Higher National Unit specification: general information

Unit title: **Switching Technology**

Unit code: FR23 35

Superclass: CB

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Unit purpose

The purpose of this Unit is to provide candidates with an understanding of how a switch communicates on a network, how switches are interconnected and configured with other networking devices in a small or medium sized business network, which includes implementing VLAN segmentation integrating wireless devices into a LAN. It is intended for candidates undertaking an HNC or HND in Computing, Computer Networking or a related area who require a detailed understanding of switching technology.

On completion of the Unit the candidate should be able to:

1 Describe LAN architecture.
2 Describe and configure basic switching technology.

3 Describe and configure advanced switching technologies.

4 Describe and configure basic wireless LANs.

Recommended prior knowledge and skills

Access to this Unit will be at the discretion of the Centre. There are no specific requirements, but candidates would benefit from knowledge of computer networks. This may be demonstrated by the possession of HN Units such as FR24 35 Networking Technology and FR22 35 Routing Technology.

Credit points and level

2 Higher National Unit credit(s) at SCQF level 8: (16 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 8*)

*SCQF credit points are used to allocate credit to qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Each qualification in the Framework is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at an SCQF level. There are 12 SCQF levels, ranging from Access 1 to Doctorates.

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Core Skills

There is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skill components in this Unit.

Context for delivery

If this Unit is delivered as part of a Group Award, it is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within the subject area of the Group Award to which it contributes.

Assessment

Evidence for the Knowledge and Understanding component of the Unit could be produced using a set of multiple choice/multiple response questions to assess candidates' capabilities. This could be administered as a single end of Unit test covering all Outcomes, or could be a series of individual end of Learning Outcome tests.

Alternatively the evidence for the Knowledge and Understanding component of the Unit could be extended response/exam style questions covering all Outcomes.

Candidates must answer at least 60% of the questions correctly to obtain a pass.

Testing must take place in a closed-book environment where candidates have no access to the Internet, books, handouts, notes or other learning material. Testing should be done machine-based must be invigilated. There must be no

communication between candidates and communication with the invigilator must be restricted to matters relating to the administration of the test.

If a candidate requires to be re-assessed, a different selection of questions must be used from all sections. A significant proportion of the questions used in the re-assessment must be different from those used in the original test.

If an Outcome has a practical component, this could be assessed by having the candidate use a logbook to record the practical tasks successfully completed. The logbook can be in electronic form and must be authenticated by the assessor.

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards

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The sections of the Unit stating the Outcomes, Knowledge and/or Skills, and Evidence Requirements are mandatory.

Where evidence for Outcomes is assessed on a sample basis, the whole of the content listed in the Knowledge and/or Skills section must be taught and available for assessment. Candidates should not know in advance the items on which they will be assessed, and different items should be sampled on each assessment occasion.

Outcome 1

Describe LAN architecture.

Knowledge and/or Skills

- Describe media access control on switched networks.
- Describe LAN architecture in switched networks.
- Describe concepts of LAN design.
- Interpret network diagrams.
- Select media, cables, ports and connectors used to connect switches to other network devices.

Evidence Requirements

The Evidence Requirements for this Outcome are found in the Evidence Requirements for the Unit.

Assessment Guidelines

The Assessment Guidelines for this Outcome are found in the Assessment Guidelines for the Unit.

Outcome 2

Describe and configure basic switching technology.

Knowledge and/or Skills

- Describe switched LAN architecture
- Describe Ethernet LANs
- Describe frame forwarding techniques
- Describe frame management and security
- Configure basic switched Local Area Networks

Evidence Requirements

The Evidence Requirements for this Outcome are found in the Evidence Requirements for the Unit.

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Assessment Guidelines

The Assessment Guidelines for this Outcome are found in the Assessment Guidelines for the Unit.

Outcome 3

Describe and configure advanced switching technologies.

Knowledge and/or Skills

- Describe virtual Local Area Networking concepts via switching.
- Describe VTP concepts and operation.
- Describe spanning tree concepts.
- Describe InterVLAN routing concepts and troubleshooting.
- Configure advanced switching.

Evidence Requirements

The Evidence Requirements for this Outcome are found in the Evidence Requirements for the Unit.

Assessment Guidelines

The Assessment Guidelines for this Outcome are found in the Assessment Guidelines for the Unit.

Outcome 4

Describe and configure basic wireless LANs.

Knowledge and/or Skills

- Describe basic wireless LANs.
- Describe basic wireless LAN security.
- Configure basic wireless LANs.

Evidence Requirements

The Evidence Requirements for this Outcome are found in the Evidence Requirements for the Unit.

Assessment Guidelines

The Assessment Guidelines for this Outcome are found in the Assessment Guidelines for the Unit.

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Evidence Requirements for the Unit

Evidence for the Knowledge and Understanding component of the Unit could be produced using a set of multiple choice/multiple response questions to assess candidates' capabilities. This could be administered as a single end of Unit test covering all Outcomes, or could be a series of individual end of Learning Outcome tests.

Alternatively, the evidence for the Knowledge and Understanding component of the Unit could be extended response/exam style questions covering all Outcomes. The sample must cover **all** Outcomes with a suitable selection of at least 50% of the Knowledge and Skills points listed for each of the Outcomes.

The assessment must be undertaken in a closed-book environment where candidates have no access to the Internet, books, handouts, notes or other learning material. Testing should be and must be invigilated. There must be no communication between candidates and communication with the invigilator must be restricted to matters relating to the administration of the test.

The questions presented must significantly change on **each** assessment occasion.

Candidates must answer at least 60% of the questions correctly to obtain a pass.

The skills component must be assessed by completion of a practical exercise that requires that the candidate can:

- select common equipment used to connect switches to other network devices

  This should include:

  — media

- cables
- ports
- connectors

configure basic switched Local Area Networks

This should include performing an initial switch configuration to allow communication between two hosts.

- configure advanced switching

This should include initial switch configuration tasks including remote access management

- configure a basic wireless LAN

This should include configuration of the basic parameters to configure a wireless network and the troubleshooting of common implementation issues.

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Assessment Guidelines for the Unit

Testing for the knowledge component can be done machine-based and must be invigilated by an appropriate person. There must be no communication between candidates and communication with the assessor must be restricted to matters relating to the administration of the test. Centres are recommended to create a coverage grid to highlight which questions cover which knowledge bullet points to assist in the assessment process.

The practical skills assessment could be evidenced by the completion of a logbook and supplemented with an observation checklist

It is suggested that all the above concepts be presented and explained within the context of current real-world content and applications.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes

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This part of the Unit specification is offered as guidance. The support notes are not mandatory.

While the exact time allocated to this Unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 80 hours.

Guidance on the content and context for this Unit

The suggested time allocation for each Outcome (including assessment) is as follows:

Outcome 1 10 hours
Outcome 2 20 hours
Outcome 3 30 hours
Outcome 4 20 hours

As it is likely that the bulk of the material in this Unit will be delivered through lecturer exposition, it is important that every opportunity is taken to introduce real-world examples, opportunities for whole-class and group discussion and practical demonstrations wherever possible. Concepts and terminology should be presented in context throughout the Unit. Video presentations should be used where appropriate for providing an alternative explanation of a difficult topic, or as a focus for class discussion or groupwork.

Given the theoretical elements in this Unit, it is intended that a significant amount of time will be made available as a central part of the Course for revision, tutorials and formative assessment exercises. Candidates should be strongly encouraged to

undertake further reading and opportunities for individual or group research should be provided.

The most important overall emphasis should be on the relevance and currency of content in such a rapidly evolving field.

This Unit (in conjunction with the related Units FR24 35 Networking Technology, FR22 35 Routing Technology and FR25 35 Internetworking Technology) may assist candidates in preparing for the Cisco Certified Network Associate examination. Candidates should be encouraged to check the latest information at www.cisco.com to ensure that all objectives have been covered.

The Unit is primarily intended to provide candidates with detailed knowledge of basic and advanced switching and wireless techniques, as such there are three practical based Outcomes enabling candidates to apply the knowledge gained during this Unit in a practical environment, detail of these is outlined later in these support notes.

Outcome 1

Outcome 1 concentrates on the architecture of switched networks and introduces candidates to the methods that hosts use to access media e.g. CSMA/CD. Candidates are introduced to the fundamental aspects of designing local area networks. Hierarchical network design utilising the core-distribution-access layer model. Candidates also will learn how to select media, cables, ports and the common connectors used to connect switches to other network devices.

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Outcome 2

Outcome 2 provides candidates with an introduction to basic switching techniques and provides them with the skills to configure them. In Outcome 2 the following items should be covered — switch forwarding methods such as fast forward, cut through and store and forward, symmetric and asymmetric switching, memory buffering, layer 2 and layer 3 switching.

The candidate should also perform the following practical tasks which should be recorded on a logbook as well as an assessor checklist.

Performing an initial switch configuration to allow communication between two hosts including:

- clearing an existing configuration from a switch
- assignment of management IP address
- assignment of appropriate default gateway
- configuration of appropriate passwords on the switch
- verification of configuration

Outcome 3

Outcome 3 provides candidates with an introduction to advanced switching techniques. It presents four main important switching concepts, VLANs, VTP, STP and interVLAN routing.

VLANs

The candidate will learn about the types of VLANs used in modern switched networks. It is important that they understand the role of the default VLAN, user/data VLANs, native VLANs, the management VLAN, and voice VLANs. VLAN trunks with IEEE 802.1Q tagging facilitate inter-switch communication with multiple VLANs. The candidate will learn to configure, verify and troubleshoot VLANs and trunks.

VTP

VTP is used to exchange VLAN information across trunk links, reducing VLAN administration and configuration errors. VTP allows you to create a VLAN once within a VTP domain and have that VLAN propagated to all other switches in the VTP domain. VTP pruning limits the unnecessary propagation of VLAN traffic across a LAN by determining which trunk ports forward which VLAN traffic. Candidates will learn to configure, verify, and troubleshoot VTP implementations.

STP

STP makes it possible to implement redundant physical links in a switched LAN by creating a logical loop-free Layer 2 topology. By default, most switches implement STP in a per-VLAN fashion. The configuration of STP is straightforward, but the underlying processes are quite complicated. IEEE 802.1D defined the original implementation of spanning-tree protocol. IEEE 802.1w defined an improved implementation of spanning tree called rapid spanning tree protocol. RSTP convergence time is approximately five times faster than convergence with 802.1D. RSTP introduces several new concepts, such as link types, edge ports, alternate ports, backup ports, and the discarding state. The candidate will learn to configure both the original IEEE 802.1D implementation of STP as well as the newer IEEE 802.1w implementation of spanning tree.

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Inter-VLAN Routing

Inter-VLAN routing is the process of routing traffic between different VLANs. The candidate will learn the various methods of inter-VLAN routing and how to implement inter-VLAN routing in the router-on-a-stick topology, where a trunk link connects a layer 2 switch to a router configured with logical subinterfaces paired in a one-to-one fashion with VLANs

The candidate should also perform the following practical tasks which should be recorded on a logbook as well as an assessor checklist:

- perform and verify initial switch configuration tasks including remote access management
- configure, verify, and troubleshoot VLANs, VTP, trunking and interVLAN routing on a network with at least **five** hosts and **four** VLANs including the management VLAN

Outcome 4

In Outcome 4 the candidate will learn about Wireless LAN standards. These standards are evolving for voice and video traffic, with newer standards being supported with quality of service. The candidate will learn that an access point connects to the wired LAN provides a basic service set to client stations that associate to it. SSIDs and MAC filtering are inherently insecure methods of securing a WLAN. Enterprise solutions such as WPA2 and 802.1x authentication enable very secure wireless LAN access. End users must configure a wireless NIC on their client stations which communicates with and associates to a wireless access point. When configuring a wireless LAN, candidates will learn that they should ensure that the devices have the latest firmware so that they can support the most stringent security options.

The candidate should also perform the following practical tasks which should be recorded on a logbook as well as an assessor checklist:

- configure the basic parameters to configure a wireless network
- troubleshoot common implementation issues

Guidance on the delivery and assessment of this Unit

This Unit is likely to form part of a group award which is primarily designed to provide candidates with technical or professional knowledge and skills related to a specific occupational area. It is highly technical in content and should not be adopted by group awards in other areas or delivered as a stand-alone Unit without careful consideration of its appropriateness.

It is a Unit which candidates are likely to find accessible at an intermediate level; it is suggested that it be delivered only as part of a second year HND program in Computing, Computer Networking or a related area. It should be delivered in tandem with other Computing Units and opportunities for teaching and assessment integration explored.

It is recommended the Unit is delivered in the second year of the HND program as candidates will already be exposed to some of the terminology and concepts. Candidates should complete FR24 35 Networking Technology and FR22 35 Routing Technology prior to beginning this Unit.

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Evidence for the Knowledge and Understanding component of the Unit could be produced using a set of multiple choice/multiple response questions to assess candidates' capabilities. This could be administered as a single end of Unit test covering all Outcomes, or could be a series of individual end of Learning Outcome tests.
Alternatively the evidence for the Knowledge and Understanding component of the Unit could be extended response/exam style questions covering all Outcomes.
a This is in addition to a logbook detailing the practical work undertaken supported by a observation checklist.

To complete practical elements of the Course centres may need routers and switches. It is recommended as minimum centres provide at least five routers and two switches per class. These may be supplemented with network simulation software.

Open learning

If this Unit is delivered by open or distance learning methods, additional planning and resources may be required for candidate support, assessment and quality assurance.

A combination of new and traditional authentication tools may have to be devised for assessment and re-assessment purposes.

For further information and advice, please see Assessment and Quality Assurance for Open and Distance Learning (SQA, February 2001 — publication code A1030).

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Opportunities for the use of e-assessment

E-assessment may be appropriate for some assessments in this Unit. By e-assessment we mean assessment which is supported by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), such as e-testing or the use of e-portfolios or e-checklists. Centres which wish to use
e-assessment must ensure that the national standard is applied to all candidate evidence and that conditions of assessment as specified in the Evidence Requirements are met, regardless of the mode of gathering evidence. Further advice is available in *SQA Guidelines on Online Assessment for Further Education (AA1641, March 2003), SQA Guidelines on
e-assessment for Schools (BD2625, June 2005)*.

Opportunities for developing Core Skills

There are no opportunities to develop Core Skills in this Unit.

Disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs

The additional support needs of individual candidates should be considered when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments, or considering whether any reasonable adjustments may be required. Further advice can be found on our website **www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements**

History of changes to Unit

Version	Description of change	Date
02	The assessment requirements have been updated to provide centres with more flexibility	June 2025

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Additional copies of this Unit specification can be purchased from the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Please contact the Business Development and Customer Support team, telephone 0303 333 0330.

General information for candidates

Unit title: **Switching Technology**

This is a 2 credit Unit at SCQF Level 8 intended for candidates undertaking a Computing or IT-related qualification who requires an understanding of Switched networks. It is designed to develop an understanding of the issues involved in installing, configuring and troubleshooting switched LANs. On completion of the Unit you should be able to:

- Describe LAN architecture
- Describe and configure basic switching technology
- Describe and configure advanced switching technologies
- Describe and configure basic wireless LANs

In the first part of the Course, you will study the principles of LAN architecture and design methods for switched networks.

In the second part of the Course, you will learn about basic switching techniques and the practical skills you need to configure them. This includes such areas as switch forwarding methods such as fast forward, cut through and store and forward, symmetric and asymmetric switching, memory buffering, layer 2 and layer 3 switching.

The practical skills you will gain include performing an initial switch configuration to allow communication between two hosts including:

- clearing an existing configuration from a switch
- assignment of management IP address
- assignment of appropriate default gateway
- configuration of appropriate passwords on the switch
- verification of configuration

In the third part of the Course, you will learn about advanced switching techniques. This section covers four main important switching concepts, VLANs, VTP, STP and interVLAN routing.

You will also learn the following practical skills, perform and verify initial switch configuration tasks including remote access management, configure, verify, and troubleshoot VLANs, VTP, trunking and interVLAN routing on a network with at least **five** hosts and **four** VLANs including the management VLAN.

In the fourth part of the Course, you will learn about Wireless LAN standards. These standards are evolving for voice and video traffic, with newer standards being supported with quality of service.

You will learn that an access point connects to the wired LAN provides a basic service set to client stations that associate to it. SSIDs and MAC filtering are inherently insecure methods of securing a WLAN. Enterprise solutions such as WPA2 and 802.1x authentication enable very secure wireless LAN access.

End users must configure a wireless NIC on their client stations which communicates with and associates to a wireless access point.

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When configuring a wireless LAN, candidates will learn that they should ensure that the devices have the latest firmware so that they can support the most stringent security options. You will also perform practical tasks that include:

- configure the basic parameters to configure a wireless network
- how to troubleshoot common implementation issues

The assessment for the Knowledge and Understanding element may be a multiple choice/multiple answer/extended response closed book assessment covering all Outcomes or may be multiple choice/multiple answer/extended response closed book assessment for each Outcome.

This format of this test will be decided by your centre and will be timed, supervised and conducted under closed-book conditions.

You must answer at least 60% of the questions correctly to obtain a pass.

The practical assessment will assess the skills component of the Unit and will take the form of a practical activity where you will be required design and implement a switched network for a given scenario. The format of the evidence you must produce will be decided by your centre but is likely to take the form of a logbook or observation checklist.