

National Qualifications



Task Group newsletter

Issue 8 March 2004

Welcome

Welcome to the eighth edition of the National Qualifications Task Group Newsletter, which keeps stakeholders up to date with developments in National Qualifications. If you are new to the newsletter, you may wish to check out previous editions, which are available on the new National Qualifications Steering Group website:

www.scotland.gov.uk/education/nationalqualifications

Schools and colleges currently receive this newsletter by e-mail and we are keen to build up a wider distribution list for all stakeholders. If you would like to be added to the mailing list please let us know by e-mailing:

Lyndsey.Hair@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

This newsletter summarises current issues within National Qualifications including information on how we will continue to inform stakeholders of the latest NQ developments following the decision to discontinue NQTG (see article below.)

Francesca Osowska, chair of the National Qualifications Task Group has taken up a new role within the Scottish Executive. Francesca's work with NQTG and in other areas of education is very much appreciated and we wish her every success in her new post. Gill Robinson has now been appointed as Francesca's successor.

Eileen Gill
NQTG Secretary
March 2004

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National Qualifications Task Group fulfils its remit

NQTG was established in June 2001 to oversee implementation of the recommendations contained within the report by the NQSG – *Review of Initial Implementation of New National Qualifications*: www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/ngir-00.asp.

These recommendations have either been met in full or substantially progressed, and many have now become embedded within the normal processes of the agencies involved in delivering and supporting NQs. Another positive development has been the creation of greater links and co-operation between individual agencies and the wider education community.

NQTG concluded that the Group's work was complete and Ministers approved their recommendation that the Group should cease. A final meeting was held in December 2003 to discuss the few areas of outstanding work – mainly considering the outcomes of the remaining subject reviews (see update overleaf). The Group also discussed how the future communication strategy will be taken forward. NQSG will take forward the remaining work from NQTG and will assume ownership of the newsletter and website, though the Scottish Executive will continue to prepare content for and administer both as at present. The next issue of this newsletter will be called the National Qualifications Steering Group newsletter, and the website has been updated and renamed the National Qualifications Steering Group website. The web address remains the same, as below.

The National Qualifications Steering Group will continue to provide a forum for stakeholders to discuss major NQ-related issues and to provide advice to Ministers.

www.scotland.gov.uk/education/nationalqualifications

Major subject reviews update

All of the investigation reports in the first phase of the major subject reviews have now received Ministerial endorsement. These are: Accounting and Finance; Administration; Craft and Design; Computing; Information Systems; Geography; Media Studies; Music; Physical Education; Psychology; Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies; Applied Mathematics All were due for implementation in session 2004, except for Music and Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies which will be 2005. Full reports for each subject are now available on the SQA's website: www.sqa.org.uk

However stakeholders reported widespread concerns over the ability of a significant number of centres to deliver the revised Computing, Information Systems and Administration courses in session 2004-05 as planned. To ensure that no candidates are disadvantaged Ministers have agreed to delay implementation of the Administration and Information Systems courses at all levels until session 2005-06, and to extend dual running of the Computing course to Higher level, in addition to the already planned dual running of the Intermediate level Computing courses.

It should be noted that from session 2004/05 the Accounting and Finance course will be called Accounting, whilst the Craft and Design course will be entitled Product Design.

Launch seminars are to be held for each subject to be implemented from session 2004-05 in May 2004 in various locations, and all presenting centres will be invited to send a delegate for each subject area. Details of these events and booking arrangements will be sent to centres by SQA. Revised Course Arrangements, NABs and Specimen Papers will be made available to centres from spring 2004 onwards. Further details about dissemination will be made available to centres in due course by SQA.

Other subject reviews

Reviews for Business Management, Economics, Politics and Personal and Social Education are complete, with changes likely to be implemented in session 2005-6.

Further information on subject reviews is available in the National Agencies Group Joint Work Programme document at the website below;

① www.scotland.gov.uk/education/nationalqualifications

Consultations

- The SQA has completed consulting on the future of the **Scottish Group Awards** and **Project Based National Courses**. The consultation clearly showed that respondents were dissatisfied with SGAs and PBNs in their present form. However, there was very little support for abolishing either award. SQA is developing proposals for its Qualifications Committee and their recommendations will subsequently be brought to NQSG and Ministers. Consultation on **core skills** within the National Qualifications has been postponed until after the outcome of the first phase of the curriculum review due around summer 2004.
- The Scottish Executive will be consulting from 11 March 2004 on the **Age & Stage regulations**, which govern when young people may sit Standard Grade and National Course examinations and receive certification from SQA for National Units. This will run for twelve weeks until 4 June, after which the results will be independently analysed and reported back in the summer. The consultation seeks views from stakeholders as to whether the regulations should be;
 - Reverted to those as operated prior to session 2003/04, where application for exceptional entry was made on a candidate by candidate basis.
 - Maintained as operated during session 2003/04 where simplified applications for exceptional entry can be made on a group, class or year basis, endorsed by the Director of Education or Chair of the Board of Governors or equivalent for the independent sector.
 - Relaxed to allow entry to Intermediate level National Courses from S3.
 - Replaced with guidance.
 - Abolished entirely.
- Readers are invited to respond to the consultation which will be sent in March to local authorities, secondary schools and other stakeholders, and will be available on the Scottish Executive website at the following address: www.scotland.gov.uk/views/views.asp. Alternatively you can get a copy by writing to: William Scott-Watson, Scottish Executive Education Department, Qualifications, Assessment & Curriculum Division, Area 2-A, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh. EH6 6QQ. Tel 0131 244 0069. E-mail: AgeandStage@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

National Qualifications: Consultation Seminars

The Scottish Executive held three seminars in Inverness, Falkirk and Glasgow in late November 2003 to engage stakeholders in discussing those commitments relevant to National Qualifications made in *Educating for Excellence*, the Executive's response to the National Debate on education. (This can be found here; www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/ndser-00.asp)

The aims of the seminars were to:

- Discuss the consultation on the future of Age and Stage regulations (see earlier article).
- Consider the relationship between Standard Grade and new National Qualifications
- Discuss the commitment to reducing the amount of time spent on external examinations.

The outcomes of the consultation seminars will play an important part in determining how these commitments will be taken forward. It was an opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to developments at an early stage.

Local authorities and the Association of Scottish Colleges were invited to nominate representatives, including parents and candidates. Members of the National Qualifications Steering Group and Learning and Teaching Scotland's Post-14 Reference Group were also invited to attend. A conference report has been sent to delegates and placed on the National Qualifications website. Updates on future work will be highlighted in this newsletter.

① www.scotland.gov.uk/education/nationalqualifications

NABs Online

Fulfilling a recommendation of the NQASG report, National Assessment Bank packs are all now available on the SQA website. They will no longer be issued in paper form. The NAB packs contain confidential assessment materials and are therefore in a secure area of the website that needs a password to access. All centres have been sent a unique password and username. Having NABs available online will make it easier for centres to access the packs and to ensure they have the most up to date materials.

Any enquiries about this new service should refer in the first instance to the SQA Customer Contact Centre on 0141 242 2214.

① www.sqa.org.uk

NQ Online

LT Scotland's NQ Online site has been further enhanced by the development of individual subject pages for the main SQA subject areas. Each subject page has 'deep links' built into it which will take learners, teachers and lecturers directly to relevant subject resources. This includes other resources held by LT Scotland as well as information from SQA (arrangements documents, subject review information, update letters), SFEU (subject networks) and other relevant educational websites. This fulfils the objectives of the first recommendation of the NQASG report for an 'electronic portal' linking together the various sources of NQ support and materials.

An area identifying forthcoming support material has also been developed which will assist with forward planning and contains details of titles being developed in the NQ Curriculum Support series, including the flexible learning (OFDL) sub-series as well as the list of titles commissioned to support the SQA NQ reviews.

① www.ltscotland.org.uk/nq

END OF COMPENSATORY AWARDS – INTRODUCTION OF GRADE D

Following SQA's consultation on compensatory awards they have been abolished. The **Grade D** award will be introduced from August 2004 for candidates who narrowly fail to achieve a grade C at Intermediate 1 & 2, Higher and Advanced Higher.

The majority of respondents to the consultation indicated that a Grade D at the level of entry would more accurately reflect the level a candidate had actually achieved in the Course assessment. It would allow candidates who narrowly fail to achieve a grade C award to be certificated consistently across all subject and levels - this is not the case at present - and would give recognition for the Units a candidate has achieved.

The grade D will recognise achievement against the majority of Grade Descriptions for the level of the Course. It will be reported on the Scottish Qualifications Certificate as a grade in its own right, and will indicate that the candidate has undertaken that level of Course and external assessment; achieved all the National Units for the Course at that level; and gained a band 7 in the external assessment.

Understanding Standards

NQASG recommended that SQA provides additional material to help practitioners understand standards. In relation to Appeals Exemplification, SQA has published material for English, Maths, PE, Music, Business Management, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, French, History, Modern Studies. Their work in this area has now moved into phase 3 and they are now refreshing the material for English & Maths, whilst also preparing such material for Geography, Drama, Information Systems and Care. This will be ready by June 2004.

A new development is the Course Assessment Specification – this will help centres when constructing their own prelims and in estimating candidate performance. This is being issued with Specimen Question papers in the phase 1 Review subjects. Plans will be put in place to extend this to other subjects.

All of the Principal Assessor and Senior Moderator reports from diet 2003 are available on the SQA website. These reports include information on pass marks and grade cut off scores. Marking schemes for high uptake subjects are also available.

① www.sqa.org.uk

CPD Workshops

The workshops piloted by SQA in English, Maths and Art & Design proved to be extremely successful. Delegates appreciated very much the opportunity to have access to examining team members and to see extracts of candidate responses to examination questions. Feedback from delegates indicated that these types of workshops should be annual events at every level. This is being considered by SQA.

Following the workshops there has been a demand from centres for additional copies of the support material produced for the events. As a result SQA has made copies available to centres for purchase. A CD-Rom was produced following the Art & Design event illustrating candidate work with commentaries and marks. Two copies of this CD-Rom were issued to all centres without charge.

Planning is well underway for workshops to follow the 2004 diet. SQA aim to extend the number of subjects to English at Higher & Intermediate 2, Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, French, History, Geography, Media Studies, Classics, Art & Design – all at Higher. Information on these will go to centres in April.

① www.sqa.org.uk

PASS-IT

PASS-IT (Project on Assessment in Scotland using Information Technology) is a joint research project piloting the delivery of NABs directly into schools and colleges. A consortium of SFEU, SQA, LT Scotland, SCROLLA and the BBC are involved in the project which is being funded by the Scottish Executive. The key objective of PASS-IT is to explore new ways of working which can add value for teachers, lecturers and candidates.

The project is now in its second phase, which began in November 2003 and will last until October 2004. Phase 1 ran from August 2002 to October 2003 and involved Maths at Higher and Advanced Higher level, Chemistry at Higher level, and Computing at Higher National level. Phase 2 includes Maths, Chemistry, English, Music and French at a variety of levels from Access to Higher. Key aspects of the project include examining the effect of the medium on candidate scores, the provision of automatic feedback, accessibility issues, and, in Phase 2, the possibility of marking short blocks of free text in Intermediate English.

For further information about PASS-IT visit the following websites:

- **PASS-IT** www.pass-it.org.uk
- **CALM** www.calm.hw.ac.uk
- **SCROLLA** www.scrolla.ac.uk

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

3rd National SCQF Conference, 8 March 2004, SECC Glasgow. The third national SCQF conference will centre around what needs to be done to make the Framework come alive. It will provide a forum for policy makers, practitioners and learners from all areas of education and training to come together to discuss how the opportunities presented by the SCQF can be grasped, how linkages can be forged between the various sectors which the Framework encompasses and how the application of the SCQF in practice can be embedded in Scotland. Details of how to register for a place at the conference are available on the SCQF website at the address below:

① www.scqf.org.uk

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS ASSESSMENT SUPPORT GROUP (NQASG)

The National Qualifications Assessment Support Group (NQASG) was a short-life group established by the National Qualifications Task Group (NQTG) to make recommendations on ways to improve support for NQ assessment related tasks. Their report has been endorsed by NQTG, the NQ Steering Group (NQSG) and by Scottish Ministers. The report will shortly be made available on the NQSG website (address below) and an Implementation Update will also be available shortly. This will provide information regarding the progress of NQASG's recommendations, the majority of which have now been progressed by the key partners - SQA, LT Scotland, SFEU, HMIE and the Executive. Specific progress on one of these recommendations is detailed below. Progress on other areas has been highlighted throughout this newsletter

NQs - Communication to stakeholders

NQASG recommended the production of information for stakeholders on the structure of NQs and internal/external assessment etc. A collaborative effort between SQA, LT Scotland, SFEU and the Scottish Executive will shortly culminate with the publication of: *Scotland's National Qualifications: A Quick Guide*. This is a 4 page leaflet intended for use by anybody with an interest in learning about National Qualifications. It will be distributed widely throughout Scotland to various organisations including schools (for use by parents), colleges, careers offices and libraries. A more in-depth version will also be available for those people who require more detailed information.

① www.scotland.gov.uk/education/nationalqualifications

Disability Discrimination Act – implications for National Qualifications

At a NQSG meeting in October 2003 the wider implications of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) in relation to National Qualifications were discussed. The discussion focussed on the work SQA, Learning and Teaching Scotland and SFEU are carrying out to support schools, colleges and other centres to comply with the Act. Members agreed it would be useful to identify existing networks and organisations involved in this area that could provide sources of advice and assistance. A range of organisations were identified and have been listed in an annex to this newsletter.

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LTS: nqcontenteditor@ltscotland.org.uk

SFEU: sfeu@sfeu.ac.uk

WEB SITES

Scottish Qualifications Authority

www.sqa.org.uk

Learning Teaching Scotland

www.ltscotland.org.uk

Scottish Further Education Unit

www.sfeu.ac.uk

National Qualifications Online

www.ltscotland.org.uk/nq

National Qualifications Steering Group

www.scotland.gov.uk/education/nationalqualifications

Join the National Qualifications Steering Group newsletter distribution list by e-mailing: Lyndsey.Hair@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS TASK GROUP NEWSLETTER – ANNEX

Wider implications of the Disability Discrimination Act for National Qualifications

Background

The National Qualifications Steering Group discussed at its meeting on 1 October 2003 the wider implications of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) in relation to National Qualifications. The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate, without justification, against disabled pupils, students and other disabled people in the provision of education and associated services. NQSG's discussion focused on the work SQA, LT Scotland and SFEU are carrying out to support schools, colleges and other centres to comply with the Act. Members agreed it would be useful to identify existing networks and organisations involved in this area that could provide sources of information and advice.

Scottish Qualifications Authority

SQA has established a Task Group on Special Assessment Arrangements which is reviewing guidelines for centres on SAAs. SQA's Diversity Steering Group monitors implementation of all equal opportunities and inclusiveness legislation relating to SQA in its role as awarding body and employer. Contact: customer@sqa.org.uk. Website: www.sqa.org.uk

Learning and Teaching Scotland

LT Scotland is involved in the PASS-IT project to research and pilot ICT based assessments and has convened a sub group to consider issues of accessibility and implications of online formative and summative assessment for pupils with a range of learning needs. LT Scotland is involved in ongoing work in support of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning, and has ensured that most pages on all its websites comply with priority 1 and 2 guidelines of the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Contact: nqcontenteditor@ltscotland.org.uk. Website: www.ltscotland.org.uk.

Scottish Further Education Unit

SFEU have a network of college staff who deal with disability issues. They have been responsible for organising and delivering an extensive programme of staff training and development in relation to the DDA. Suggested contact is Sandy MacLean (email: sandy.maclean@sfeu.ac.uk). Further information from SFEU. www.sfeu.ac.uk

Scottish Further Education Funding Council

SFEFC are responsible for, among other things, funding colleges to secure adequate and efficient provision of further education; promoting continuous quality improvement and innovation in learning and teaching; and offering guidance to colleges. They have ensured that FE colleges were aware of their responsibilities under the DDA, and asked them to ensure that they meet these responsibilities. They have also funding a range of support for colleges to assist them to in relation to their responsibilities under the DDA. SFEFC has a Disability Advisory Forum, covering both FE and HE, which considers issues relating to disability policy. Suggested contact is Tom Ward, Head of Access Policy Branch, SFEFC (email: tward@sfc.ac.uk). Further information from SFEFC.

Skill Scotland

Skill Scotland are a source of information and advice to disabled students and staff at FE colleges about disability issues, including legislation. They have played an active role in training staff in FE colleges and in disseminating information about the DDA. For training enquiries contact John Ireson (Director) email: john@skillscotland.org.uk. For information enquiries contact Mhairi Snowden (Information & Policy Officer) e-mail: admin@skillscotland.org.uk Further information available on the Skill website: www.skill.org.uk.

Scottish Disability Team

The SDT are carrying out DDA training events in Higher Education and also co-ordinate local and national networks of HE Disability co-ordinators which discuss, among other issues, the DDA. Suggested contact is Paul Brown (email: sdt.info@dundee.ac.uk). Further information available on SDT's website: www.sdt.ac.uk.

Disability Rights Commission (Scotland)

The DRC is an independent body, established by Act of Parliament, with the aim of eliminating discrimination faced by disabled people and promoting equality of opportunity. DRC Scotland Suggested contact is Elaine Noad, Scottish Commissioner (email: Elaine.Noad@drc-gb.org). Further information available on DRC Scotland's website: www.drc-gb.org/scotland.

Association of Support for Learning Officers

ASLO aims to: provide an inter-authority forum for discussion and support on matters relating to Additional Support Needs and Inclusion; promote, influence and exchange good practice; provide a point of contact for other national associations; and provide advice to the Scottish Executive. Suggested contact and further information from Ken McAra, Quality Improvement Officer (Support for Learning) at Dundee City Council and Chair of ASLO, (email: ken.mcara@dundeecity.gov.uk).

Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists

ASPEP is the national professional body for principal educational psychologists in Scotland and has a particular interest in promoting the professional development of its members. Suggested contact and further information from Anna Boni (email: Anna.Boni@educ.edin.gov.uk).

CALL Centre

The CALL Centre (Communication Aids for Language and Learning) based at Edinburgh University provides specialist advice and expertise in ICT for children who have speech, communication and/or writing difficulties in Scottish schools. The CALL Centre also conducts research and development projects in the areas of special educational needs, disability, communication and learning. Suggested contacts are Sally Millar or Paul Nisbet (email: callcentre@ed.ac.uk). Further information available on CALL Centre's website: <http://callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk>