teachers with internal assessment.

The Department also used the consultation period which followed the publication of the Howie Report to conduct several other small-scale investigations to assess the practicability and financial consequences of Howie's proposals. Since the whole of Howie's grand plan hinged on moving Standard Grade examinations from S4 into S3, the top priority was to examine the feasibility and desirability of doing that. These feasibility studies at subject level were carried out by some twenty-two consultants who were mainly subject Principal Teachers, Advisers and retired HMIs, all of whom had been brought together for a seminar on 2 November 1992 to

discuss how they might tackle the task. Staff Inspectors were also asked for their views. The conclusion of virtually all those consulted was that it was technically possible to advance Standard Grade by a year, but there were several serious drawbacks.

In the first instance, a great deal of development work would be required. Howie's assumption that the 5-14 Programme could lead naturally into the new Standard Grade was highly suspect. The relationship between Level E of the 5-14 Programme and the Grade Related Criteria (GRC) of Standard Grade was not consistent across all subjects, and it was clear that merging the 5-14 Attainment Targets with the GRC of Standard Grade in order to produce a single set of progressive targets for S1-S3 would pose serious technical problems. The 5-14 Guidelines and Standard Grade documents would require to be redrafted. One Inspector described the problem thus:

*"The Attainment Targets of 5-14 and the Grade Related Criteria of Standard Grade are written quite differently. Do we re-write the 5-14 Guidelines before the ink is dry or (in the case of Environmental Studies) even wet? Or abandon familiar Standard Grade GRC in favour of an extension of the relatively untried targets of 5-14? Either course of action involves substantial curriculum development activity."*

Another concern was the fact that pupils would have to select their subjects for Standard Grade after only six months of secondary education. To confront this problem, the Department even considered briefly the radical step of having pupils transfer from primary to secondary after P6. However, consultants expressed concern over whether pupils had the emotional and cognitive maturity to choose subjects at age 12½, and about the possibility that they would make premature, ill-informed subject choices which could affect their future careers. They also pointed out that Howie's argument about loss of momentum in S1 and S2 was based only on English and Mathematics and was not equally true across all subjects.

It was estimated that it would take a year and a half to re-write courses and attainment targets, that this exercise would cost around £2 million (not counting the design and production of curriculum support materials), and that two years' notice of the amended curriculum would have to be given to schools. All of this preliminary work would delay the start of the work required to implement Howie's proposals for upper secondary courses, so that it was likely that a system which Howie and virtually all respondents had agreed to be defective would have to continue until at least 2002 — a whole decade after the publication of the Report.

To use only internal assessment for Standard Grade was also not a good solution. Besides being far too expensive because of staffing costs, it would be less reliable than the mixture of internal and external assessment (which the SEB had used for several years), it would increase the workload of teachers (which was already a contentious issue), and it would have less credibility in the eyes of parents, employers and other users who wanted independent certification of attainment by an Examination Board.

One possible way of facing up to the immaturity issue of pupils having to choose their Standard Grade subjects after only six months of secondary education would be to introduce modal courses in S1-S3, as Howie suggested. This idea was investigated by consultants who looked in depth at four modes: Social Subjects (incorporating History, Geography and Modern Studies), Science (integrating the three sciences), Technology, and Creative and Aesthetic Activities. The consultants' conclusion regarding the first two of these modes was that, while such courses might simplify timetabling by reducing the number of subject options which would have to be offered,

they were likely to lead to a reduction in the quality of preparation they would provide for pupils who took the study of these subjects beyond Standard Grade. Modal Standard Grades in Technology and in the Creative and Aesthetic mode would be artificial.

Still other consultants examined further issues raised by Howie's proposals such as: curriculum modelling; timetabling; educational, organisational and staffing issues; assessment and quality assurance arrangements; the feasibility of basing SCOTBAC on existing Revised Higher Grade and Revised CSYS syllabuses; the likely composition of SCOTCERT programmes, which the Report had skimmed over; the availability of curriculum materials; the assessment and place of core skills in the upper secondary curriculum; the implications for pupils with special educational needs; implications for the Guidance system; and the effect of Howie's proposals on Higher Education Entry requirements. A costing exercise was also carried out by the HMI Audit Unit, and there were HMI papers on such issues as merging GSVQs within SCOTCERT.

Since there were serious doubts about whether schools, particularly smaller schools, would be able to offer a Howie curriculum without the greatly increased staffing levels which studies in Strathclyde Region suggested would be necessary (see Chapter 2), a serving Headteacher was seconded for forty days to check this out in eight schools which were carefully chosen to be as representative as possible in respect of size, geographical location and catchment area. A Depute Head, who was an expert in computer-assisted timetabling, was also seconded, in his case for fifteen days, to study how the proposals would affect timetabling and staffing (**Note 16**). Their initial studies showed that the Howie proposals would be difficult to timetable, but they would not require extra staffing. However, these conclusions had to be treated with caution since Howie had assumed that pupils would follow modal Standard Grade courses, that pupils would have fewer subjects from which to choose their S5 and S6 curriculum, that there would be multi-level teaching groups at the upper end of the school, and that FE colleges would provide some of the vocational courses. It was now clear that many of these assumptions would not materialise. For example, devolved management was likely to make schools less keen to co-operate with FE colleges because of fears that they would lose some funding for such pupils; and the incorporation of FE colleges, following their removal from local authority control, was already resulting in fewer pupils from S5 and S6 undertaking part of their studies in colleges, since colleges could not charge fees for students under the age of 18 and they were now tending to concentrate on students following advanced courses in order to generate income.

Recognising that some of Howie's statistics were already out of date, the Department updated the SCE figures from 1990 to 1992. This revealed that an even lower proportion of S5 pupils were achieving Higher Grade passes than in 1990. Not too much was read into that, however, because it was clear from the SEB's Annual Report that many candidates were spreading their Highers over S5 and S6, and there was a growing trend for pupils to take the more practically oriented SCOTVEC National Certificate modules rather than academic Higher Grade courses.

This series of feasibility studies was altogether a different exercise from the Feasibility Study which followed the Munn and Dunning Reports in 1978-79. That Study was carried out almost entirely by the Inspectorate, whereas this exercise involved a wide range of specialists. Each of the consultants had to work to a very tight timescale, typically only 10 to 20 days. Altogether, well over 500 consultancy days were used. The results of the studies were never published, although it was widely known that the studies were taking place. In all, they cost around £130,000.

The feedback from national consultation and from the various feasibility studies clearly showed

that some modification of Howie's proposals would be required. Several alternatives had been suggested in the responses from interested bodies, but none of them had been thought through sufficiently to make them viable alternatives. Respondents could criticise with impunity; the Department could not afford the luxury of rejecting Howie without proposing a viable alternative. Senior members of the Department therefore had what they called "A Howie Away Day" in the Marine Hotel, North Berwick, over 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1993 to thrash out various options. The senior civil servant who chaired the discussions summed up the problem as follows: *"We have to explore how the main ingredients of Howie's recipe could be mixed together to make a different dish, this time a single-track system, the type of cake favoured by a large number of respondents. ....Howie has shown how they would fit into his twin-track system. We need to see whether they would work, or could be adapted to work, in a single-track system before we can begin to formulate any option for Ministers based on that mix of ingredients."*

By the end of February 1993, the Department was confident that a viable single-track system could be devised, but it did not yet have enough evidence to put to Ministers. It did think it had all the evidence it required, however, to suggest to Secretary of State Ian Lang and Education Minister Lord James Douglas-Hamilton that they should reject the proposal to move Standard Grade examinations to S3. This they did in mid-March. In this submission, besides using the arguments of cost and slowness of implementation, the Department pointed out that bringing Standard Grade forward by a year would actually produce less breadth in the curriculum since pupils would make their subject choices a year earlier. (In S1 and S2, at this time, pupils normally studied ten subjects, in S3 and S4 only seven in most cases.) Also, since the proposed change had been opposed by almost all respondents, strong arguments would be required to justify it. The Department stated that, at this stage, it was asking Ministers to take a decision in principle only on the Standard Grade issue; but that issue had to be settled first, since there was no point in wasting time and money in attempting to produce various detailed curriculum models without that decision. It needed a fixed reference point around which it could build a scheme for S5 and S6. Realising, however, that one of the Government's main intentions in setting up the Howie Committee had been to improve the lot of able pupils, the Department also stated that it was considering three different ways of stretching able pupils academically, none of which would involve more than a limited review of Standard Grade, viz.

- (a) removing the stage barrier for the SEB's Standard Grade Arrangements
- (b) removing external assessment at Standard Grade, and
- (c) developing "higher level" GRC at Standard Grade.

The Ministers readily agreed to these proposals in principle and also agreed not to publicise the decision until the whole package was ready. The aim was to make the announcement before the end of the school session at the beginning of July 1993.

The early decision on Standard Grade enabled the Department to continue its search for a new model that would acknowledge the validity of Howie's analysis of the failings of existing arrangements but produce a more realistic solution that would challenge abler pupils throughout their secondary careers, would not compromise 5-14 developments, would provide attainable and marketable targets for the large number of non-academic pupils staying on into S5 and S6. and would be attainable without astronomical expenditure. The work of devising such a model fell to HM Inspectorate. A second phase of short-term consultancies was already under way to test its feasibility.

Some consultants were employed during this period to examine the possibility of creating a "Credit Plus" level at Standard Grade in order to stretch able pupils academically. Initially, this project was to be limited to History and Physics, but it was later decided to add English and Mathematics because they were so central to the curriculum. The consultants tackled these studies in different ways. While the English and History consultants based their proposed GRC on a more demanding level of answer, the Mathematics and Physics consultants suggested that the greater level of difficulty should be created by pulling back some of the content of the Higher Grade syllabuses. All were agreed that a Credit Plus was feasible and desirable. Some subject specialists in the Inspectorate, however, sounded a note of caution, pointing out that Credit Level in their subjects was already difficult enough, and Credit Plus would attract only small number of very able pupils. It would also create real difficulties for a teacher who had to organise a class which contained possibly three different groups (e.g. Credit Plus, Credit and General Level), as would happen in many schools. As regards the suggestion that pupils should be permitted to take Standard Grade in S3, only about 8% of S4 candidates gained a Grade 1 in Standard Grade, and it was estimated that no more than 1% would attain that in S3. In other words, in most schools there would be an insignificant number of pupils, if any, capable of gaining a Credit award in Third Year.

The above were not idle exercises to satisfy Ministers, however. The Inspectorate was definitely concerned at this time that able pupils were not being adequately challenged. This was made clear in its report published in January 1993 entitled *Standards and Quality in Scottish Schools 1991-2*. The findings in this report were based on inspections of 450 classes in 89 primary schools and 500 subject departments in 60 secondary schools.

Another factor which had to be considered was how to incorporate GSVQs within the overall scheme, since it was Government policy to develop broadly-based vocational schemes. Because of the uncertainty over what Howie would propose, the White Paper *Access and Opportunity* (May 1991) had envisaged that GSVQs would be aimed primarily at young people in FE colleges; there was now clearly a need for GSVQs suitable for schools. Although firmly based on the National Certificate system, GSVQs introduced the important element of "externality" by insisting on an additional assessment which integrated all major aspects of the programme and provided the basis for differentiation into Pass and Merit awards. A major hurdle facing any attempt to harmonise the SCOTVEC and SEB systems was the fact that, so far, all National Certificate awards were based entirely on internal assessment. One group of subject consultants was asked to define Howie's levels F, G, H and I in their subjects and to place National Certificate modules in this framework. They found this difficult, partly because of the differences in the assessment and moderation arrangements of the SEB and SCOTVEC, but also because they tended to look for an unrealistic matching of content rather than for an equivalence in demand.

One consultant was asked to compare the quality assurance systems of the SEB and SCOTVEC, to identify their similarities and to make suggestions as to how a more harmonised system could be developed. The solution offered by that consultant was to adopt the moderation approaches of the SEB but to combine these with SCOTVEC's strategy of devolving quality assurance to centres. The SEB routinely sampled between 25% and 33% of its provision annually, although within any one course in a school the work of only six, or at most twelve students, was moderated. The consultant's view was that SCOTVEC's sampling was lighter, but its moderation was more stringent in that certification was withheld until problems had been resolved. However, this last comment was based on a misunderstanding on his part. It was also SEB policy not to certificate assessments which were found wanting in the moderation process;

but, in practice, certification had never had to be withheld since centres in that position always ensured that they sorted out problems and satisfied the moderators before the due date for certification.

The view of the Inspectorate was that assessment and moderation should not be solely about “policing” standards. Within industry, it was increasingly being realised that heavy reliance on examining products at the end of the process (quality control) was costly and not very effective, and there was now greater emphasis on establishing systems which ensured quality at all stages of the process. The aim should therefore be to encourage teachers and lecturers in schools and colleges to accept responsibility for quality, which was the policy that SCOTVEC had adopted in its Quality Development Programme. SCOTVEC, of course, used only internal assessment. If a mixture of internal and external assessment were used, the quality audit of centres could be made even stronger by focusing, not only on internal quality assurance procedures, but also on how concordant the internal and external assessments were. For the foreseeable future, the external assessment would be conducted by whatever examining body was established.

As a way of reducing the complexity and cost of the reforms, the Department even looked at the possibility of allowing the pupils known as Christmas Leavers to leave school at the end of S4. Since the introduction in the mid-1970s of a single entry date for Primary 1, the number of pupils forced to return to S4 because they were too young to leave at the end of S4 had risen substantially. In 1988-89, there were 11,036 pupils in this category — roughly a sixth of the S5 population. To provide a worthwhile curriculum for these pupils was proving very difficult for schools. Reports of school inspections carried out in the early 1990s, however, suggested that the curricular provision for these pupils was improving. Schools were beginning to put together sensible, often vocationally-oriented, programmes of National Certificate modules and SEB Short Courses so that the experience of Christmas leavers was now more worthwhile than a few years previously. According to the Inspectorate, S5 was now less of a “*Highers or nothing*” year, and claims that it was a wholly unsatisfactory and unrewarding experience for this group were exaggerated and inaccurate. Changing the statutory leaving date to the end of S4 would create other problems. Some pupils would be able to leave school as young as 15 and four months and, as National Insurance numbers were not issued until age 16, it would be difficult for them to find employment because they would be in a questionable position as regards Health and Safety Regulations. A change in employment legislation would be required, and lowering the leaving age could be criticised as a lowering of standards since it would run counter to the general aim of encouraging more young people to stay on at school. This option was therefore quickly rejected.

Overall, the work of the consultants had shown that it was possible to develop common approaches to assessment and grading, and the Department was confident that it could see a way of producing a single-track scheme. However, it was not yet confident enough to divulge this to Ministers and, to test the conclusions drawn from the various consultancy projects, it brought together groups of consultants for seminars in Dunkeld (1-2 March and 20-21 April 1993) and in Perth (6-7 May). Finally, the Departmental planning team met in Edinburgh on 26 May to complete the proposals that would be placed before Ministers; and, after the draft paper had undergone further redrafting, it was presented to the Ministers on 24 June 1993. The main points in the paper were:

- (a) Although research had shown that Howie’s proposals were technically feasible, there were a number of educational and other arguments against certain aspects of his main proposals.

- (b) Ministers should confirm the decision they had made in principle not to move the Standard Grade examinations from S4 to S3. They should also approve a single-track model which would encompass Standard Grade and would meet Howie's aims by running from S3 to S6. The Department was examining two approaches that would stretch able pupils: one of these would allow them to sit Higher Grade in S4, the other would introduce a Level F in the 5-14 Programme so that able pupils would not mark time in S1.
- (c) Since Howie's twin-track system had lost credibility, a single-track system had been devised and tested for feasibility using data from schools which had been used in the evaluation of Howie's proposals. This approach, rather than an actual study in schools, had been necessary to ensure confidentiality. To achieve a single-track, it was essential to have some form of grading which worked in the same way across all qualifications. Since the single-track would make better use of existing courses, it would be less disruptive and could be introduced earlier than Howie's proposals. It was emphasised, however, that this would be the case only if sufficient resources were made available. Ministers were reminded that in the late 1980s an additional £3.3 million had had to be spent on producing materials to keep the Standard Grade Development Programme on track.
- (d) Group Awards were a fundamental principle of the Howie Report and should be regarded as fundamental to what the Department was now proposing. No subject would be compulsory, but students would need to gain passes in units of study drawn from at least five of the eight modes of study identified by the SCCC. (See *The Higher Tradition*, page 161) They would also be required to demonstrate basic levels of competence in key practical skills ("core skills") such as communication and numeracy (**Note 17**). Those who failed to gain a Group Award would still receive recognition for the units they passed. Standard Grade achievements would also receive full recognition within the new award structure: not only would they count towards Group Awards in S5, S6 and further education, but even those who left school from S4 could attain a Group Award provided the five modes and the core skills were covered. Part of the Development Programme would be devoted to examining how core skills could be assessed within Standard Grade subject assessments instead of through special courses devoted to these skills.
- (e) The awards would be available at five levels which corresponded roughly to the three attainment levels of Standard Grade, Higher Grade and CSYS. Awards would be available for pupils of all levels of ability, including those with special educational needs. Group Awards would be available at the end of S5, but they would be designed in such a way as to encourage pupils to continue to the end of S6. The intention was to use a points system to augment the descriptions of the different levels of award, including, for example, Pass, Merit and Distinction gradings; but more work required to be done to develop this.
- (f) Group Awards would be made up of modules of different lengths (40, 80 and 160 hours) and different levels of demand. Some modules would be internally assessed, others externally assessed. Modules had grown in popularity in schools because of the flexibility they brought to the curriculum. However, to move over completely to an internal assessment system for any of the awards would fly in the face of what had been

learned during the consultation exercise and would fail to gain acceptance by a wide range of interested parties. Absence of grading was one of the reasons why the National Certificate did not have parity of esteem with Higher Grade.

- (g) Because there would always be the suspicion in a norm-referenced system that consistent or rising pass rates were caused by easier examinations, standards of performance should be criterion referenced. Such a system was now universally accepted and, if combined with mixed mode assessment (i.e. partly internal and partly external), it would have all the advantages of flexibility, reliability and credibility. Only perhaps at Foundation Level, should assessment be entirely internal.
- (h) The Department for Education in England and Wales had decided to retain "A" Levels for abler pupils and to rely on a greatly expanded system of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) to meet the needs of all those for whom "A" Level courses were unsuitable. The title "Vocational A Level" would be conferred on the appropriate level of GNVQ. This was essentially a twin-track system, whereas the proposed Scottish system was aiming at parity of esteem between academic and vocational awards. However, GSVQs would still be compatible with GNVQs south of the border (**Note 18**). FE colleges would provide most GSVQs, but there would be some in schools. The Department was proposing to examine the interaction between fees charged at colleges for students of different ages and the unwillingness of colleges to provide course for those under 18 years of age for whom they could not charge fees. There might be resource implications if the provision of courses for under-18s prejudiced other priority college provision, such as part-time courses for those in employment.
- (i) The total cost of implementation would be around £11.3 million phased over five or six years. The Department favoured starting in 1997, rather than in 1996 which would leave little room for manoeuvre in the Development Programme. That date would also avoid a clash with local government reorganisation which was due to take place on 1 April 1996. Allowing teachers two extra days for in-service training over two or three years, as had happened when Standard Grade was introduced, would help to reduce costs since class cover would not be required for teachers absent on training courses. Education Authorities, of course, would have additional staffing costs. Because of the need for confidentiality, it had not been possible to use actual schools to quantify this exercise. Three options were listed. The first of these, which envisaged giving pupils maximum choice of subjects, no composite classes and Foundation classes in S5 and S6 in every school, i.e. courses for pupils with special educational needs (**Note 19**), would require around 1600 extra teachers and cost roughly £43.2 million. Not only was that regarded as far too expensive, but it would have created serious accommodation problems in most schools, and particularly in magnet schools whose buildings were already stretched to capacity because of parental choice operated under the Parents' Charter. The third option, which limited choice and permitted extensive use of multi-level teaching would have no additional costs, since it could be done within the existing staffing complements. The Department favoured the middle option, which offered a fair degree of choice, accepted some use of composite classes and assumed that only half of the schools would offer Foundation courses in S5 and S6. That would still require an additional 700 teachers (i.e. about 3% more) and would cost an additional £18.5 million per annum, but it would not be required before 1997-98, assuming the new awards started in that year. No estimates were available of possible capital costs such as the building of extensions to schools, nor of how many teachers might have to be trained. Moving the leaving age

downwards so that all were free to leave at the end of S4 would significantly reduce the cost of implementation, but it would have a knock-on effect on social security budgets and youth training schemes.

- (j) Throughout, the Department had sought to devise a system which was consistent with the Government's policies in Scotland and south of the border and which would be acceptable to the teaching profession, Higher Education, employers and parents. It was expected that teachers would welcome the scheme because there would be little change in the content of courses. Fears concerning workload could probably be overcome by providing resources from central funds, including good staff development. Higher Education would be pleased that academic standards would be maintained. Employers were likely to welcome the proposals because of their commitment to raising standards generally and their emphasis on attainment of core skills. Parents would probably welcome the breadth of qualifications and the prospect of higher standards, but they would want to be assured that their children would not be disadvantaged during the implementation period.
- (j) Ministers were asked for their views on nomenclature. It would be unwise to retain the titles SCOTBAC and SCOTCERT because of their association with twin-tracking. There was a case for having different titles to differentiate levels: for example, Scottish Upper School Award Levels 4 and 5 might be regarded as the minimum level for entry to higher education, while Levels 1 and 2 might provide routes into further education. There were difficulties in using numerals to indicate levels, however, as the Department had discovered in its own internal discussions. People could never remember whether "1" was the top grade (as in SCE examinations) or the lowest level (as in SVQs). Experience south of the border confirmed this confusion, and there numerals had now been dropped in favour of the terms Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced. On balance, the Department also favoured familiar terms such as Foundation, General, Credit and Higher, and the word "Scottish" (rather than "Scot") should appear in the title since it was important to highlight the uniqueness of Scottish education. It was recommended that the word "schools" should be avoided because of the growing number of adults returning to education; and it might even be difficult to retain the word "Higher" since it was presently understood as single-subject certification and would not reflect a Group Award. Whatever terms were used, there should be one overall title covering all levels and reflecting the fact that it was a Group Award.
- (l) Finally, Ministers were urged to accept the proposals and make an early announcement, since there was a climate of expectation in the educational community that an announcement would be made soon. It was now fifteen months since the publication of the Howie Report, and six months since the end of the consultation period. An early decision would also open the way for consultations on detailed aspects of the Development Programme. If at all possible, a draft statement should be made in the House of Commons before the summer recess; failing that, it should come no later than the autumn. At the very least, Ministers should announce the decision on Standard Grade to enable the 5-14 plans to go ahead.

As you would expect, the Department had done a thorough job in identifying all possible ramifications. However, Ian Lang's reaction was not quite what had been expected. Interested groups have often felt aggrieved that, after many months of waiting for the Department to prepare a consultation document, they were expected to make an almost immediate response,

thus making it impossible for them to carry out consultations within their own organisations. Ian Lang reacted in a similar way to the substantial document which had landed on his desk. While acknowledging the Department's explanation that it did not wish to trouble him with tentative proposals which might not lead anywhere, he felt that the complete package contained such far-reaching proposals that a decision on them could not be rushed. Although he realised that it was impossible to reach conclusions on each item in isolation, he still wished the submission to be broken down into acceptable chunks in which issues could be considered one at a time. Ministers could then work their way through these to help them reach final decisions. He suggested that a programme of meetings be drawn up for this purpose. The Department prepared six separate papers in which it spelled out in even greater detail its reasons for rejecting certain of Howie's proposals and for arriving at its own proposals.

The first paper went to Ministers on 8 September 1993 and was discussed at a meeting of ministers and officials on 24 September. It evaluated the Howie proposals and urged Ministers to reject the status quo. Ian Lang accepted its recommendations on 5 October but made it clear that he wished to retain the term "Higher", even if that Grade emerged substantially changed.

The second submission, which dealt with the length of upper secondary courses and the reasons why the Standard Grade examination should remain in S4, went to Ministers on 6 October. The Department argued that a 3-year course would be a disincentive to those continuing in full-time education and to those returning to education as adults. It dismissed as flawed Howie's concept of a group ethos developing among a discrete set of pupils who came together at age 15 and stayed together for three years. It was also inconceivable that 30%-40% of an age cohort could achieve Credit Level by the end of S4, let alone in S3, in order to form this select band. Ian Lang accepted on 11 October that Standard Grade examinations should remain in S4 and that the upper secondary course should be a 2-year one. However, he insisted that some Higher Grade work should be possible in S4.

The third paper was submitted on 1 November. It produced evidence to show that the comparisons with other countries which Howie had used were flawed; but the main thrust of the paper was the rejection of the twin-track approach since that would increase the academic/vocational divide (**Note 20**). Somehow, the two systems had to be brought together using the same assessment and certification systems. On 8 November, the Secretary of State accepted this paper and asked the Department to produce alternative models. He also made it clear that Ministers now wished to accelerate consideration of the Howie issues.

The fourth submission went to Ministers on 10 November. In it, the Department strongly supported Howie's claim that only by using Group Awards could the key objectives of breadth, depth and coherence of study be achieved. Single subject awards would not guarantee these objectives. Group Awards would also make a more efficient use of teaching resources because there would be fewer potential combinations of units that pupils could take (**Note 21**). Although 71 of the responses had opposed Group Awards as against 37 in favour, in most cases it was the detail of Howie's proposals which was criticised rather than the principle of Group Awards. The Department insisted that Group Awards offered the best way of achieving parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications. Employers had great difficulty in understanding SCOTVEC's certificates which contained a tremendous amount of detail. They also found it difficult to compare the worth of two quite different types of qualification: Highers used four grades (A-D) and mainly external assessment to show how well a successful candidate had done in a complete course lasting at least a school session, whereas ungrouped National Certificate modules used only internal assessment and recorded the contents of separate units

which had been mastered by the candidate in (usually) only 40 hours. In the Department's view, parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications could not be achieved unless the same system of assessment was used for both academic and vocational qualifications. The fact that SCOTVEC's National Certificate modules had been in existence for nine years would ease the task of harmonising the SEB and SCOTVEC systems, unlike England and Wales, where GNVQs had only recently been introduced. External assessment and some form of grading had to be brought into the National Certificate module system, and both academic and vocational courses had to attain the same objectives of breadth, depth and coherence of study. The recent SCOTVEC initiatives which aimed at producing groupings of modules (GSVQs, School Group Awards and National Certificate Cluster Courses) were already recognised Group Awards. Nevertheless, it was inadvisable to have so many variants since these programmes, however commendable they were in themselves, had added to the confusion in the short term; and Howie had already shown that schools were allowing academic pupils to follow courses that lacked breadth. Group Awards, supported by a points system, would provide a mechanism for introducing a common currency by which attainments could be compared across the whole range of subjects and levels in a coherent structure that could be presented to users in an uncomplicated way. Building in choice of subjects within modes of study and the use of Records of Achievement would permit flexibility and would remove the fear of "*all or nothing*" awards. The SOED was confident that this could be achieved without being over-prescriptive.

Within days of receiving Paper 4, it was clear that Ministers were not happy with it, and, at the meeting held on 25 November to discuss the paper, Ian Lang expressed this unease. He said that breadth was covered by curriculum arrangements up to Standard Grade, and what mattered thereafter was a focus on a narrower range of subjects studied at greater depth. The Department seemed to be concentrating its efforts on helping those for whom Highers were unattainable, whereas he thought it most important to produce a system which stretched the most able. He was not willing to abandon the "Higher" label. As far as he was concerned, vocational education was working well in Scotland; GSVQs already existed and radical change would not be welcome at that time. The immediate emphasis should be on addressing the key weakness of the uneven gradient of difficulty over the years of Scottish secondary education, and on allowing current vocational qualifications to evolve under their own steam. The Government did not have it in their power to deliver parity of esteem. Only FE, Higher Education, industry and commerce could decide what value to put on various qualifications. Students should continue to be able to choose between SEB and SCOTVEC courses.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton expressed his concern that pupils might be deprived of a certificate because of weakness in a compulsory subject, as had happened under the Group Award system which existed prior to 1950. The Senior Chief Inspector assured him that the proposed Group Awards would not be as prescriptive as that previous system. Certainly, Howie had proposed that pupils should achieve set standards in a list of compulsory **subjects**. The Department's model was far less prescriptive. Although pupils would have to demonstrate competence in five key practical skills, they would have to gain passes in units (not all equally long) drawn from only five of the eight **modes** and would be free to select subjects within these areas of study. However, the Minister's misgivings were reinforced by memos from two political advisers who were hostile to Group Awards.

Ministers' hostility towards Group Awards was a severe setback to the Department because they were so central to its overall plan of action. It continued to argue strongly for Group Awards, therefore, while at the same time considering how the various qualifications on offer could be brought together without a Group Award system. In a memo to Lord James on 3 December, Mrs

Macniven also tried to allay fears that Group Awards would be restrictive, since there would be a balance between breadth and choice based on modes rather than on specific subjects. Furthermore, pupils could choose any five of the modes and did not have to take them all to the same level of difficulty. Without external assessment, National Certificate modules would not have parity of esteem. Under a Group Award system, external assessment could be concentrated at the pupil's point of exit from schooling, thus reducing the number of external examinations a candidate would have to sit. If individual modules had to have some external assessment, this would remove flexibility and increase examination "blight" because of the excessive number of assessments. GSVQs could not be dropped because that would break the link with the GNVQs south of the border; to retain them without an overall Group Award system would be tantamount to adopting a variant of Howie's twin tracks.

None of this had any effect. On 13 December, Ian Lang in a letter to the Secretary of the Department stated that he remained unpersuaded that the Group Award proposal was the right way forward to meet the Government's objectives and the remit that had been given to Howie. He disagreed that parity of esteem should be given top priority rather than quality. The aim should be to produce a qualifications system that rewarded and raised attainment levels rather than to find a mechanism for achieving a common currency by which to compare achievement across a whole range of subjects and levels. He affirmed that he was unwilling to sacrifice academic attainment objectives for the sake of vocational esteem. Group Awards were finally rejected at a meeting held on 21 December between the Ministers and Departmental representatives.

Paper 5, which was to have dealt with the structure and content of Group Awards, had therefore to be amended, and the idea of a points system was also dropped since it would now have less value and might be an unnecessary complication that was not essential to the success of the rest of the proposals. During January 1994, Ministers accepted the Department view that introducing a Credit-Plus should be abandoned for several reasons: a consistent attainment level across all subjects could not be guaranteed beyond Credit Level and it was likely that only about 2% of an age cohort would attain two or three Standard Grades beyond Credit Level in S4; such a move would also cause some disruption of Standard Grade and would inevitably increase the workload of teachers. However, the stage restriction (later referred to as "age and stage") could be removed from Standard Grade, though here also it was estimated that only a very small number of pupils could take Standard Grades a whole year earlier. Removing the stage restriction from Higher Grade would enable some pupils to have some of their Higher units assessed internally in S4. It was agreed that the new courses in S5 should begin in 1997-98, but there was no guarantee that a Level F could be ready for the 5-14 Programme by 1997.

Ministers were also pleased to note that the SOED model could start earlier than the Howie proposals and was more likely to be seen as workable by the teaching profession, since it was an adaptation of existing courses rather than a grand plan which swept the existing arrangements aside. It was also far cheaper than Howie's proposals, although the Development Programme would still cost around £11 million. Ministers gave their approval to the amended programme.

The policy paper went through several working drafts under the title "*Higher and Broader*", originally with the sub-title "*The New Group Awards in Scotland*." The sub-title, of course, had to be removed following the discussions with Ministers; and, during January 1994, other titles were suggested: e.g. "*Building for the Future*" and "*Towards New Levels of Qualifications*." The final draft of the White Paper went to Ministers on 25 January 1994 and, on 1 February, Ian Lang's Private Secretary wrote to the Department to express the Minister's satisfaction with it.

He thanked officials *"for taking on board so well and expressing so clearly the flavour of what he [the Secretary of State] had in mind when he met you in December."* He did wonder if aiming at a 1997 start might be too ambitious. Towards the end of this letter, Ian Lang indicated a preference for the title *Higher Still: Opportunity for All*. Rumour has it that this snappier title had been suggested by Ian Lang's political adviser.

One other important hurdle had to be cleared. The Treasury and other Government Ministers had to be satisfied that no new money would be required and that the proposals would not have any knock-on effects on their own budgets. For example, towards the end of February, the Minister for Social Security expressed concern about the effect that staying-on rates might have on child benefit, which was payable for students over the statutory leaving age only if they were in non-advanced education. That was defined as being at or below "A" Level and, while Higher Grade and CSYS both currently fell within that definition, it seemed that the Advanced Higher might extend beyond CSYS. Lang confirmed that the Advanced Higher would still fall within non-advanced education, and he also assured the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that he intended to fund the Higher Still Development Programme from the existing Scottish block grant.

On 24 February, when it was clear that there were to be no Cabinet objections, Lang's Private Secretary sent another congratulatory letter to the Department. In it he indicated that Ministers were satisfied with the final draft of *Higher Still*. *"It reflects Ministers' views and priorities and it is a tribute to the Department's presentational skills that it has emerged unchanged after Whitehall scrutiny."* On 2 March Lord Wakeham, whose function it was to oversee the expenditure of all Government departments, gave permission for the announcement to be made on Thursday, 3 March.

Lang insisted that only the Times Educational Supplement Scotland should be given an advance embargoed copy of the White Paper (a concession made presumably because of its print deadlines). The rest of the media were simply told on the Wednesday afternoon that there was to be an announcement on the following afternoon. He did, however, write to Professor Howie telling him about the impending announcement and enclosing a copy of the proposals. In the accompanying letter he wrote: *"While our solutions differ from those put forward by the Committee, I want to say that it would not have been possible for us to move forward so positively without the excellent groundwork and analysis that the Committee undertook ..... [which] stimulated a healthy and penetrating debate about Scottish education."* Similar letters were sent to all members of the Howie Committee and copies of the White Paper were FAXED to them at the time of the announcement.

*Higher Still* was not a consultative document but the framework of what was going to happen. For such a momentous decision-making document, it was remarkably short — only 24 pages of fairly "slack" type, as against the 161 densely-printed pages of the Howie Report. Its shortness was partly due to the fact that the Department had not completely recovered from the Secretary of State's unexpected rejection of Group Awards, which had been central to its original proposals; also, with the second anniversary of the publication of the Howie Report looming, the Government's response could not be delayed any longer, even though the Department had not as yet been able to firm up the modified plans. But there were also tactical considerations: a document which did not contain too much specific detail was more likely to create a consensus from which future progress could be made towards the reform of courses in S5 and S6, something which everyone agreed was essential.

In the Foreword, Ian Lang stated that the factors which influenced him and his colleagues

were: *"the need to build on the strengths of our existing arrangements; the need to provide demanding but attainable standards for all pupils; the need to encourage pupils to achieve breadth as well as depth in their study; the need to ensure that vocational qualifications are properly regarded as having comparable value with academic qualifications; and the need for change to be evolutionary."*

Who could disagree with such aims? The final clause was a particularly important assurance as far as the teaching profession was concerned, since teachers were already complaining strongly about the greatly increased workload which they faced as a result of a range of government reforms.

Acknowledging the widespread opposition to the Howie recommendation that Standard Grade should be moved to S3, Ministers had decided that this should not happen. However, two changes were proposed to enable very able pupils to progress at a faster pace. Firstly, since some pupils already achieved Level E before leaving primary school, a new Level F would be introduced into the 5-14 curriculum structure to stimulate pupils in the early stages of secondary school; and, secondly, there would be a relaxation of the *"stage restriction"* which currently prevented presentation for Standard Grade before S4 in all but a very few exceptional cases. It was emphasised, however, that this concession would apply only at Credit Level. Pupils who were fit to pass only General Level at the end of S3 would be better served by continuing with their Standard Grade course and aiming at Credit Level in S4. It would also be possible for able pupils to take Higher modules in S4 and have them accredited at that stage.

The twin-tracking proposed by Howie had been overwhelmingly rejected during the consultation process, and so *Higher Still* proposed a single track for all pupils in S5 and S6, using almost all of the types of course currently offered by the Scottish Examination Board and SCOTVEC. The emphasis would be on the flexible use of these to provide a variety of courses of varying length and difficulty that would suit the needs of all pupils, from the ablest to the least able. There would be a single assessment system leading to a single system of certification. All of the passes achieved by a pupil would be recorded on a single certificate, updated annually to give a single cumulative record which would be kept in the pupil's National Record of Achievement folder.

Contrary to Howie's recommendation, all courses, including the Higher and the Advanced Higher, would be modular in structure. The modules would be of 40 or 80 hours' duration and could be certificated independently. In some cases, they would draw on current SEB post-Standard Grade courses; in others, existing SCOTVEC National Certificate modules and Higher National Units would be adapted, developed and brought together into coherent clusters. Equivalent levels would be worked out, and any duplication between current SEB and SCOTVEC courses would be rationalised. Because vocationally-oriented subjects would be included in the Higher and Advanced Higher, it would be possible for pupils, if they wished, to study a mixture of academic and vocational courses, and these would all have parity of esteem.

The Government had decided that there was no need to introduce a Group Award structure for all courses, but it was important that there was a clear progression in all pupils' programmes of study and that these programmes were coherent and sufficiently broad.

There would be five course levels in the modular structure, with titles that corresponded closely to existing nomenclature, namely, Foundation, General, Credit, Higher and Advanced Higher (**Note 22**). All five levels would come under the common heading Scottish Certificate of Education (SCE). The content of some of the modules currently offered by SCOTVEC would be

incorporated in SCE courses. The term "*National Certificate*" would no longer apply to individual modules but would be restricted to General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (GSVQs) and other group awards which had been developed by SCOTVEC over the previous few years.

Although the Higher Grade would remain in the New Upper Secondary Curriculum, changes would be made to take account of the weaknesses in the existing system which had been highlighted in the Howie Report. Howie had been particularly concerned that the ablest pupils were not being stretched intellectually. He was critical of the system under which these pupils strolled through Standard Grade, dashed towards Higher Grade in two terms and then, in many cases, wasted their time in Sixth Year because they had already acquired the necessary university entrance qualifications.

*Higher Still* proposed that the most able pupils (i.e. largely those who had achieved Credit Level in Standard Grade) should be encouraged, at the start of S5, to embark on a two-year course leading towards a new qualification, to be called the Advanced Higher. Some of them might even take Standard Grade in S3 and start accumulating Higher credits through gaining Higher module passes in S4. By bypassing external examinations at Higher Level in S5, they would reduce the amount of time they spent on sitting examinations, and the "*two-term dash*" would be eliminated (**Note 23**). The Advanced Higher would replace CSYS but would "*incorporate its course content as appropriate and .... build on Highers to provide coherent two-year courses in S5 and S6 which promote high levels of attainment.*"

A range of options would be available for those who had gained only a General Level in a subject at Standard Grade. Some would aim at Higher Grade in that subject over two years, the first year of which would involve study at a level equivalent to Credit at Standard Grade; others in this middle range of ability might follow a mixture of Highers and SCOTVEC modules; still others would concentrate on studying for National Certificate clusters, i.e. groupings of National Certificate modules which would form coherent 120-hour courses of study. These clusters would be developed at three Levels from 1 up to 3, and students could either progress through these Levels or, if they wished, move across from Level 2 to study subjects at Higher Grade.

Those who might never be able to tackle Highers would nevertheless follow the same track as their abler fellow-students, building on what they had already achieved at Standard Grade. Those who had gained mainly Foundation Level passes in S4 were likely to follow a programme of study leading to National Certificate Level 1 after one year and to National Certificate Level 2 after two years. Those who had been working below Foundation Level in S4, particularly those with special educational needs, would probably work towards a Skillstart 1 award in S5, before advancing to a Skillstart 2, if they decided to stay on for S6.

All assessment would be criterion-based, i.e. it would be measured against clearly specified learning outcomes. Individual modules would be assessed internally by the students' own teachers or lecturers, but these assessments would be externally moderated. Skillstart would use only internal assessment. However, where the modules were linked to form a 160-hour course, i.e. from General Level (equivalent to National Certificate Level 1) upwards, students would also have to face external assessment, which would use written examinations or projects or a combination of these as a final guarantee of quality. Normally, they would have to pass in both modes of assessment, but good performance in one of these might compensate for narrow failure in the other. The external assessments would be graded A to C to show the quality of the pass obtained; but it was possible that a points system might be introduced, if users felt that that

would help them to understand how the different qualifications compared with one another.

In all two-year courses, a certificated exit point would be available at the end of one year. Any pupil, therefore, who had doubts about success in Sixth Year could take an external examination at the end of S5 as a safety net, and gain a Higher. In fact, pupils who had embarked on the 2-year course could leave at any point and receive credit for what they had already achieved. The SEB and SCOTVEC would be asked to develop other appropriate certification arrangements to overcome any fears that pupils might have of failing a 2-year course and finishing up with no qualification.

There would be no mandatory requirements regarding the duration of courses, but it was recommended that an Advanced Higher subject should last 320 hours over two years, and a Higher subject 160 hours over one year instead of the current average of about 120 hours for a Higher Grade course. It was hoped that this extra study time would enable more pupils to reach Higher level. For example, if even half of the 18,000 candidates who currently achieved a D grade could convert that to a C grade, the change would be worthwhile. At the same time, the increase in time allocation should not prevent able pupils from following a five-subject curriculum and in the two-year programme achieving, say, four Advanced Highers plus one Higher, or two Advanced Highers and five Highers in different subjects.

While it would still be possible for pupils to proceed to higher education at the end of S5, the current trend was against that, and fewer pupils were likely to follow that route in future, particularly if those who gained Advanced Highers were granted exemption in relevant subjects in their first year at higher education institutions.

The five core skills of communication, numeracy, problem-solving, personal and interpersonal skills, and information technology were to be given a higher profile, since it was stated that all students, regardless of the programme they were following, should reach a satisfactory level of attainment in these. SCOTVEC had already developed statements of competence in each of these core skills at four levels called "stages." The report provided an indication of these levels using Communication as an example. In it, Stages 1-4 would be roughly equivalent to awards in English at Foundation, General, Credit and Higher respectively.

Having made this apparent stipulation for all pupils in one paragraph, however, the document went on in the next to grant exemption from core skill requirements to those who had already demonstrated that they had attained these through Standard Grade and other courses in S3-S4; and, strangely, it even seemed to excuse completely those who were taking free-standing Highers or Advanced Highers, although it would be recommended that their overall programme of study should be so designed as to help them reach minimum core skill standards. In effect, therefore, core skills were to be a built-in component of only the SCOTVEC type of Group Award in S5 and S6. This apparent anomaly was a direct result of the rejection of Group Awards, which had been central to the Department's original plan. Core skills were to have been a compulsory element of the Group Awards, but free-standing subject courses could not be bound by such conditions.

Details of the new examinations would be fleshed out in a development programme similar to that which had developed Standard Grade in the 1980s. This would be led by the SOED, but other agencies would be involved in carrying the work forward, namely, the SEB, SCOTVEC, education authorities, the SCCC, the Scottish Further Education Unit, teacher training institutions, and the schools and colleges themselves.

Since the new structure would require only amendments and adjustments to existing syllabuses and courses rather than a complete revision, it was thought that it could come into operation in session 1997-98, so that the first Advanced Higher examinations would be set in 1999. Howie had proposed the year 2001 for the first SCOTBAC examinations.

This has been a long chapter, even though it only summarises the main developments from the publication of the Howie Report to the publication of *Higher Still*. I feel that the detail is justified, however, since it illustrates the immense amount of activity that had to go into laying the foundations of one of the most momentous reforms in secondary education in the 20th century, for it was designed to bring together a range of reforms covering the whole of primary and secondary education in Scotland. As with the introduction of Standard Grade, the Department had amply demonstrated its ability to handle such a complex operation.

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**Note 16:** This curriculum modelling duo was later given an extended remit early in 1993, liaising with the Inspectorate's Audit Unit to produce costings.

**Note 17:** Since modern languages could not be regarded as one of core skills which all young people required to make a full contribution to society and the economy, the Department recommended rejection of Howie's proposal that modern languages should be part of the compulsory core. Science students, in particular, might find it a difficult hurdle to surmount; and the qualification would have no credibility if the level of demand was lowered to ensure that able pupils, who were not gifted linguistically, were not disadvantaged.

**Note 18:** Throughout these discussions, an eye had to be kept on what was happening in England and Wales so that the two systems were consistent with the UK Government's policy of ensuring mutual recognition of awards north and south of the border.

**Note 19:** It should be noted that, in this context, the terms "Foundation, General and Credit" applied to Howie's SUSA levels and did not mean that pupils would sit Standard Grade examinations. (See also Note 20.)

**Note 20:** At a meeting with Lord James on 29 September 1993, even Professor Howie admitted that he now regretted the strict division into two divisions. However, writing in *The Scotsman* several years later (22 October 1997), he explained that his regret was not over what he had recommended but over the way in which they were presented, viz. the divisiveness created by the use of the two different names SCOTBAC and SCOTCERT. If he had known that some kind of full-time education to the age of 18 would soon become the norm, he would have recommended "*Bacs for all, with the divisiveness inherent in any system of qualifications decently tucked away in a well-understood, but never articulated pecking order among the Bacs,*" as was then being proposed in France.

**Note 21:** "*Unit*" was now the accepted term to cover what had previously been referred to as "*module*" in some schemes and "*unit*" in others. The term "*modules*" had rather gone out of fashion because they tended to be freestanding, whereas "*units*" were parts of a progressive course of study.

**Note 22:** One of the difficulties in understanding the new proposals is the number of terms which were used in two different senses. For example, "*Foundation*" would continue to be the lowest of the three Standard Grade levels, but it was also applied to the lowest SUSA level, called "*Skillstart*"; "*Credit*" was the highest award in Standard Grade and would also be a 40-hour unit in a Group Award; "*units*", "*modules*" and "*credits*" all had roughly the same meaning but were used in different contexts; the externally examined "*Higher Grade*" would be re-packaged into the new "*Higher Level*"; and the proposed "*Advanced Higher Level*" was not to be confused with the English "*Advanced Level*."

In using the terms "*Foundation*," "*General*" and "*Credit*," the Department had hoped that these familiar terms would make it easier for pupils, teachers and users to understand the relationship between the various levels of the Higher Still arrangements and also indicate how students were likely to progress from Standard Grade to Higher Still courses and units. Their use actually caused confusion, since these terms were variously interpreted as "*identical to*", "*equivalent to*" and "*corresponding to*" the Standard Grade levels. An internal SOED memo (24 June 1993) dealing with the position of Standard Grade in the proposed scheme seems to suggest that there was some uncertainty even in the minds of some within the Scottish Office. The memo states that the three Standard Grade levels would correspond in attainment terms to the lowest three levels of SUSA units, but the difference in SUSA would lie in the size of the units, the assessment arrangements, and the age and stage of the candidates. Achievement at Standard Grade would be given full allowance within the SUSA structure, and Standard Grade results would count towards a Group Award provided the requirements of breadth and core skills were met.

It was August 1995 before the confusion was officially recognised through the publication by the Higher Still Development Unit of the consultation document entitled "*Nomenclature*".

**Note 23:** This was a surprising claim in the light of previous experience. When both "O" Grade and Standard Grade were introduced, the same hope had been expressed that able pupils would bypass these and aim straight for Higher Grade. Only a very few did; the majority took the Fourth Year examinations to ensure they would have some qualifications if they later failed Higher Grade or were forced to leave prematurely. And, instead of sitting these examinations *en passant*, they treated them as an end-goal, thus limiting the time available for the Higher Grade syllabus to the "*two-term dash*".