

Biology and Human Biology

The Qualifications Team

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Staffing update

Lynn Wallwork has recently taken over from Jonathan Gillies as Qualifications Manager for National Qualifications in Biology and Human Biology.

Jack Rillie, Qualifications Manager, has responsibility for:

Science (National 3 and National 4); Skills for Work: Laboratory Science (National 5); Skills for Work: Health Sector (National 4 and National 5)

These changes take place with immediate effect and any enquiries relating to these courses should now be directed to the relevant qualifications manager.

Changes to assessment at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher

As announced by the Deputy First Minister in September 2016, units and unit assessments are being removed from National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses on a phased basis over three years:

- National 5 from 2017–18
- Higher from 2018–19
- Advanced Higher from 2019–20

For more information, including a Q&A on the implications of these changes, please visit our website at www.sqa.org.uk/nqchanges.

Units that were previously part of National 5 courses

The units that were previously part of National 5 courses are now freestanding units at SCQF level 5. They can no longer be used to contribute to the achievement of a National 5 course.

We will remove all references to National 5 courses from the unit specifications, unit support notes and unit assessment support packs in due course, and the unit support notes will be added to the unit specifications as an appendix. Other than this, there are no plans to update the unit assessment support packs for SCQF level 5 Biology as the units are now separate from the National 5 Biology course and are not subject to the same changes.

All existing unit assessment support packs remain available for teachers and lecturers to use as a resource. The unit specifications will also be relocated to a new freestanding units web page for each subject.

Further information on the timescales for this will be provided in our weekly Centre News newsletter.

A guidance document has been produced which refers to those instances where candidates are being presented for freestanding units in session 2017–18. It is available from the 'Updates and announcements' section of the [Biology subject page](#).

Changes to assessment in National 5

The National 5 Biology course is now assessed through the following components:

Component	Marks	Scaled marks
question paper	100	n/a
assignment:	20	25

Question paper: section 1 has 25 marks consisting of 25 multiple-choice questions; section 2 has 75 marks consisting of 14-20 structured items.

Assignment: the topic must include a mandatory practical experiment/activity and be related to a key area of the course.

Clarification of course content in the National 5 course

As a result of feedback from stakeholders, the National 5 Biology mandatory course content was reviewed in order to address key issues. Some content has been removed, some content has been re-ordered and clarification of the required depth of knowledge has been provided.

Changes to assessment in Higher courses from session 2018–19

Units and unit assessments will be removed from Higher courses from session 2018–19 and we have started our review of the Higher course assessments. For this, we are working closely with our National Qualifications Support Teams (NQSTs) for each subject. Our NQSTs include teachers and lecturers who currently deliver National Courses, and representatives of professional associations. We will also meet with a sample of teachers to gauge their views on the proposed changes and the implications of these.

The publication of new and revised Higher materials will follow a similar timescale to National 5:

End of April 2018	Revised Higher course specifications
End of May to end of September 2018	Course support notes New/revised specimen question papers New/revised coursework assessment tasks

We will provide further information on what the changes to assessment are for each subject by the end of January 2018.

As with revisions to National 5, we will be removing content for Higher Biology and Higher Human Biology, re-ordering content, and providing clarification of required depth of knowledge.

Conditions of assessment for coursework

To ensure fairness for all candidates, it is essential that the specified assessment conditions for coursework are consistently applied in all centres. The following documents detail the specific conditions that must be followed in each assessment:

- course specification
- course assessment specification (Higher and Advanced Higher only)
- coursework assessment task

In addition to these documents, you must also refer to the following document, which is available from the coursework section of the National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher web pages:

- [Guidance on conditions of assessment for coursework](#)

This document provides important information on the time and volume of assessment, the use of resources, and the supervision, control and authentication of assessment — including examples.

Changes to documents

Revised National 5 documents and assessment support materials

Following the removal of units and unit assessments from the National 5 Biology course, we have strengthened the course assessment to ensure it assesses the full content of the course.

We have published revised course specifications and revised assessment support materials for the National 5 course(s), which detail the requirements of the revised course assessments from session 2017–18 onwards. The documents are available from the National 5 Biology web pages at www.sqa.org.uk/ngsubjects. Further information on the changes to documents and assessment support materials is provided below.

Course specification

In April 2017, we published a revised course specification which provided detailed information about the National 5 course and course assessment, including the conditions of assessment that must be followed. The revised document was produced by merging the previous course specifications, course assessment specifications and general assessment information into a single, streamlined document. Course support notes have been added to the course specification as an appendix. The course support notes provide further detail on the depth of knowledge required for each key area of the course.

The National 5 Biology course specification is available on the [National 5 Biology web page](#).

The course specification explains the overall structure of the National 5 Biology Course, including its purpose and aims and information on the skills, knowledge and understanding that will be developed.

A summary of the changes to the National 5 course content has also been produced and is available on the [National 5 Biology web page](#).

Specimen question paper

The National 5 Biology question paper has been strengthened to allow increased sampling of knowledge and understanding and skills. The specimen question paper illustrates the standard, structure and requirements of the question paper learners will sit. This also includes marking instructions and is available on the [National 5 Biology web page](#).

Coursework assessment task(s)

The National 5 Biology assignment allows assessment of skills which cannot be assessed through the question paper; for example, the handling and processing of data gathered as a result of experimental fieldwork, and research skills. The coursework assessment task includes information that centres need to administer coursework and must be read in conjunction with the course specification. The document is available on the [National 5 Biology web page](#).

Changes to documents following Diet 2017

Coursework: General assessment information; Project assessment task

We have updated the following Advanced Higher Biology project documents to provide further clarity on the marking instructions and instructions for candidates:

- General assessment information (available on the [Advanced Higher Biology web page](#), under Assessment support).
- Project assessment task (available on our secure website).

Supportive resources

National 5 CPD webinar

To help teachers and lecturers prepare for the changes to assessment in the National 5 Biology course, we ran a subject-specific continuing professional development (CPD) webinar that focused on the requirements of the course assessment.

The recording of the webinar is available to view online via our website and can be accessed from the **CPD webinar/audio and support** tab on the [National 5 Biology web page](#).

National 5 course events

We are hosting a series of subject-specific events that focus on the changes to assessment in the National 5 Biology course. The events are running until November 2017 and provide delegates with the opportunity to participate in workshops and discuss the course documents, as well as have their questions answered by senior examining team members.

To view the event schedule and book your place, visit www.sqa.org.uk/nqevents

Q&A document on the changes to assessment

During the question and answer section of the National 5 webinar, we received a number of questions about the changes to assessment. We have published a Q&A document that provides answers to the questions asked during the webinar, as well as some of the most frequently asked questions we have received from teachers and lecturers.

View the Q&A on the changes to assessment in the National 5 course under the 'Updates and announcements' tab at the [National 5 Biology web page](#).

Understanding Standards materials

We have recently published two exemplar National 5 Biology assignments with associated commentaries. You can view these by selecting Biology from the [Understanding Standards website](#).

SSERC, in partnership with SQA, have produced teacher/technician guides that provide background information to teachers/lecturers. Candidate guides containing protocols have also been produced. These are available from [National 5 Biology Assignment SSERC Resources](#).

Candidate evidence and commentary materials

We have published new candidate evidence and commentary materials for the following assessment:

Advanced Higher Biology Project

These materials contain examples of real candidate assessment evidence and a commentary that explains why the evidence has, or has not, met the required assessment standards. You can view these from the [Understanding Standards website](#).

Further information and guidance

National 3 and National 4 Biology

Units remain in National 3 and National 4 Biology. In session 2016–17 a threshold was introduced to the number of assessment standards that candidates must meet to achieve outcome 1. Candidates are no longer required to show full mastery of the assessment standards to achieve outcome 1. Assessment standards were removed from Outcome 2. For session 2017–18 centres must use the criteria exemplified in the following guidance documents when carrying out assessments:

‘National 3 Biology: understanding the next steps for session 2017–18’

‘National 4 Biology: understanding the next steps for session 2017–18’

You can view these documents on the [Biology subject page](#) under the ‘Understanding the next steps for session 2017–18’ tab.

The National 3 and National 4 Biology unit specifications and unit assessment support packs are in the process of being revised to reflect the removal of assessment standards and the revised assessment criteria. They will be published in due course.

National 4 Biology Added Value Unit

Marks and a cut-off score were introduced to the National 4 Biology assignment added value unit in session 2016–17. A cut-off score of 50% should be applied. Candidates must achieve 7 marks or more to pass. In session 2017–18 centres must use the criteria exemplified in ‘National 4 Biology: understanding the next steps for session 2017–18’. You can view this document on the [Biology subject page](#) under the ‘Understanding the next steps for session 2017–18’ tab.

The unit specification and unit assessment are in the process of being revised to reflect the revised criteria. They will be published in due course.

Higher Biology and Higher Human Biology

In session 2016–17 a threshold was introduced to the number of assessment standards that candidates must meet to achieve outcome 1. Candidates are no longer required to show full mastery of the assessment standards to achieve outcome 1.

For session 2017–18 centres must use the criteria exemplified in the following guidance documents when carrying out assessments.

‘Higher Biology: understanding the next steps for session 2017–18 ‘

‘Higher Human Biology: understanding the next steps for session 2017–18

You can view the Biology document on the [Biology subject page](#) under the ‘Understanding the next steps for session 2017–18’ tab. The Human Biology document is available on the [Human Biology subject page](#) under the ‘Understanding the next steps for session 2017–18’ tab.

Advanced Higher Biology

In session 2016–17 a threshold was introduced to the number of assessment standards that candidates must meet to achieve outcome 1. Candidates are no longer required to show full mastery of the assessment standards to achieve outcome 1.

For session 2017–18 centres must use the criteria exemplified in the following guidance document when carrying out assessments:

‘Advanced Higher Biology: understanding the next steps for session 2017–18’

You can view this document on the [Biology subject page](#) under the ‘Understanding the next steps for session 2017–18’ tab.

Course Reports

We strongly recommend that you read the annual Course Reports for Biology and Human Biology. These reports are produced following the annual diet of exams and are published by the end of October. The reports provide informed and valuable comment on the assessment for each component in the course, and include a summary of:

- candidate performance in the course assessment
- areas in which candidates performed well
- areas which candidates found demanding

The reports also contain advice on preparing future candidates, and statistical data relating to grade boundaries. Course Reports for each level in Biology can be viewed by going to the relevant web pages on the [Biology subject page](#).

Recruitment opportunities for 2018

We would like to express our gratitude and extend our thanks to all appointees who have undertaken duties in session 2016–17.

We are now accepting marker applications from teaching professionals to contribute to the 2018 exam diet. If you are interested in joining us as a marker, please visit the [appointee opportunities](#) section of our website where you will find a marker advert for all subjects and levels, with details of the role.

Becoming a marker helps to increase your awareness of the demands of course assessment and provides excellent professional and personal development.

Please check appointee opportunities regularly for other openings which may be of interest to you.

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