



National Course Assessment Survey 2014

Summary of results

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National Course assessment survey

SQA values the views of learners, teachers and lecturers in setting and maintaining standards in our qualifications. Capturing these views has included carrying out Question Paper and Course assessment surveys for many years.

Prior to 2012, each year, a sample of presenting centres was asked to comment on the question papers of a sample of National Courses. From 2012 onwards, the survey has been expanded to include Course assessments for all National Courses and has been made available to all teachers/lecturers and all learners through an open web survey which is accessed from SQA's website. In 2014, two separate surveys, one for teachers/lecturers and one for learners, were made available from the first day of examinations. Each survey was hosted on its own web page, with text explaining the purpose of the survey.

The expansion of the survey to include all National Courses provided an opportunity for information on a wider range of Courses to be collected. It also increased the opportunity for all teachers, lecturers and learners to participate and encouraged openness and transparency. In its present form the survey has provided SQA with limited qualitative information which when complemented with information from other sources has helped to improve the quality of Course assessments.

This method of data collection, an open web-based survey, has some limitations. Although, the teacher, lecturer and learner surveys were hosted on separate websites with text explaining the purpose of each survey, we cannot be sure that learners have not responded to the practitioner survey or vice-versa. Indeed there is some evidence through the free-text responses that some learners have responded to the practitioner survey.

Additionally, as respondents are self-selecting we have no way of ensuring that the views of those responding are representative of all teachers and lecturers and learners. For example, in 2014, more than 145,181 learners from around 400 presenting centres attempted Course assessments for a range of National Courses. The 1317 learners and 1250 teachers and lecturers who responded to the surveys represent a small proportion of all teachers and lecturers and learners and we have no way of knowing to what extent they represent the range of sub groups (eg gender, age, geographical area, etc) in the population as a whole.

For the above reasons, the findings of the 2014 Course Assessment Survey may need to be treated with care.

The nature of the new curriculum and Courses requires SQA to actively move towards a more representative and reliable system which supports teachers and lecturers and learners in providing useful feedback. Therefore 2014 will be the last year for web-based surveys in their current form.

As outlined above, SQA values the views of learners, teachers and lecturers in setting and maintaining standards in our qualifications. To support this, alternative methods for engaging with teachers and lecturers and learners are being explored including: surveying stratified samples of teachers and lecturers through questionnaires, the use of focus groups and connecting with learners through social media. Work is on-going to ensure that the views of teachers and lecturers are obtained as accurately as possible and taken into account when developing future Course assessments.

Practitioners

The total number of responses to the National Course Assessment Survey for Practitioners was 1,250.

The subjects with the highest numbers of complete responses were (across all levels):

- ◆ Chemistry (including Revised Higher and Advanced Higher) — 150
- ◆ Mathematics — 120
- ◆ English — 119
- ◆ Physics (including Revised Higher and Advanced Higher) — 108
- ◆ Biology (including Revised Higher and Advanced Higher) — 88
- ◆ Geography — 69

Practitioners were asked the following three questions.

Question 1: Overall how would you rate this year's Course assessment?

- ◆ Fair
- ◆ Reasonably Fair
- ◆ Unfair

Question 2: How would you describe the level of the Course assessment?

- ◆ More difficult than expected
- ◆ The same as expected
- ◆ Easier than expected

Question 3: How did the Course assessment as a whole cover the knowledge and skills you expected to be assessed?

- ◆ Very well
- ◆ Sufficiently
- ◆ Insufficiently

Responses

Question 1: Overall how would you rate this year's Course assessment?

Rating	%
Fair	24.2
Reasonably Fair	31.4
Unfair	44.4

Question 2: How would you describe the level of the Course assessment?

Rating	%
More difficult than expected	38.6
The same as expected	43.4
Easier than expected	17.9

Question 3: How did the Course assessment as a whole cover the knowledge and skills you expected to be assessed?

Rating	%
Very well	14.6
Sufficiently	51.2
Insufficiently	34.2

The survey also provided practitioners with the opportunity to make additional comments. A range of the type of comments made is provided below:

- ◆ 'I think the written paper in Art & Design was fair considering it is the first year of presentation'
- ◆ 'Final course assessment offered a fair amount of challenge'
- ◆ 'A well prepared candidate sitting the exam over a two year course would have had little difficulty. Pupils on a one year course found it harder (more to squeeze into one year and less time for focused preparation prior to exam)'
- ◆ 'Questions were all fair however there could be greater element of choice, eg instead of stating aids, pupils could have choice of three diseases (two more than Higher) as in many past Intermediate papers and specimen question papers'
- ◆ 'A good standard paper which rewarded those who put the effort into revising their Chemistry'
- ◆ 'There has been far too much assessment and the goal posts have been changing throughout the year'
- ◆ 'Very fair and accessible and pitched at exactly the correct level for SCQF 5. Compared very well with the level contained in Intermediate 2 which is the same SCQF level. Gave the candidates the opportunity to show what they could do. An excellent paper'
- ◆ 'The reading and writing were of an appropriate standard. I think that the listening was very difficult and this has been discouraging for those wishing to continue to Higher'
- ◆ 'Perfect level for National 5 candidates'
- ◆ 'Level as always challenging and timing way too short. Pupils don't get the time to show their knowledge well. Hopefully the new Higher will allow time for students to expand on answers and not be racing the clock'

Learners

The total number of responses to the National Course Assessment Survey for Learners was 1,317.

The subjects with the highest numbers of complete responses were (across all levels):

- ◆ Mathematics — 353
- ◆ English — 217
- ◆ Chemistry (including Revised Higher and Advanced Higher) — 113
- ◆ Biology (including Revised Higher and Advanced Higher) — 80
- ◆ History — 59
- ◆ Modern Studies — 57

Learners were asked the following three questions.

Question 1: Overall how would you rate this year's Course assessment?

- ◆ Fair
- ◆ Reasonably Fair
- ◆ Unfair

Question 2: How would you describe the level of the Course assessment?

- ◆ More difficult than expected
- ◆ The same as expected
- ◆ Easier than expected

Question 3: How did the Course assessment as a whole cover the knowledge and skills you have learnt?

- ◆ Very well
- ◆ It did not give me the opportunity to show all the skills and knowledge I have learnt
- ◆ It asked me about more than I expected

Responses

Question 1: Overall how would you rate this year's Course assessment?

Rating	%
Fair	27.4
Reasonably Fair	29.4
Unfair	43.2

Question 2: How would you describe the level of the Course assessment?

Rating	%
More difficult than expected	60.0
The same as expected	31.1
Easier than expected	9.0

Question 3: How did the Course assessment as a whole cover the knowledge and skills you have learnt?

Rating	%
Very well	32.7
It did not give me the opportunity to show all the skills and knowledge I have learnt	50.0
It asked me about more than I expected	17.5

The survey also provided learners with the opportunity to make additional comments. A range of the type of comments made is provided below:

- ◆ 'I think the course assessments helped me to fully understand the topics that I have been taught in Chemistry'
- ◆ 'It had very different questions from the ones in the past papers I was revising from'
- ◆ 'Maths has always been one of my strongest subjects. I enjoyed the challenges from the course that I was faced with'
- ◆ 'Some particular questions were difficult but others were reasonable'
- ◆ 'More time to do the critical essay and set text. Time keeping was too difficult for me'
- ◆ 'By taking National 5 Physics as well, I was able to make use of the things I'd learnt in other classes. This was helpful as it meant I was making use of the knowledge more often'
- ◆ 'Some questions were extremely difficult, badly linked together and the level of difficulty is completely different from the years before'
- ◆ 'After studying a lot for this Higher Maths exam it was still more difficult than expected. The previous years' past papers couldn't prepare you for this exam'
- ◆ 'The essay questions did not go with any of my texts and it was very difficult to write a decent essay with the questions that were given'
- ◆ 'Some questions not worded well. Too much tricky problem solving questions compared to other years'

Summary

For the subjects that received more than 50 responses, the percentage of positive responses across all qualification levels (Fair and Reasonably Fair) and negative responses (Unfair) were:

Subject	Practitioners		Learners	
	% of positive overall rating	% of negative overall rating	% of positive overall rating	% of negative overall rating
Chemistry	42.0	58.0	38.9	61.1
Mathematics	66.4	33.6	33.7	66.3
English	53.8	46.2	65.4	34.6
Physics	37.0	63.0	N/A	N/A
Biology	42.0	58.0	57.5	42.5
Geography	78.6	21.4	N/A	N/A
History	62.7	37.3	57.6	42.4
Business Management	48.1	51.9	N/A	N/A
Modern Studies	N/A	N/A	64.9	35.1

N/A — where responses were less than 50

Although the practitioners' responses were reasonably equal in terms of positive (either 'Fair' or 'Reasonably Fair') and negative ('Unfair'), the percentage of positive responses was considerably increased from last year, with a corresponding decrease in negative responses (Unfair).

In contrast, the majority of learners' responses were positive (either 'Fair' or Reasonably Fair'), the overall percentage of positive responses was also higher than last year, notwithstanding Chemistry and Mathematics where the overall percentage rating was negative. In the case of Chemistry, the responses were exactly the same as last year and, regarding Mathematics, the positive overall rating was increased from last year with the overall negative rating down slightly.