

Design principles for National Courses

Approved by Qualifications Governing Group, 15 January 2010

Introduction

The Curriculum for Excellence values, purposes and principles will underpin all new and revised National Courses. Learners should have opportunities to continue to acquire and develop the four capacities¹, as well as skills for learning, skills for life, and skills for work.

The purpose of National Courses is to enable certification for general educational aims. Each Course has its own rationale and aims, but all follow a common set of design principles and have a broadly consistent structure of Units and Course assessment.

National Courses are organised within eight curricular areas². The broad objectives of National Courses are to provide high standards, and breadth and depth of learning which will help learners progress.

National Courses provide a statement of a learner's achievement against a defined standard. Achieving a National Course provides learners with the opportunity to demonstrate their acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding in a formal way. It is also a 'marketable' qualification for progression to further study, training and employment.

All National Courses will conform to the design principles set out here.

¹ The four capacities are: confident individuals, effective contributors, responsible citizens, successful learners

² expressive arts, health and wellbeing, languages, mathematics, sciences, social studies, religious and moral education, technologies

The design principles

Course design

- 1 Every National Course must have a clear rationale that:
 - ◆ justifies the need for the Course and its uniqueness
 - ◆ provides evidence of demand for it
 - ◆ explains how the National Course fits with other qualifications
 - ◆ identifies the progression opportunities into and from the Course
 - ◆ outlines the aims, purposes and intended learning outcomes of the Course and explains how the award structure meets these purposes

- 2 National Courses will have the following SCQF credit points:
 - ◆ Courses at Access 2 and 3 will have Units totalling 18 SCQF credit points.
 - ◆ Courses at National 4 will have Units totalling 24 SCQF credit points. One of the Units (six SCQF credit points) will assess added value, ie it will require the learner to demonstrate depth of understanding and/or application of skills.
 - ◆ Courses at National 5 and Higher will have Units totalling 18 SCQF credit points, with an additional six SCQF credit points to allow the use of an extended range of learning and teaching approaches, remediation, consolidation of learning, integration, and preparation for external assessment. This will give a total of 24 SCQF credit points for Courses at National 5 and Courses at Higher.
 - ◆ Courses at Advanced Higher will have Units totalling 24 SCQF credit points, with an additional eight SCQF credit points to allow the use of an extended range of learning and teaching approaches, remediation, consolidation of learning, integration and preparation for external assessment. This will give a total of 32 SCQF credit points for the Course.

- 3 The level of a National Course should be consistent with the appropriate SCQF level descriptor. The extent of coverage of a National Course should be comparable to appropriate existing or previous qualifications at the same level, and should be consistent with the rationale and the aims, purposes and intended learning outcomes of the Course. Units in a National Course must all be at the SCQF level of the Course.

- 4 Every National Course should provide appropriate opportunities for skills for learning, life and work to be developed.
- 5 National Courses should take into consideration practical aspects of delivery and should be able to be delivered in a range of centres. The requirements for practitioner expertise and resources should not be restrictive and should be appropriate for general qualifications.
- 6 National Courses should take into consideration the needs of all learners, and should be designed to be as accessible as possible to learners who will achieve in different ways and at a different pace.

Course structure

- 7 A National Course can be made up of mandatory and/or optional Units. However, at least six SCQF credit points (eight at Advanced Higher) must be from mandatory Units, and these must reflect the title of the Course. There will be no alternatives within this mandatory section. In some Courses, all component Units will be mandatory.
- 8 Optional Units can account for up to 12 SCQF credit points (16 at Advanced Higher). Where optional Units are used, these should reflect identified needs of the specialist area and the rationale, aims, purposes and intended learning outcomes for the Course.
- 9 Where appropriate, a suite of Courses with the same title at different levels should have a Course structure which is consistent across levels.

Units

- 10 Each Unit in a National Course should be coherent and worthy of recognition in its own right.
- 11 Units in National Courses will be internally assessed on a pass/fail basis, and will be ungraded. Unit assessment should be fit for purpose and proportionate. Units can be assessed individually. In some subjects, it will be possible to gather evidence of achievement of Units in an integrated way, combining assessments across Units.
- 12 Units in a National Course can be of different SCQF credit values but they must all be at the same SCQF level of the Course.

Assessment

- 13 Assessment methodologies for National Courses should support the *Strategic Vision and Key Principles* for Assessment 3–18. They should promote best practice and enable learners to achieve the highest standards they are capable of. They should support greater breadth and depth of learning and a greater focus on skills development.
- 14 Assessment approaches for National Courses should support learning by engaging learners. Assessment has to be fair and inclusive, and must allow learners to show what they have achieved.
- 15 Assessment approaches should be proportionate and fit for purpose: different forms of assessment are appropriate in different areas of learning, and this should be reflected in the assessment approaches for National Courses.
- 16 Assessment for National Courses will be as follows:
 - ◆ To achieve the award of a Course **at any level**, the candidate must provide evidence of achievement of the Units of that Course. Units can be assessed individually. In some subjects, it will be possible to gather evidence of achievement of Units in an integrated way, combining assessments across Units.
 - ◆ The award of a Course at Access 2 and 3 and National 4 will require achievement of Units.
 - ◆ The award of a Course at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher will require achievement of Units and an external assessment, which will be graded. The external assessment will confirm attainment in the Course — sampling the skills, knowledge and understanding in the Course Units as well as integration and application of these as appropriate. The external assessment will take a form that is fit for purpose and proportionate. It might involve an examination, performance, project, practical activity or other form of assessment (or combination of two of these) as appropriate to the subject area.
- 17 Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher will be graded A-D. The grade awarded will be based on the grade achieved in the external assessment.

Award of Course

- 18 For the award of a National Course at Access 2, Access 3 and National 4, candidates must pass all the Units in the Course.

For the award of a Course at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, candidates must pass all the Units and achieve an overall pass grade in the external assessment.