



Monitoring standards over time:

National Qualifications and Higher National Units in 2013 compared with previous years

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1 Introduction

SQA has been carrying out an annual standards monitoring programme since 1998. This plays a very important role in ensuring that we continue to offer qualifications of a consistently high standard. The purpose of this programme is to monitor and maintain standards over a longer period of time, including changes in arrangements and specifications. It complements the procedures which ensure year-to-year comparability of grade boundaries in external exams.

We greatly appreciate the role played by colleges and training providers in providing us with HN evidence, and gratefully acknowledge the thorough work of all panel members who participated in the monitoring and analysed large amounts of documents and evidence.

This report brings together the main conclusions of the comparisons over time conducted in 2014.

About the monitoring programme

The Monitoring Standards programme aims to establish whether our qualifications have been comparable over time. For SQA, this means that a Course has remained equally demanding over time, even when reviewed or replaced by an equivalent Course — ie candidates in one year have been set tasks that were just as demanding as in another year, and similar evidence has received the same judgement.

We monitor qualifications by comparing a sample of National Qualifications and Higher National Qualifications from the current year with their equivalents from previous years.

The sample is selected on the following bases:

- ◆ qualifications that have been monitored in the past — and for which we have archived evidence (which provides the ‘over time’ element)
- ◆ recommendations and suggestions from qualifications development colleagues
- ◆ recommendations arising from any previous year’s monitoring exercise

National Qualifications

The material we use is available centrally in SQA. Where possible, the results for internally assessed components are provided. The material consists of:

- ◆ Course Arrangements documents (which describe the skills, knowledge and understanding, and grade related criteria, and specify the assessment)
- ◆ SQA external examination papers and marking guidelines
- ◆ grade boundaries and grade distributions
- ◆ candidates’ scripts for each of these categories:
 - closest to the minimum mark for a grade A (band 2)
 - closest to the minimum mark for a grade C (band 6)

Higher National Qualifications

Centres with candidates who have recently achieved one of the mandatory Units in the sample of qualifications are asked to submit assessment material, marking guidelines, instructions to candidates, internal verification forms, and the work of two candidates whose evidence exemplifies the standard for the qualification. The panel is then provided with the:

- ◆ specifications (which describe the standard)
- ◆ internal assessment instructions, instruments and marking guidelines
- ◆ candidates' scripts

Monitoring panels

Panels monitoring standards in National Qualifications are composed of a Principal Assessor (PA) and two Senior Markers (all usually practising teachers). For Higher National, panels are composed of the Senior Verifier and two other verifiers (all usually practising subject experts).

How monitoring is carried out

Instructions for the panels, materials, and a questionnaire are made available in confidential web meeting rooms, one for each panel. The panel answers a series of questions about the following aspects:

- ◆ educational context
- ◆ Course Arrangements/Specification
- ◆ assessment
- ◆ marking and grading
- ◆ overall judgement

They start by giving a description of major differences in the educational context of the years they compared, which might help to explain possible changes in attainment. Then they compare the demands set by Course Arrangements or Specifications, as well as the demands set by Assessment Specifications. They analyse the demands set by the assessment instruments. (For National Qualifications these are the question papers. HN assessment instruments are centre-devised, so for this type of qualification there would be various internal assessments of the same Units in each year.) They also compare the rigour with which candidates' responses had been judged by comparing the two sets of marking instructions and the quality of scripts with the same grade. Panels report their findings in a form, indicating whether the aspects mentioned were more, no more, or less demanding in 2013.

The 2013–14 programme

This report covers the following comparisons:

National Qualifications

Advanced Higher Geography	2013 and 2007
Advanced Higher Modern Studies	2013 and 2008
Higher French	2013 and 2008
Higher Physics	2013 and 2008
Higher Chemistry	2013 and 2007
Higher History	2013 and 2008
Intermediate 2 Geography	2013 and 2006
Intermediate 2 Graphic Communication	2013 and 2008
Intermediate 2 Psychology	2013 and 2008

Higher National Units

Hospitality	
Hospitality: Financial and Control Systems (DL3T 34)	Control Systems for the Hospitality Industry (A781 04)
Food and Beverage Service (DL3G 34)	Food and Beverage Service (A78K 04)
Hospitality Supervision (H198 34)	Supervision and Human Resource Organisation (A77V 04)
Social Sciences	
Research Analysis in the Social Sciences (A6V5 04)	Research Issues (FM0J 35)
Social Science Research and Methodology (FM66 34)	Social Science Research and Methodology (DP59 34)

2 Findings: National Qualifications

Advanced Higher Geography

Overall judgement

In Advanced Higher Geography it was judged that the overall level of demand between 2007 and 2013 was very similar.

Educational context

There was no significant change in the size or composition of the Advanced Higher Geography cohort between 2007 and 2013.

Between 2007 and 2013 there were considerable improvements in teaching and learning. These were based on:

- ◆ greater experience and specific expertise within centres
- ◆ dissemination of advice and information on the Advanced Higher qualification via Understanding Standards programmes, web resources and other materials
- ◆ development programmes and resources delivered by SAGT (Scottish Association of Geography Teachers) and RSGS (Royal Scottish Geographical Society), local authorities and schools' consortia
- ◆ briefing sessions conducted by the Principal Assessor and Senior Examiner

It was felt that individual students aimed at higher standards in the Geographical Issues essay in particular as a result of the above factors.

It was felt that, in general, candidates in 2013 had better IT skills than in 2007, and were more confident in their use. This applied particularly to use of web resources and to computer graphics. However, greater fluency in IT was not always translated into higher quality work in 2013.

It was noted that extended bad weather in the winters of 2011 and 2012 had a significantly adverse effect on field work for the study, which resulted in a change to grade boundaries. This change was reversed in 2013.

The general ability of candidates was judged to be very similar between the two years; however, improved teaching and learning resulted in an improvement in standards between 2007 and 2013. There was an improvement in the essay component of the folio, which was offset by a slight decrease in marks awarded for map interpretation.

Course Arrangements/Specification

The Course Arrangements for Advanced Higher Geography changed between 2007 and 2013; however, the only significant differences were the introduction of question 5 in the written examination and the removal of word limits in the folio (however, retaining the same

page length prescriptions). This latter is an element in the improvement in essays, albeit a minor one.

Assessment

There were no significant differences in the challenge represented by assessment between 2007 and 2013. To a very large extent, as indicated by both the instruments of assessment and the marking instructions, the two years were very closely similar.

Candidates' marks in question 5 ('Scenario' question) were similar to other questions. Question 5 had no impact on standards, and the extra time given for the written paper means that there was no change in overall performance in the written paper.

Marking and grading

There were few notable differences in the quality of the written examination scripts between the two years.

Advanced Higher Modern Studies

Overall judgement

Overall, the panel judged that standards in Advanced Higher Modern Studies between 2008 and 2013 remained constant in all areas. The instrument of assessment in both years met the requirements of the Arrangements document, the marking remained constant across the years, and the scripts looked at from both years were marked accurately.

Educational context

There was a significant increase in the uptake of Advanced Higher Modern Studies between 2008 and 2013; from 644 candidates in 2008 to 833 in 2013. This reflects in part the increase in Scottish students returning for a sixth year, and especially the increase in the number of students being presented for, and passing, Higher Modern Studies. The greater emphasis on personalisation and choice and the imperative to create class viability may have led to an increase in Higher candidates with C passes progressing to Advanced Higher. Despite this change in presentation, the pass rate remained relatively constant.

The numbers of candidates who achieved no awards reduced by approximately 3%. In 2008, A grades were given to 32% of candidates, and in 2013 this was 26% — a significant change due to rigour in the marking of research methods in section B. In 2008, there were 57 candidates who did not progress from Higher Modern Studies compared with 105 in 2013. C-grade awards increased from 23% to 29.7% and the overall pass rate increased from 86% in 2008 to 87.8% in 2013. Factors linked to the increase may be that teachers were better prepared through attendance at SQA events, the use of Understanding Standards, and the publication of the document *Improving Performance in Advanced Higher Modern Studies*. Consortia arrangements to ensure proper timetabling of Advanced Higher may also have been a contributing factor. Understanding Standards has been in place since

2005 and has been used frequently by both staff and candidates. The guidance document *Improving Performance in Advanced Higher Modern Studies* has been available online since 2008 and has been accessed regularly by staff and candidates, which again helped to maintain standards.

Course Arrangements/Specification

The Arrangements document used for the 2013 exam was slightly different from the Arrangements document for the 2008 exam. However, these changes were minor, with the content remaining the same. Changes to the statements of standards ensured a greater degree of clarity for centres. The 2013 Arrangements are no more demanding than before.

Assessment

Despite changes in context and content, the assessment in 2013 was judged to be no more demanding in 2013 compared with 2008.

Marking and grading

In both years, the marking instructions were very clear, which gave markers pointers towards unfamiliar context areas. While there were variations, overall, the quality of scripts was felt to be the same.

Overall, the combination of grade boundaries, question paper, and marking instructions was no more demanding than before.

Higher French

Overall judgement

The Higher French examination has remained constant over a number of years in terms of the Arrangements document and guidance provided to setters and vetters. Overall, in terms of content, marking instructions, grade boundaries and performance by candidates, the standard of the assessments and the level of demand in each of the language skills were believed to be very similar in both years.

The content, structure and assessment of the Higher French exam remained stable during the period under consideration, as did the population of candidates sitting the exam. Teachers have over the years made effective use of support and guidance issued by SQA to ensure candidates are well prepared for the examination and this has ensured a strong pass rate in Higher French, which is reflected in each of the years under consideration (86% in 2008 and 81.2% in 2013).

Educational context

The number of presentations fell slightly from 4602 in 2008 to 4236 in 2013, and the number of candidates achieving grade A in 2013 fell by 3.5% and grade B by 1.7% in comparison to those achieving grades A and B in 2008. In general, the total number of candidates achieving C grade and above in 2013 fell by 4.8% and there was a corresponding increase in the number of candidates achieving D grade or No Award. The grade boundaries for both 2008 and 2013 were set at the notional levels of 85/70/60/50/45.

There were no changes to the delivery of the Higher French Course in terms of learning and teaching; however, for several years (and prior to 2008) there was an increase in the amount of support materials and guidance from SQA available to practitioners. Detailed past paper marking instructions for Reading/Translation and Listening are readily available on SQA's website in order to help practitioners become familiar with the standards. To assist practitioners in developing and assessing candidates' abilities in speaking and writing, samples of candidate performances and how they were assessed are available on the 'Understanding Standards' section of the Higher French pages of SQA's website. The external assessment report, which is produced at the end of each diet of examinations also provides clear guidance on which areas practitioners should focus in order to improve candidate performance in the external examination.

Course Arrangements/Specification

The Course Arrangements and Assessment Specification were no more demanding in 2013 than in 2008 as there were no significant changes to the Arrangements documents or to the structure and marking of the Higher French examination. The Arrangements document used in 2008 was the ninth edition (published April 2007) and the one used in 2013 was the tenth edition (published March 2009). However, the only change to these documents was the incorporation of Mandarin and Cantonese in 2009 into the suite of qualifications available to candidates. The guidance contained in both documents was identical.

Assessment

On the whole, the assessment in 2013 was no more demanding than that of 2008 as both assessments followed the guidance in terms of content and assessment details outlined in the Arrangements documents, and both assessments were developed as set out in guidance documents provided to setters and vetters.

A comparison of the 2008 and 2013 question papers and marking instructions indicates that the level of demand was very similar in both years. The content of both papers covered elements of the Higher French syllabus as outlined in the Arrangements document; however, the specific topics in each case were different. In Paper 1, the reading element in 2008 dealt with internet blogging which is a topic familiar to most candidates, whereas in 2013, the topic was about owning a second home in the country which is perhaps less familiar. In Paper 2, the listening element in 2008 concerned part-time jobs, whereas in 2013, the topic related to ideal holidays, both of which are likely to be accessible to all candidates. However, irrespective of the specific topics chosen in any specific year it is the level and complexity of the language which is the key element in determining if the assessment is at the appropriate level and this was certainly the case in both 2008 and 2013.

Marking and grading

In both years, rather than trying to provide all possible wordings of the answer, the format of the marking instructions for assessing the receptive skills (reading, translation and listening) was to highlight the key idea and the specific amount of detail that the candidate must demonstrate in their answer to achieve the mark. In both years, the format of the marking instructions for assessing the productive skills (speaking and writing) was to use pegged mark descriptors as a means of allocating the performance to a specific category and then to a specific mark. In the case of the assessment of writing, photostats were selected as a basis for discussion at the markers' meeting and the candidate performances were discussed and assessed in terms of their content, accuracy and language resource. The same expanded set of pegged mark descriptors was used in 2008 and in 2013.

The grade boundaries for both years and the content and level of language complexity within the assessments indicated a high level of consistency in the level of demand. There was also a great consistency and similarity in the format of the marking instructions developed for the two years under consideration

Performance among both grade A and grade C candidates in Paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing was broadly similar. Candidate performance in reading comprehension was split evenly between the two years (ie in three out of six instances 2008 was the best year, and in the other three instances 2013 was the best year). This is despite the fact that in 2013 there were fewer one-mark questions and more two-mark questions than in 2008, and that the 2008 marking instructions indicated more alternative ways of getting points for questions than those of 2013.

Performance in the translation element of the paper and the directed writing was broadly similar across both years. Grade C candidates performed marginally better in directed writing in 2013 than in 2008, although among grade A candidates the converse was true. In Paper 2: Listening and Writing, there was very little difference in the performance of grade A candidates in the listening and writing elements. However, in five out of six instances, grade C candidates performed better in 2008 than in 2013 in both listening and writing, although this was balanced in each case by an improved performance in the speaking element.

On balance, there was very little difference in performance across the two years, suggesting the level of demand in 2013 was similar to that of 2008. Across the writing assessments, grade A candidates in both years exhibited similar levels of language ability, while the grade C candidates in both years had similar difficulties in writing in French with sufficient accuracy and control of the language to communicate clearly and consistently.

Higher Physics

Overall judgement

The panel's overall judgement was that the awarding standard for Higher Physics has remained unchanged from 2008 to 2013. The 2013 paper was felt to be slightly harder overall, but appropriate adjustments were made to the cut-offs to maintain equivalence of the awards in the two years.

Educational context

The number of candidates sitting Higher Physics was almost identical in 2008 and in 2013 (2008 — 8765 candidates; 2013 — 8788 candidates). However, it should be noted that the total number of candidates sitting Higher Physics in 2013 was greater because there were another 844 who sat the Physics (Revised) Higher paper.

Slightly less than 10% of all the candidates sat the revised paper in 2013, leaving very nearly the same total number of candidates sitting the traditional paper in 2013 as the number who sat the 2008 paper (there has been an overall rise in the total number of candidates sitting Higher Physics since 2008).

There was a slightly smaller percentage of grade A candidates in 2013 — this could be accounted for by some centres now presenting candidates for the Revised Higher paper instead of the traditional paper (with which the 2008 paper is being compared).

Course Arrangements/Specification

The same Arrangements document was in place for both the 2008 and 2013 examinations, therefore there were no changes to the Course content between the two years and no changes to the specifications of the assessment instrument between the two years.

Assessment

Some parts of questions in the 2013 paper were felt to be more difficult for candidates than in a 'typical' paper. All the grade boundaries in 2013 were adjusted down by a few marks to allow for this and to ensure that candidates in 2013 were not disadvantaged.

The analysis of all the materials (scripts, marking instructions and cut-off scores), indicates that appropriate adjustments were made to cut-off scores and the evidence confirms that the awarding standards in 2008 and 2013 were consistent with each other.

Marking and grading

There were no changes to the standards required by the marking instructions for the two years and the quality of marking was of the same high standard in both years.

The 2013 examination paper was slightly more difficult overall at both the 'C' and 'A' boundaries compared to the 2008 paper. Appropriate adjustments were made to lower the grade boundaries in 2013 to maintain equivalence of the awards in the two years.

Higher Chemistry

Overall judgement

The panel judged the 2013 Higher Chemistry paper to be more demanding than the 2007 paper, particularly in respect of those questions set to be A-grade questions. Appropriate adjustments were made to the cut-offs to maintain equivalence of the awards in the two years. In areas of the paper such as multiple choice and calculations, candidate performance was maintained. The quality of answers given by candidates in 2013 was of a comparable standard to those given by candidates in 2007.

Educational context

One of the main changes between the candidates in 2013 and 2007 was that around 6% of the potential candidates were presented for the Higher (Revised) qualification instead.

Also, there was a significant upward trend in the number of candidates taking the Intermediate 2 qualification in Chemistry between the two years. Candidates for Higher are generally better prepared for the Higher qualification via this route in comparison to progression from Standard Grade.

Changes in classroom practice with regards to the use of formative assessment/active learning strategies have been ongoing throughout the period covered by this comparison (2007–13) but no significant changes are likely to have occurred between these two years of examination.

The development of Curriculum for Excellence has resulted in a workload issue for practising teachers. Between the two years there was an increasing demand on a classroom teacher's time, meaning that less was available for consolidation activities such as revision classes, extra assessment and the setting and marking of homework. Whilst there may have been changes in individual classrooms due to teachers engaging with Curriculum for Excellence and co-operative learning strategies, the demands of the Course and the pressure of delivering the Course to the timeline required for completion, is likely to have meant that there were no significant changes in learning and teaching.

Course Arrangements/Specification

Higher Chemistry in 2007 and in 2013 was taught and externally assessed using the Course Specification and Assessment Specification contained in the fifth edition (June 2002) of the SQA Arrangements document.

Assessment

In Chemistry there have been historical requirements to try to set papers where grade boundaries are closer to notional values. In Chemistry that has meant increasing the demands at the 'A' boundary whilst trying to maintain a similar or slight easing of demand at the 'C' boundary.

The 2013 exam paper was on the whole slightly more demanding than that of 2007, primarily due to the less familiar nature of the contexts within which questions were set:

- ◆ The radioactive decay question in 2007 was set in the context of beta decay, with which candidates would have been very familiar — the equivalent question in 2013 examined similar knowledge but in the totally unfamiliar context of positron formation.
- ◆ The extended response question on intermolecular bonding in 2007 was set in the very familiar context of ammonia molecules whereas the equivalent question in 2013 required candidates to compare the solubilities of two different (and less familiar) chlorine compounds.
- ◆ The experimental design question in 2007 was presented in a familiar lab equipment diagram context while the experimental design question in 2013 was much less structured and hence more alien to candidates.
- ◆ The overall style of the 2013 paper was somewhat different to that of 2007 — a higher level of information processing was required in 2013 and there was more examination of the understanding of chemistry in contexts that are less routine/familiar to candidates.

However, the 2007 questions appeared to be more complex because less guidance and support were provided, particularly in calculations. This would have made these calculations more demanding, particularly for the C-grade candidates where the percentage achievement, in calculations alone, differed from 30.7% in 2007 to 38.3% in 2013.

The two questions where extended responses were required in the 2013 paper were more demanding in terms of candidate understanding and communication abilities than the equivalent questions in the 2007 paper. Comparing questions — eg percentage yield (Q 8c in 2007 and Q 11b in 2013) the demands of Section B of the 2013 question paper appear greater. In addition two calculations, redox titration and electrolysis, were given a lower weighting in 2013.

The increase demand in Section B of the paper appears to be reflected in the distribution of marks between Section A and Section B.

Marking and grading

Between 2007 and 2013 there were substantial changes to both the construction of the marking instructions and the way in which the markers' meeting is conducted. Prior to the meeting, the examiners' team clearly identifies issues arising from candidate responses and shares all this with the markers. Many candidate responses are used to illustrate the principles being applied within the marking instructions. The meeting has evolved into more of a briefing and has resulted in very consistent marking.

The 2007 marking instructions lack the information of the 2013 instructions, leaving the 2007 instructions open to more interpretation. The 2013 markers' meeting was far more instructional than the 2007 meeting reportedly was, detailing the *only* acceptable responses and urging consistency, above all. This may have led to more marks being awarded in 2007 than would have been given, with the same guidance, in 2013.

In 2013, the A-grade boundary was 3 marks lower than that of 2007 (73% as opposed to 76%). This does not reflect an easing of standards but accurately reflects an increase in demand at the A-grade level.

C-grade candidates

In both 2007 and 2013 the distribution of marks gained by C-grade candidates in each section of the paper was comparable:

2007	Section A : Section B	24.16 : 23.84
2013	Section A : Section B	23.50 : 23.50

In both years, the C-grade candidates in the sample obtained 50% of their marks from each section of the paper. Consideration of the multiple choice scores suggests the Section Bs of both papers were comparable in terms of demand on candidates. There was a slight improvement in calculations in 2013 compared to 2007.

A candidates

The distribution of marks gained by A-grade candidates in each section 2007 was:

2007	Section A : Section B	33.84 : 42.16
2013	Section A : Section B	35.33 : 37.67

The slight increase in Section A multiple choice marks gained in 2013 would hint at an improved candidature or improved performance. However, there was a 4.3 mark decrease in scores in Section B from 2007 to 2013. In 2007, A-grade candidates were scoring 8.3 marks more in Section B than in Section A. In 2013, A-grade candidates only scored 2.3 marks more in Section B than in section A. Marks gained in calculations by candidates were consistent over the two years at 72% of marks available. In 2007, there were only six individual questions where A-grade candidates in the sample were achieving less than 50% of the marks available. In 2013 this had risen to 15 questions.

Higher History

Overall judgement

Overall, the level of demand has remained steady with the success of 2013, as compared with 2008, being a direct reflection of a clearer syllabus, leading to more informed and effective teaching and learning.

Educational context

Candidate numbers increased significantly between 2008 and 2013. In 2008 there were 8,130 candidates compared to 10,337 candidates in 2013 — an increase of over 2,000 candidates in five years.

As a result of initiatives such as Curriculum for Excellence and Assessment is for Learning, student-led and student-centred learning has become more of the norm in schools.

The marking of Higher History has changed significantly over the years. We now have criterion-referenced marking rather than broad bands that are interpretive. Criterion-referenced marking has led to a general increase in candidate performance as teachers now know specifically what will get a mark.

These changes have made the qualification much more accessible and understandable, both for teachers and for students. This can be seen in the rise in cut-offs. To take one example, in 2008 the A-grade cut-off was 68%; lower than notional. However, in 2013 the cut-off was raised to 72%. Despite this, 22% of the cohort achieved an A grade in 2013, compared with 22% in 2008.

The change can largely be attributed to the introduction of criterion-referenced marking. If teachers and candidates know exactly what is being looked for then they can alter their advice and teaching and learning accordingly. The efforts by the Higher History team to introduce a system where each mark can be allocated effectively pre-dates current initiatives in the National Qualifications structure.

The overall effect of this had led to some erosion of the perception that Higher History is a 'hard' Higher and it is now seen as more comparable to Higher Modern Studies and Higher Geography in terms of the percentage of A–C, as well as the percentage of A, passes.

Course Arrangements/Specification

In terms of the Course rationale, the 2013 Arrangements pointed out the fact that the Course Units were studied in terms of a number of key issues. This is the main difference between 2008 and 2013. The aims were integrated into the rationale in 2013. There is no real difference here, though the Course aims in 2008 were organised around the assessment, while in 2013 they were integrated into the general preamble. The 2013 Arrangements document also mentions skills that are to be developed.

The Course Specification changed as certain fields of study were dropped and the balance of the assessment changed. The most important change was the introduction of Scottish history as a compulsory component. It was placed in Paper 2, the document paper, and the old document paper content was altered to bring it into an essay format.

The Course assessment did not alter in terms of the allocation of marks (40 marks for Paper 1; 30 marks for Paper 2; and 30 marks for the Extended Essay) and the timing allocation for each paper also remained the same (1 hour 20 minutes for Paper 1, 1 hour 25 minutes for Paper 2 and 2 hours for the Extended Essay write-up).

However, there were extensive differences in terms of how the assessment was marked. The breadth of skills did not differ in terms of the Course content; although changes that focused the content around issues clarified the areas that needed to be taught in both Paper 1 and Paper 2. Instead of broad descriptors and Course coverage, issues were developed along with detailed descriptors which illustrated the areas that the examiners felt would be likely to come up for each issue. This gave teachers and students much clearer guidance as

to what would be asked in an examination. This greatly aided centre Course preparation and the development of appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

The skills developed were essentially the same in terms of the essay writing and source analysis that the examiners were looking for. However, far greater clarity was given regarding how the marks were derived.

The demands of 2013 Course were similar to 2008, but 2013 was much clearer and more accessible.

Assessment

The overall balance of the examination papers did not change, but some of the mark allocations did.

In terms of Paper 1, in 2013 there was still a requirement to answer two essays in 1 hour 20 minutes, but the choice of essays had been reduced. In 2008 there were five British essays and four European and World essays to choose from. By 2013 this had been reduced to three essays per essay topic area, be it British or European and World. So, in one sense the essay paper was harder in 2013, but this had been softened by the way the Course was structured. Candidates know that each topic area has six issues. These issues are essentially essay topics. Of these, three will come up in some form. The issues are randomly selected but if issue 1 is for one topic then it is for all across the fields of study. This has standardised the examination across all fields of study. By 2013 there had also been some standardisation of question stems, but the overall effect clarified matters rather than making them more/less difficult.

However, Paper 2 had some differences. In 2008, the exam paper had five sources with five questions; the mark allocation was: 5, 5, 6, 6, 8 for these five questions. The main skills were to evaluate a source, to compare two sources, to contextualise two sources, and an overall 'contextualise' question that referred to three sources. By 2013, the exam paper still had five sources, but only four questions. There was comparability in demand in terms of the number and complexity of presented sources. However, the mark allocation was altered. It was now 5, 5, 10, 10. The overall 'contextualise' question had been dropped. To compensate for this the mark allocation for the two individual 'source-contextualise' items was raised to 10 each. The topics were divided into four issues with one question per issue. The number of points available in each source was also standardised to ensure comparability across the different fields of study. Question stems were also been clarified to ensure comparability of demand across fields. (There is a 'How far' question, a 'How fully' question, a 'Compare' question and a 'How useful' question.)

The next issue concerns complexity. The 2008 Higher had most centres doing the Appeasement topic for Paper 2. This was perceived to be difficult as it dealt with a political idea and development. However, this field was moved to the essay paper and the source paper was then developed using Scottish history fields. Complex topics with abstract concepts were introduced. For example, the Reformation topic required candidates to deal with abstract religious ideas such as Presbyterianism, and the Great War topic required candidates to deal with abstract political ideas such as radicalism and political unionism. The overall effect was to toughen the paper, even though there was now less choice in Paper 2.

Marking and grading

The marking criteria in 2013 were very clear with good exemplification. However, there was a difficulty in the interpretation of the question/source and the application of correct knowledge in the correct way. Candidates had to evaluate information to gain high marks. This was a big difference between 2013 and 2008.

As previously mentioned, the overall effect of changes saw more candidates taking the subject, a rise in the A-to-C-pass rate and A-pass rate, along with resultant rises in the cut-offs.

It is felt that this was not due to the examination becoming 'easier', but can be attributed to the examination and marking instructions, which by 2013 were underpinned with a clear and accessible rationale. This led to an overall improvement in examination performance in the panel's opinion.

Comments on Paper 1

The essay responses in 2013 for Paper 1 were very much more structured compared to what markers were looking for.

There was little significant difference in the level of demand between the two papers. In both sampled years, Paper 1 required two essays in the same 80 minutes. There were differences in the marking instructions for Paper 1 which have already been referred to.

Candidates seemed to have only a tenuous idea of what constituted a good introduction or conclusion in 2008. By 2013 that was established and candidates benefited. There was also much less reliance on narrative. The panel found that candidates in 2008 wrote fairly narrative responses to the essays with very simple introductions and conclusions. That candidates improved their work by 2013 seemed to be due to the introduction of criteria-driven marking schemes.

There was evidence of much good practice with structure, knowledge and its use, to answer the question by 2013. The result of this was marginally higher marks for 2013 candidates than 2008, but this also reflects better understanding of what to do and how to write an essay. Candidates did gain more marks, but seemed to stay within the grade boundary.

Comments on Paper 2

Only in Paper 2 was change very pronounced. In 2008, candidates were asked five questions from five sources, including a question worth 8 marks and based on three of the five sources. By 2013, candidates were asked four clearly signalled question 'types' based on five sources.

The greater clarity of the syllabus should not be confused with greater predictability of questions. Indeed the clarity of Paper 2 sits alongside the fact that there are no safe zones to leave out in revision. Anything within the syllabus could be examined so knowledge of the entire Unit was important, along with the execution of very specific skills.

Paper 2 marking in 2008 was through bands. By 2013, specific marks for specific knowledge and evaluation had been introduced which led to improved the marks as there was far less of a 'feeling' about marking and much more was credited through specifics.

The panel felt that the marking was very accurate for both 2008 and 2013, within the restrictions of the relevant marking instructions. However, even though the writing style was more analytical in 2013, it did not change the grade. We might have reduced one or two of the marks in 2008, but this was marginal (1 or 2 marks) and would have had little effect on the overall grade given increases elsewhere.

Comments on Extended Essay

Today the panel would probably have marked the 2008 candidates a little higher in terms of their analysis marks. This has more to do with how we apply the criteria these days than anything else. We felt that the marking in 2013 was accurate and, as we are familiar with this style, easier to understand and justify. Again, the margins were 1, 2 or, at the most, 3 marks.

Intermediate 2 Geography

Overall judgement

The panel judged that the Intermediate Geography examination in 2013 was slightly more demanding than in 2006; however, it was also more accessible.

Educational context

The overall cohort changed significantly between 2006 and 2013. The trend had been for more centres to offer Intermediate 2 in S4 instead of General/Credit Standard Grade. The presentation numbers increased from 1898 in 2006 to 3561 in 2013 (88%). This meant that proportionately there were more higher achieving candidates who would otherwise have been achieving a Credit level in Standard Grade. This was reflected in the increase in A passes from 32% in 2006 to 36% in 2013, despite the A-grade boundary increasing by 4 marks.

The 2006 exam was only the second after the revised syllabus was introduced. In 2013 it was felt that teachers and candidates were much more familiar with the demands of the syllabus. Better choices were being made within the optional Interactions section which was quite poorly answered in 2006.

In 2013, marking instructions were available online, as well as past papers. These have proved to be a valuable resource for centres when using prelim exams to prepare candidates. This factor, along with more accurate target setting and presentation policies within centres has in our opinion been one of the reasons leading to the overall pass rate increasing from 74% to 76.5%.

The Intermediate 2 paper was made more accessible for all ability levels due to greater use by the setters of plain unambiguous language and clearer graphics.

2006 was the second year of the revised syllabus. By 2013, teachers were more familiar with the syllabus, and had more expertise in preparing candidates for the exam. This was particularly noticeable in the optional Environmental Interactions section of the paper where performance was markedly improved. Compared to 2006, teachers and candidates in 2013 had access to a wider range of relevant textbooks and support materials. Greater emphasis on examination feedback and advice for centres via Principal Assessor reports was also felt to be valuable.

In 2013 it was felt that more candidates were being presented at the appropriate level due to improvements in target-setting procedures within centres. The presentation shift from S5/6 to S4 has led to an overall improvement in candidate ability.

Course Arrangements/Specification

There were no changes to the Intermediate 2 Geography Course Arrangements and Assessment Specification between 2006 and 2013.

Assessment

The 2013 paper was slightly more demanding. In 2013 there was a greater number of five- and six-mark questions to stretch better candidates, and although we feel that the paper was more accessible overall, less able candidates would have found it more difficult to gain high marks.

Marking and grading

Grade boundaries were higher in 2013, nearer to notional boundaries. Online accessibility of past papers and marking instructions has encouraged professional development opportunities for teachers leading to more accurate target setting and estimates, and more general awareness among teachers and exam candidates of what is required.

Marks were higher overall. Q1 (Physical Environments) and Q2 (Human Environments) varied from script to script, but answers to the two optional questions in Environmental Interactions were generally better for A and C candidates.

The A2 grade boundary had increased from 52/80 in 2006 to 56/80 in 2013. The B4 grade boundary increased from 44/80 to 47/80. The C6 grade boundary increased from 36/80 to 39/80.

The A-pass rate increased from 32% in 2006 to 36% in 2013 despite the A-grade boundary increasing. This reflected a higher achieving cohort in 2013 rather than a reduction in level of demand.

Comparing the two sets of A and C scripts from each year, it was difficult to draw concrete conclusions with such a small sample — the quality of the scripts was very similar, particularly in the two 25-mark questions where there was a big variation in marks. We felt, however, that both A and C candidates on the whole performed better in the shorter 15-mark Environmental Interactions questions, and given that the grade boundaries have also increased, the conclusion was that the 2013 scripts were of better quality than those in 2006.

Intermediate 2 Graphic Communication

Overall judgement

The panel judged that the question papers from 2008 and 2013 were of a very similar standard with regard to the range of topics covered across the Course Units and the level of difficulty.

The grade boundaries at all grades were higher in 2013 than in 2008. Given the level of demand has been assessed as equivalent, candidates attaining the minimum grade C score in 2013 would have demonstrated a higher level of performance than those attaining the minimum grade C score in 2008. The same applies to grades A and B.

The addition of a themed approach to the paper may have motivated and allowed the candidates to see a clearer link between all Course Units.

Educational context

The number of candidates presented for Intermediate 2 Graphic Communication showed a marked increase from 1692 in 2008 to 3129 in 2013, an overall increase of 84.9 %. There was also a small increase in the number of centres presenting candidates, from 231 in 2008 to 267 in 2013, an increase of 16.4%.

After 2008 there was a slight shift in the stage at which candidates are presented. In 2013, 6% of candidates were in further education establishments, in contrast with 2008 where there were no candidates from further education. In addition, there was an increase of 5% in the number of candidates in S6 who were presented for examination.

Since 2008 a wide range of support has been made available by SQA, via SQA's public website and secure site. This was in the form of: improved detail in external assessment reports, marking instructions, exemplar folios, updated folio guidance documents and the BSI Symbols for Graphic Communication document, all of which have given teachers a greater understanding of the Course requirements and ways in which candidates can achieve within coursework and within the final examination.

As evidenced by the increased number of candidates who achieved an A-grade pass in 2013, it can be surmised that as teachers became more familiar with the examination content and style then candidates became better prepared to sit the final examination and understand how to obtain a higher proportion of marks, for example within drawing questions.

Course Arrangements/Specification

The Course Arrangements and Assessment Specification were originally published in October 2008. They were unchanged in 2013 and as such would not have an effect on the level of demand or candidate performance.

Assessment

Overall, the grade boundaries were higher in 2013, by a few marks, in comparison to 2008. This resulted from a paper that was as robust as previous years. However, it used specific questions that gave a challenge to grade C candidates yet the response by grade A candidates was strong. It was evidently clear those achieving an overall award at grade C achieved a high proportion of their marks in the theory questions but performed poorer than grade A candidates in the drawing questions.

As a consequence of this, grade C candidates were reliant upon a high folio mark in order to gain the Course award.

The style of questions in 2013 was similar to previous years and the application of marks was consistent; the paper marks remained the same and the only variation was 2 marks, which were distributed between the theory and drawing section of the paper.

The isometric view and sectional plan clearly demonstrated the skill set required for the higher achieving candidates, they consistently scored higher in these questions. These questions demonstrated a greater demand from the grade A candidates as these drawings required a greater depth of understanding of these drawing styles in order to obtain the maximum marks required.

The DTP question 4 allowed poorer ability candidates to pick up marks, whilst question 2 CAD symbols, proved challenging for all candidates at grades A and C.

It was harder for candidates in 2013 to obtain a C pass in comparison to 2008, as they had to pick up more marks from a paper that seemed to deliver a greater challenge. The sample of exam papers suggests that all but one candidate made a reasonable attempt at all questions. The development of teaching styles over the years from 2008–13 demonstrated that a clear focus was being put on candidates picking up the marks within the theory questions whilst relying on the folio as the basis for the Course award. Most managed to pick up simple marks within the drawing questions. However, this was the area where candidates who are more adept were able to use their skills to gain better marks and achieve a higher banded award.

Marking and grading

There was an increase in the grade boundary between 2008 and 2013 — 5 marks at grade A, 6 marks at grade B, and 7 marks at grade C.

Upon review of the scripts, there was clear evidence of improvement in the quality of work submitted within the drawing questions particularly on the more challenging questions attempted by grade A candidates.

The 2013 scripts were generally of a similar quality to those of 2008. The candidates were much better prepared for the examination as teachers had become more familiar with what was required to gain marks, and there was also evidence of a better understanding of the detail required to gain maximum marks in the knowledge and understanding element of the

paper. This is an area that has been exemplified for the benefit of learning and teaching in the Principal Assessors' reports.

Both question papers were marked out of 70, with the detail and allocation of marks being very robust.

The allocation of marks within both papers remained broadly similar with only two exceptions:

- ◆ Within question 4 in 2013, two more marks were allocated to this element of knowledge and interpretation, than in 2008.
- ◆ Within question 7, in 2013, two fewer marks were allocated to the development, than in 2008.

There were notable differences between the quality of the scripts from the two years. Candidates achieved more marks overall in 2013 and seemed more knowledgeable.

Candidates in 2013 attempted the drawing questions with more success. Question 7 in both papers is a good example of this, both were development questions carrying a weighting of 12 marks in 2013 and 14 marks in 2008. grade A and grade C candidates gained more marks in 2013 and more candidates completed the drawings to a satisfactory level compared to 2008 where candidates achieved few or no marks.

Intermediate 2 Psychology

Overall judgement

There appears to be no noticeable difference in demand between the years 2008 and 2013. Although the overall pass rate was the same, fewer candidates achieved an A grade (down from 43% in 2008 to 30.5% in 2013) and there was a slight increase in candidates achieving a D grade (up from 3% in 2008 to 6.6% in 2013.) No particular aspect of the 2013 paper seems to have clearly accounted for this, but it was noted that not all candidates appeared to be fully prepared for some mandatory sections of the paper. This was highlighted in the external assessment report, in which centres were strongly reminded to follow the guidance in the Arrangements document and to adhere to the mandatory content of the Course.

The 2013 exam question paper contained fewer topics but while this decreased the breadth of knowledge and understanding, it resulted in a slight increase in the depth, with no overall increase in demand for candidates.

Educational context

Presentation figures for Intermediate 2 Psychology were very similar in both years, with only an increase of 38 candidates in 2013 compared to 2008. The pass rate remained almost

identical overall, but the A grade passes reduced in 2013 by 13% and the D grades increased by 3.6%.

The only noticeable change in learning and teaching as far as the Arrangements documents are concerned is the fact that in 2008 more topics were studied in the Units Understanding the Individual and The Individual in the Social Context (three in each in 2008 as compared to two in each in 2013). Another point in terms of teaching, which was also observed at grade boundary setting and referred to in the external assessment report, is that candidates did not always appear to be adequately prepared for some of the mandatory topics in these Units.

At grade boundary setting for the 2013 paper the pass marks were reduced by 2 marks for every level, which might suggest that the paper was more demanding than that of 2008, but it is actually related to the issue mentioned above regarding apparent lack of preparation of some candidates in mandatory topics.

There was no change in the level of demand over the two papers, however candidates in 2008 will have had more to learn than candidates in 2013. Also, the ability of some of the candidates in 2013 seems to have been affected by the lack of preparation in the mandatory topics.

Course Arrangements/Specification

The Course Arrangements and Assessment Specifications in 2013 were found to be on the whole no more demanding than in 2008.

Teaching more topics in 2008 clearly increased the breadth of the Course but reducing the number of topics in 2013, although reducing the breadth, increased the depth of knowledge slightly, therefore a balance was met.

Assessment

The panel did not consider that the 2013 paper was any more demanding for candidates than in 2008.

Some slight changes were made in the presentation of the questions, eg bullet points were included in questions about research and there were perhaps more questions that were broken down into (i) and (ii) sections. This was done to increase accessibility and was not thought to have affected the demand of the paper.

Marking and grading

The panel did not believe that there was any difference in the level of demand in terms of the grade boundaries, question paper and marking instructions between 2008 and 2013.

Although the grade boundaries were slightly reduced at every level in 2013, as stated previously, this was related to apparent lack of preparation of many candidates in the mandatory topics, rather than any difference in the demand of the paper.

In terms of the marking instructions, it was noted that general principles were added in the 2013 paper but, again, this was not thought to have had any effect on the demand of the paper. On examining the candidates' scripts, the quality of the scripts over the two years was very similar in terms of the wording of answers to questions. There was no marked improvement in the quality of the written work.

3 Findings: Higher National Units

Hospitality

In all instances it was felt the 2013 Units were more in keeping with current industry demands where candidates are more often asked to provide evidence of knowledge and understanding through practical application which is supported through observation or compilation of a portfolio of evidence. The clarity of the Unit Specifications enabled delivery staff to maintain a consistent approach for marking purposes and the provision of exemplars ensured equity across all centres.

Units:

- ◆ Hospitality: Financial and Control Systems (DL3T 34)
- ◆ Control Systems for the Hospitality Industry (A781 04)

Overall judgement

Overall, and with due consideration of the different competences being assessed, it was felt that the 2013 Unit was much more in line with industry requirements. As such, while offering more value to the industry, this Unit had become more taxing for the candidate. The assessment was clearly matched to the standards and the judgements made reflected the marking scheme provided. Less slippage was possible, since specific standards were attached to marking each of the Outcomes and the cut-off points were identified.

Educational context

In the earlier Unit there was little evidence of any attempt to integrate assessments, although the content/context clearly stated that computerised procedures should be used. This could have generated evidence for an IT Unit which formed part of the Group Award.

In DL34T, because the assessment was standardised and a clear marking scheme was available, this affected the standard of the evidence.

Industry practice has evolved over the years and the emphasis is now on IT systems. More centres are becoming reliant on IT and using this in their delivery model.

The structure of the earlier Unit was much more suitable for those candidates progressing through the NQ route. The teaching practice and delivery of the assessments here indicated little evidence of attempts to adopt a holistic approach. By 2013, centres were being encouraged to adopt a holistic approach to assessment, and to effectively reduce the amount of assessment, where one piece of evidence can be used to satisfy more than one criterion. In the earlier Unit, most centres constructed a list of up to 18 separate tasks in order to assess the minutiae of the requirement.

Specification

The two Units were assessing different competences. The 2013 Unit placed much more emphasis on financial systems where the candidates used software and spreadsheets to generate the majority of the evidence required.

In the earlier Unit, the emphasis was more on control systems, and the candidate was required either to draw up manually or populate, again manually, a series of business documents. In some centres these documents were provided for populating. Where candidates were left to construct their own documents the resulting evidence was generally poor.

Candidates also had to explain the various sources of supply which are used as evidence of achievement. In some cases the evidence required only amounted to a few words.

This makes up two of the four Outcomes. The evidence required and seen for this was not considered to be at an appropriate level for HN at SCQF level 7.

There is some commonality in the other Outcomes, albeit much more IT skills were required in 2013.

The Assessment Specification clearly stated the number of errors allowed in each piece of evidence. This ensured the assessment standard for this Unit was much clearer, both for the assessor and the candidate.

Assessment

By 2013, with the changes in the Unit content, the assessment of Outcomes and the removal of the less taxing Outcomes, this had become a Unit more aligned to industry requirements and its expectations of candidates.

Quality and judgement of evidence

It is difficult to undertake a comparison when the Evidence Requirements are based on Unit Specifications which are set to assess different competences. In the older Unit, candidates were tasked with describing, operating and controlling systems. The standard of evidence accepted as satisfactory was not consistent across centres. In some centres there was evidence of a marking scheme.

The 2013 evidence was much more reliant on spreadsheet operation, in line with developments in the industry. Manual dish costing which forms a great deal of the evidence requirement in the old Unit is now covered in spreadsheet operations. Much more targeted management data is incorporated without the need to draw forms and explain simple control methods which are more aligned with NQ Level 2/3 work.

Units:

- ◆ Food and Beverage Service (DL3G 34)
- ◆ Food and Beverage Service (A78K 04)

Overall judgement

The level of demand for both years was felt to be very similar, with both meeting the standards, assessments and Evidence Requirements as identified in the Unit Specifications. Candidates in 2004–5 submitted more evidence of individual research and choice of establishment to compare, which allowed for an extended response that was not available to 2013 candidates.

The extended response question from the former Unit was replaced with questions relating to case studies that reflected different portrayals of the hospitality industry. However, these may not have been considered as challenging as the former assessment.

It is also noted that the lack of ‘expected performance standard’ may have resulted in centres either having difficulty in assessing practical performance or differing levels of candidate competency between centres.

Overall, the skills set remained the same between the years, just the approaches were slightly different and could therefore have led to different standards between centres.

Educational context

Candidates in 2013 have greater understanding of restaurant styles and services, through employment, media and general expectations to eat out more than in 2004–5. The 2013 Unit was written in a manner which offered the opportunity for centres to recognise current industry practices. Technology in 2013 allowed candidates to undertake research demands for Outcome 1 more easily than in 2004.

Candidates and centres appear more focused on minimum requirements in 2013 than in 2004–5 but this may have been because ‘merit’ was no longer awarded and the Unit was less demanding in the practical requirements (only two ‘dates’ required).

Specification

The 2013 specification was no more demanding than in 2004–5. The 2013 Unit format was more prescriptive and therefore clearer with knowledge and skills and Evidence Requirements being included, but the content of each was similar in its demands.

Assessment

Overall, the 2013 assessment demands were less than those of 2004–5. The increased detail in the knowledge and skills and Evidence Requirements sections identified the minimum requirements to pass the Unit. This has become the norm and does not encourage or reward the candidate to extend their responses.

Outcomes 2 and 3 in the 2013 Unit state performance can be assessed over more than one occasion — but this was interpreted differently by each centre and there are no ‘performance standards’ with which to identify skills attained or improved.

In Outcomes 1 and 4 of the 2004–5 Unit the assessment requirements offered the opportunity for more in-depth research or opinions sought.

Quality and judgement of evidence

Comparison of the quality of evidence is difficult due to the different approaches for assessment evidence. However, in both instances the marking of candidate scripts presented was appropriate and indicated advice to candidates where necessary. Some centres provided additional feedback to their candidates indicating areas for improvement in their practical skills.

The judgements made in 2013 were applied consistently with the exemplar assessment demands. However, these would be regarded as lenient in comparison to the responses of 2004–5 — particularly with regard to Outcome 1. This was due to the extended responses sought in the earlier Unit as candidates had the opportunity to attain merit awards.

Units:

- ◆ Hospitality Supervision (H198 34)
- ◆ Supervision and Human Resource Organisation (A77V 04)

Overall judgement

There were similarities between the Units, however there was certainly more requirement for the learner to understand and undertake practical activities to demonstrate their skills in the 2013 Unit.

There was a reduction in written assessment over the period, with centres in 2013 left to teach and test the understanding of the diverse range of skills in a variety of ways at the centre's discretion, eg mini case studies, activities and also the integrative practical approach.

The quality of evidence between centres appeared to be consistent and grading was fair. Feedback was supportive, but not leading where remediation was required.

Educational context

Unit A77V 04 required the learner to describe the function of a supervisory role in human resource activity. It appears that more emphasis was placed on the learner describing the function within the HR role to include knowledge and understanding of induction, training, recruitment and production of job specifications. Within Unit H198 34 the emphasis on the HR role was less exaggerated and merely required the learner to have an overall understanding of the supervisory role and the diverse range of skills that a person would have in the hospitality environment. Knowledge and skills match the personal qualities within the older Unit and there is still a requirement to understand the disciplinary and grievance procedures in accordance with ACAS guidelines.

It is anticipated that teaching practices would have remained the same. However, legislative changes relating to disciplinary and grievance procedures and updated working practices would have been included in teaching practices, since the whole of the content listed in the Unit Specification knowledge and skills section must be taught.

Where the HR emphasis has been removed in the later Unit, it has been replaced with more emphasis on the customer experience and teamworking relationships.

Outcome changes mean that the later Unit had a specific training activity associated with it that enhanced the learners' understanding through actually undertaking a practical session instead of producing theoretical work. The teaching environment therefore required suitable resources to enable this practical element to take place.

All centres appear to have amalgamated the Unit with other practical-based Units and this has remained the same between both years.

Candidate knowledge in A77V 04 developed around an understanding of basic supervisory principles and identifying key skills within the HR role a supervisor may have played.

H198 34 developed the learner's knowledge more with the practical element helping them to gain the qualities of a supervisor by training others or leading a small team of people. It is expected that this is undertaken on a rota basis within the hospitality environment, the panel therefore believes the learner will gain a greater understanding of supervisory traits within this Unit.

Advances in technology have enabled candidates to be more resourceful in their presentation of evidence over time.

Specification

Unit H198 34/DL3X 34 evolved with industry requirements to assist the learner to gain a broader understanding of the supervisory role in the hospitality industry and in doing so added in the training activity as a practical element and not just as theory.

The panel felt the 2013 specification standards were slightly more demanding, merely for the enhanced practical element and encouraging the learner to put into practice the skills they are developing, this in turns makes assessment more challenging since the learner is not graded merely on knowledge, but also performance of the key skills.

This Unit was enhanced from single credit to double credit to allow for more in-depth knowledge to be gained from practical experiences of undertaking the supervisory role and practising personal qualities (on more than one occasion). The integrative approach remained the same.

Assessment

A77V 04

Outcome 1 — Describe the function of a supervisory role in human resource activities

Outcome 2 — Plan the supervisory activity

Outcome 3 — Carry out the supervisory activity

Outcome 1 places more emphasis on gaining knowledge and understanding of the supervisory role which is assessed in the theory, whereas H198 34 relates more to the learner portraying these traits in the practical environment and producing evidence through classroom-based activities rather than written assessment.

Outcomes 2 and 3 are evidently linked to cross-assessment of other Units including Food Production processes or Food & Beverage Services as intended.

H198 34

Outcome 1 — Demonstrate an understanding of the diverse range of skills required of the supervisor in a hospitality environment

Outcome 2 — Plan, implement and evaluate a training activity within a hospitality environment

Outcome 3 — Plan, implement and evaluate a supervisory activity within a hospitality environment

Outcome 1 allows the learner to take hand written A4 notes to the assessment for the grievance and disciplinary topics and could therefore be seen as lowering the assessment standard since the two small case studies do not require very prescriptive answers. The role of the supervisor and their traits is no longer assessed in theory, although knowledge must be gained through teaching practices and demonstrated in the practical element of (Outcomes 2 and 3).

In Outcome 2, the specific task to train a team member adds value to the overall assessment.

Outcome 3 emphasises customer care techniques and requests the learner to evaluate effectiveness of techniques. Evidently linked to cross-assessment of other Units including kitchen modules and Food & Beverage Service as intended.

The integrative approach to assessment remained the same. However, the emphasised practical element in the 2013 Unit made assessment **more** challenging since the learner was not graded merely on knowledge, but more on the performance of the key skills.

The 2013 Unit Specification provided more clarity to the centre but did not necessarily make the Course more or less demanding since the challenges removed from the earlier Unit were approached in a different way in the newer Unit.

Quality and judgement of evidence

There have been developments in the approach to assessment with more emphasis on the practical element which is often more difficult to judge.

Although practical elements can be more difficult to judge from a centre's point of view, in 2013 the candidate was certainly encouraged more to reflect on the key skills they portrayed through the practical tasks.

Where some areas of theory assessment have declined over the years, it is felt that the practical element is more difficult to achieve and the panel would therefore be inclined to say it remains the same since the changes to assessment between the Units balance one another.

Social Sciences

Units:

- ◆ Research Analysis in the Social Sciences (A6V5 04)
- ◆ Research Issues (FM0J 35)

Overall judgement

The older Research Analysis Unit was mainly of value to students continuing with psychology post-HND. It was of limited use to those who did not want to continue with statistics. It placed an unnecessary burden on those who struggled with number-work. There is now a place for complex statistical analysis within the Psychology D Unit, but this can be completed under open-book conditions with tutor support.

It is difficult to draw an exact comparison between the two Units because an essay (Research Issues) doesn't equate to carrying out and interpreting calculations (Research Analysis). However, the essay is a fairer generic social science assessment.

In conclusion, both these Units assess students at SCQF level 8. They require understanding of complex issues. However, they both assess in quite different ways, using different academic competences. It is not comparing like for like.

Candidates who passed either Unit are demonstrating knowledge and skills at an equivalent level, but in a different way.

Educational context

The Research Analysis Unit was replaced by the Research Issues Unit, which was further revised at revalidation in 2011. Both Units form a core Unit for the HND Social Science award. They are complex and challenging, requiring analysis of material and critical thinking.

Specification

The purpose and nature of the Units has changed significantly. The Research Analysis Unit was more demanding. In it the candidates needed to demonstrate understanding through calculations and analysis. It is now quite a different type of assessment, assessing on a 'shopping list' of issues rather than unseen stimulus and calculations. The Research Issues Unit is more formulaic with a list of aspects to be considered. Achievement can be describing and comparing aspects.

Various factors prompted these changes. Overall it was felt that the demands of the old Unit were excessive and when the new Unit was designed in line with the Design Principles an attempt was made to correct this.

The calculations which made up a significant part of the old Unit were mainly useful to those who intended to progress to a degree in Psychology. It was therefore decided to move them out of the Research Unit and into the Psychology Units.

In the latest revision of the Social Sciences Units an attempt has been made to move away from the Units and assessments focusing on knowledge (which made the assessments largely a memory test) and to test out the skills they have acquired and are able to demonstrate in their answers.

Assessment

This was felt to be significantly different. Across the centres, there was greater homogeneity of marking in the 2005 papers than in the new Unit. Question papers are similar across the centres within each year; and of a similar level across the years, but the nature of assessment differs considerably. All instrument assessments were appropriate in assessing students across the Outcomes and Performance Criteria. Within each year, the papers were equivalent.

The Research Analysis Unit's assessment was usually treated as a closed-book exam with short questions and complex calculations. Remediation was used just to clarify points.

The assessment for the Research Issues Unit consists of an open-book 2000-word essay. This involves a three-part question, complex concepts with remediation to fill in missing /understanding evidence.

Quality and judgement of evidence

The panel felt that marking was consistent across both Units.

The Research Issues evidence shows differences between centres in terms of acceptable references/bibliography (eg one centre accepted just one book reference in each candidate's work).

Research Analysis was homogenous across centres.

Research Issues seems less demanding to pass in 2013. There was also an increased amount of remediation and more variability of acceptable evidence.

Units:

- ◆ Social Science Research and Methodology (FM66 34)
- ◆ Social Science Research and Methodology (DP59 34)

Overall judgement

Both Units were appropriate as SCQF level 7 Units within the Social Sciences award.

The biggest differences were not between the Units but rather between centres.

The changes made in the newer Unit were slight in terms of content but the splitting of the assessments allowed a better opportunity to judge the achievements of the candidates.

While the guidance on remediation and re-assessment is to be welcomed towards the achievement of standardisation, there is much help that could be offered by SQA to centres in the creation of assessments, both traditional and alternative, to ensure that the demands

of all assessments across centres are similar and satisfactorily cover all the required Outcomes.

Educational context

It was felt at the time of revalidation that there was a need for minor changes to improve the relevance and demand level of the mandatory Research and Methodology Unit so the newer of these two Units was devised to replace the earlier one.

These mandatory Units within the HNC Social Sciences award remain very challenging. In the light of feedback received and SQA's desire to see the use of alternative assessments, the Unit was modified in such a way that the level of demand remained appropriate to SCQF level 7.

Specification

The Unit Specification content for the two Units is similar but the newer Unit contains 'Intellectual property rights and plagiarism' which is not in the older Unit.

The newer Unit is more specific about how far a candidate can go to be allowed to remediate and at what point it becomes necessary for the Outcome to be re-assessed with a new set of questions.

Assessment

The approach to the assessment of the newer Unit seems much fairer and more successful than the older Unit. In the old Unit, candidates had to undertake a burdensome three-hour assessment covering all three Outcomes of the Unit within a period of up to three hours. Apart from this requiring candidates to have all the knowledge concerning the Outcomes at their fingertips, it also sometimes led to candidates spending too much time on some of the Outcomes to the detriment of the others.

The newer Unit splits the assessment into two separate entities: a two-hour assessment covering Outcomes 1 and 2 and a one-hour assessment undertaken at another time to cover Outcome 3. In practice, this successfully tests the range of knowledge and skills of the candidates, while at the same time giving candidates the opportunity to display what they are capable of. The benefit of these changes is that candidates are more likely to be successful without any reduction in the demand level of the Unit.

In the older Unit, the lack of clarity over when a candidate should be allowed to remediate and when they should be re-assessed led to differences in approach between centres with candidates in some centres being allowed to achieve through remediation while in other centres candidates were made to take a new assessment. The fact that the rules have been clarified in the newer Unit allows for greater standardisation between centres. Now for Outcomes 1 and 2, candidates are only allowed to remediate if the change for a single Outcome can be undertaken in no more than 100 words; and for Outcome 3 candidates are only allowed to remediate if they have no more than one calculation wrong.

There is a potential problem with centres being encouraged to use alternative methods of assessment. In two of the examples provided, candidates were assessed by multiple choice

questions. It was the feeling of the panel that the level of demand in those scripts was lower than for those assessed by the more traditional method.

It has been suggested that it would be helpful if SQA were to create a bank of acceptable questions for this Unit so that a consistent standard was maintained across centres. As shown by the scripts supplied, there was consistency when the exemplar assessment was used but this was lost when centres produced their own assessments or attempted alternative means of assessment.

Quality and judgement of evidence

While there was feedback on many of the scripts, the quality and value of the comments varied widely from assessor to assessor.

For both Units there was a variation across centres. Partly this depended on the assessment being used and, therefore, the demands of the questions. Partly also there was a variation between centres over what was deemed acceptable and what was not by the assessors who were marking the scripts.

5 Conclusions

The panels looked at the specifications, assessments and evidence of a selection of National Qualifications and Higher National Units and compared 2013 with a previous year. Although the comparison exercise was different between qualification types, standards were judged to be comparable in all but two National Courses.

The 2013 Intermediate 2 Geography question paper was felt to be slightly more demanding than in 2006. However, the panel also noted the fact that the 2013 question paper had been made more accessible due to greater use by the setters of plain unambiguous language and clearer graphics. Overall in 2013, candidates gained more marks and higher grades than in 2006 despite the increase in grade boundaries between the years. This could be explained by teachers being more familiar with the syllabus, and having more expertise in preparing candidates for the paper. Also, teachers and candidates in 2013 had access to a wider range of relevant textbooks and support materials than in 2006.

The 2013 Graphic Communication question paper was felt to be similar in demand to the 2006 question paper. As grade boundaries were higher in 2013, the panel felt that this indicated an increase in demand. Despite this there was an increase in the number of candidates achieving an A grade in 2013. This was attributed to teachers becoming more familiar with the examination content and style — and candidates being better prepared to sit the final examination and understand how to obtain a higher proportion of marks. The panel was not able to consider the folio component of the Course assessment as this is internally assessed.

Panels had more difficulty in comparing Higher National Units as, in all cases, there had been changes to specifications over the years. Generally it was felt that the demand of the Units was appropriate to the level and the current Units were in line with current industry requirements. The Social Sciences panel felt that there was some variability between centres in judging the acceptability of evidence and that while the guidance on remediation and re-assessment is to be welcomed, there is much help that could be offered by SQA to centres in the creation of assessments, both traditional and alternative, to ensure that the demands of all assessments across centres are similar and satisfactorily cover all the required Outcomes.

6 SQA's response

The following table summarises our responses to the conclusions of the monitoring standards panels.

Advanced Higher Geography: 2013–2007	
Conclusion	Action
Similar demand in 2013 and 2007.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
Advanced Higher Modern Studies: 2013–2008	
Conclusion	Action
Similar demand in 2013 and 2008.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
Higher French: 2013–2008	
Conclusion	Action
Similar demand in 2013 and 2008.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
Higher Physics: 2013–2008	
Conclusion	Action
Similar demand in 2013 and 2008.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
Higher Chemistry: 2013–2007	
Conclusion	Action
Similar demand in 2013 and 2008.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
Higher History: 2013–2008	
Conclusion	Action
Similar demand in 2013 and 2008.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
Intermediate 2 Geography :2013–2006	
Conclusion	Action
The 2013 Intermediate 2 Geography question paper was felt to be slightly more demanding than in 2006.	We note that the panel concluded that the 2013 Intermediate 2 Geography question paper was felt to be slightly more demanding than in 2006. We also note that the panel recognised that the strategies to make the paper more accessible in terms of language, diagrams and consistent use of command words, have been successful. We can also confirm that 5 mark and 6 mark questions proved to be good discriminators between less able and more able candidates, and that less able candidates were also able to access marks against these questions. This resulted in 2013 candidates gaining more marks and higher grades than in 2006 despite the increase in grade boundaries between the years. This, along with a National Rating of

	-0.09 suggests that the 2013 Intermediate 2 Geography paper is very close to standard. Teachers' working knowledge of the syllabus and access to a wider range of relevant textbooks and support materials than in 2006 has undoubtedly supported successful learning, teaching and attainment of this Course.
Intermediate 2 Graphic Communication: 2013–2008	
Conclusion	Action
The 2013 Graphic Communication question paper was felt to be similar in demand to the 2006 question paper. As grade boundaries were higher in 2013, the panel felt that this indicated an increase in demand.	The boundaries were adjusted in 2013 upwards as a result of an unintended easing in demand of a small number of questions. There was a review of the 2014 question paper in light of the 2013 awarding meeting discussions.
Intermediate 2 Psychology: 2013–2008	
Conclusion	Action
Similar demand in 2013 and 2008.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.