



# Changes to assessment of National Courses: Your questions answered

June 2017

## 1 Changes to assessment and documentation

### Why are changes being made to the National Courses?

The Deputy First Minister announced in September that he wanted to reduce workload for candidates and teachers by removing units and unit assessment from National 5 to Advanced Higher courses.

Since this announcement, SQA has been working through the necessary structural changes to the courses and course assessments. We have done this in consultation with our National Qualifications Support Teams (NQSTs) to consider what the removal of unit assessments means for each subject.

The common goal of everyone involved should be to reduce the volume of assessment, while maintaining the standards and integrity of National Qualifications.

### What are the changes to assessment in National 5 to Advanced Higher courses?

The current course assessment approach requires candidates to complete internally-assessed National Units and a course assessment, which is normally a question paper (exam) or coursework, or both. Removing the units and unit assessments means that we need to strengthen the course assessments to ensure that they assess the full content of the course. This will protect the integrity of National Courses and maintain their current value of 24 SCQF credit points.

For each course, we will make one or more of the following changes to the course assessment:

- ◆ extend the existing question paper
- ◆ extend the existing item of coursework
- ◆ introduce a new question paper component
- ◆ introduce a new coursework component

There will be no change to the aims, rationale or content of the courses. With the exception of National 5 Biology\*, only the assessment arrangements will change. We will also provide further guidance on course content where needed.

*\*We are removing some content from the National 5 Biology course following feedback from teachers who indicated that there is more content than necessary.*

### When will the changes take effect?

The timeline for removing units and unit assessments from National Courses, and implementing the revised course assessments, will be:

- ◆ National 5 from session 2017–18

- ◆ Higher from session 2018–19
- ◆ Advanced Higher from session 2019–20

Subject-specific information about the revisions to National 5 course assessments is available from the 'Updates and announcements' section of the National 5 subject level pages at [www.sqa.org.uk/nqsubjects](http://www.sqa.org.uk/nqsubjects).

### **Are any changes being made to assessment in National 4 courses?**

At present, SQA has only been asked to take forward the nationally-agreed revisions to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

The Assessment and National Qualifications Group (ANQ) has begun to consider the approach to assessment in National 4 courses, with its initial focus on the value of a form of external assessment, and a means of differentiation through grading. These discussions will be taken forward in the context of the different pathways that might be taken by a candidate who achieves a National 4 course award.

### **Will the course documentation change?**

Yes. We have received feedback from teachers that the number of documents for each course is an area of concern, so we are streamlining our documents.

For session 2017–18, we are merging the National 5 course specifications, course assessment specifications and general assessment information into one document — a revised National 5 course specification. This will allow teachers and lecturers to quickly and easily access the information they need to deliver their course. The revised course specifications will include introductory information, mandatory course content and details of the revised National 5 course assessments. They will also be simpler to use as we are removing duplicate content from the existing documents.

### **Will new assessment support materials be published?**

Yes. For subjects where we are introducing a new question paper or coursework component, we will publish a new specimen question paper or coursework assessment task. We will publish these materials between the end of May and the end of September 2017. We will also publish revised specimen question papers and coursework assessment tasks for subjects where we are extending and/or modifying the question paper or coursework component.

### **Will revised course specifications be published for Higher and Advanced Higher?**

Yes. We will publish revised course specifications for Higher in session 2018–19, and for Advanced Higher in session 2019–20. This is in line with the changes to assessment agreed by the Assessment and National Qualifications Group.

### **Will the changes to assessment have an impact on Insight tariff points?**

No decision has been taken on this yet — this is the responsibility of the Scottish Government. The Insight project team will consider any necessary modifications to the Insight tool to ensure it is able to present an accurate and consistent picture of young peoples' attainment. The project team consists of members from the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, SQA, Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES), the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), and School Leaders Scotland (SLS).

## **What will the Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) look like if candidates have achieved the National 5 course with the units removed?**

National 5 courses will continue to appear on the candidate's summary of attainment along with the grade achieved, and will also be listed in the detailed record of attainment section of the certificate pack.

If a candidate has been entered for and has achieved the free-standing units at SCQF level 5, these will also be listed on their detailed record of attainment, under the National Unit section.

[View information on the Scottish Qualifications Certificate \(SQC\).](#)

## **How will the changes to assessment impact on disabled candidates or candidates with other protected characteristics?**

SQA has a process in place to carry out Equality Impact Assessments of National Qualifications. This ensures that the qualifications are not discriminatory for any learner on the grounds of disability, race, age, religion/belief, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity or sexual orientation. Due consideration is also given to the reasonable adjustments that SQA can make to provide access to the qualifications for disabled candidates and candidates with additional support needs.

All current National Qualifications were subject to this process prior to being implemented and, as there is no change to the aims, rationale or content of the courses, the reviews that were carried out remain valid and fit for purpose,

SQA has been asked to take forward the removal of unit assessments and to strengthen course assessments. As such, we have been carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment on the specific changes to course assessment at National 5 and are considering the potential impact of these changes to learners with protected characteristics, and how our existing arrangements could reduce this. We are nearing the final stages of this and the findings will be formally reported to SQA's Qualifications Committee in June 2017.

In session 2017-18, our Assessment Arrangements team will also monitor the impact of the changes on candidates to determine if any further actions are required. Equality Impact Assessments will also be built into our processes for revising the course assessments at Higher and Advanced Higher.

## **2 Removal of National 5 units**

### **What will happen to the units once they are removed from the National 5 courses?**

The units will remain available as free-standing units at SCQF level 5. They will no longer contribute to the achievement of a National 5 course.

Learners can be presented for the free-standing units as an alternative to National 5 courses, and this will give centres some flexibility in meeting the needs of individual learners. For example, some learners might be presented for National 5 courses in some subjects and presented for free-standing SCQF level 5 units and/or National 4 courses in other subjects. For some learners, schools should consider planning their learning experience over two years.

It is for the school or college to decide which qualifications each learner is entered for, and they must ensure they are entered at the most appropriate level. The Scottish Government has published [policy guidance for schools and local authorities](#).

### **Are units being removed from National 5 Skills for Work courses?**

No. The removal of units does not apply to Skills for Work courses.

### **Will National 5 courses be recoded once the units are removed?**

Yes. The new course codes are being added to the revised course specifications. Please note that the new course codes will be valid from session 2017–18 onwards.

### **If any updates are made to the National 5 courses over time, will the free-standing units also be updated?**

No. The free-standing SCQF level 5 units will be separate from the National 5 courses and will not be subject to the same updates. Some of the units that were formerly part of the National 5 courses are also part of National Qualification Group Awards, and these may be revised if these group awards are revised.

## **3 Entry requirements and presentation decisions**

### **What are the entry requirements for National 5 courses?**

The revised specifications state that 'learners should have achieved the curriculum level 4 or the National 4 course or equivalent qualifications and/or experience prior to starting the course'. This ensures that learners have a reasonable chance of success at National 5, given sufficient time for delivery and assessment.

### **How long does it take to complete a National 5 course?**

National 5 courses consist of 24 SCQF credit points and this includes additional time for preparing for course assessment.

For a candidate who meets the minimum recommended entry requirements, the notional length of time for a learner to complete a National 5 course is 160 hours. If a candidate does not meet the minimum entry requirements, more time would be required for learning than the 160 hours.

### **When should candidate entries be submitted by?**

Our arrangements for candidate entries will remain unchanged. Centres will still be required to provide SQA with an accurate indication of their presentation patterns for the upcoming exam diet, and initial entry information is required by the **end of November for schools** and the **end of January for colleges**.

### **Can candidates be entered for both the National 5 course and the free-standing SCQF level 5 units for the same subject?**

In its [policy statement on the changes to National Courses](#), the Scottish Government states that 'the removal of mandatory unit assessments has the distinct purpose of reducing the amount of assessment experienced by young people taking National Qualifications and the teacher workload created as a result of administering the units'. It goes on to state that 'schools should therefore decide whether learners are entered for units or for the full course award'.

Following the Deputy First Minister's decision to retain the current mechanism of Recognising Positive Achievement for an **interim period only**, learners can be entered for both the units and the National 5 course. However, the Scottish Government states that

‘given the agreed need to reduce assessment-related workload, this pathway should only be used in a very limited number of exceptional circumstances, where the view of the teacher and head teacher, in discussion with parents and young people, is that it is in the interests of specific individual learners’.

### **Will there be an option for dual-entry at National 4 and National 5, like there was with Standard Grade?**

No. The design of the current qualifications system does not allow for dual-entry.

### **Can candidates be entered for the free-standing SCQF level 5 units in addition to the National 4 course?**

Yes, where it is identified that this is an appropriate pathway for individual candidates and will not lead to unnecessary workload. The Scottish Government has included advice on learner pathways in its [policy statement on the changes to National Courses](#).

### **What progression will there be for candidates who have achieved National 4 but who are not ready for the National 5 course assessment?**

The achievement of a National 4 course provides candidates with a number of progression routes, including Skills for Work courses, National Certificates and Modern Apprenticeships. Candidates who wish to progress to the National 5 course, but are not yet performing at the level required for the course assessment, could be entered for the free-standing SCQF level 5 units as an alternative. They will be certificated for the units, and this may also prepare them for entering the National 5 course in future — for example, as part of a two-year course.

Which qualifications a candidate is entered for is a decision for the school or college. It is important that candidates are entered for the appropriate level of qualification, and the Scottish Government has published guidance on this. Its [policy statement on the changes to National Courses](#) states that ‘decisions about learning pathways will require discussion with young people and their parents/carers about their longer-term aspirations. Reliable assessment information should be used to inform these discussions, for example on whether a young person has achieved the third or fourth curriculum level by the end of S3. This will inform the decision on whether a learner should embark on a course leading to National 4, National 5 or Higher, whether that be a one year or two year pathway, or pursue other qualifications pathways.’

## **4 Literacy and Numeracy**

### **How will candidates’ literacy and numeracy skills be certificated?**

SQA certification of literacy and numeracy qualifications is available through the literacy and numeracy standalone units at SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5.

SQA also certificates the five Core Skills of Communication, Numeracy, Problem Solving, Working with Others, and IT, at specific SCQF levels, on the Core Skills profile that is included on every candidate’s certificate.

Candidates can achieve Core Skills certification of Literacy through the achievement of the National 5 English course at grades A to D or by achieving the Literacy unit at SCQF level 5. Core Skills certification of Numeracy can be achieved through the National 5 Mathematics course at grades A to D or by achieving the Numeracy unit at SCQF level 5.

## What about school measures for literacy and numeracy within Insight?

An Insight Guide is available for schools, explaining which achievements can count towards the school measures for Literacy and Numeracy within Insight. You can access this guide from the Scottish Government website, using the following link:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0044/00449947.pdf>

An explanatory note on calculating Tariff Points is available from the Insight website at <http://insight-guides.scotxed.net/support/InsightDeepDive3-CalculatingTariffpoints.pdf>

## 5 Grading and Recognising Positive Achievement

### Is grade D being extended?

Yes. Grade D will be extended from a notional 45–49% to a notional 40–49%.

This move is intended to recognise the achievement of candidates who are aspiring to attain a National 5 course, but who do not perform as well as predicted in the course assessment. It will provide opportunities for candidates who do not achieve grades A to C to have their achievement recognised and to be certificated for the level of qualification for which they were entered. This will give teachers and lecturers greater certainty that learners can attain an award at the appropriate level. This new 10 per cent range also brings grade D into line with the ranges for grades B and C.

This change will apply to National 5 in 2017–18, Higher in 2018–19 and Advanced Higher in 2019–20. There will be no change to the standards required to achieve grades A to C.

### Will a grade E be introduced?

No. National 5 to Advanced Higher courses will continue to be graded A to D or 'no award'.

### Can Recognising Positive Achievement or 'fallback' still be used if a candidate does not achieve the National 5 course assessment?

The Scottish Government has made it clear in its [policy statement on the changes to National Courses](#) (Annex B) that the current mechanism of fallback to National 4 'will remain available for an **interim period only**', and that this pathway 'should only be used in a very limited number of exceptional circumstances, where the view of the teacher and head teacher, in discussion with parents and learners, is that it is in the interests of specific individual learners'.

SQA is currently working through the operational implications of this change. We will communicate how centres will be able to access this in due course.

## 5 Support for schools and colleges

### What support will be given to teachers and lecturers to help them prepare for the changes to assessment?

We are running a series of subject-specific webinars for a range of subjects. We will be publishing audio presentations for other subjects. Both the webinars and audio presentations will focus on the requirements of the revised National 5 course assessments.

Further information is available from [www.sqa.org.uk/nqevents](http://www.sqa.org.uk/nqevents).

## **What support is being provided to SQA co-ordinators?**

In addition to the subject-specific support for teachers and lecturers, we recently ran a series of conferences for SQA co-ordinators. These took place on the following dates:

- ◆ Wednesday 31 May 2017 — Inverness
- ◆ Thursday 1 June 2017 — Edinburgh
- ◆ Wednesday 7 June 2017 — Dundee
- ◆ Tuesday 13 June 2017 — Stirling
- ◆ Thursday 15 June 2017 — Glasgow

The conferences provided SQA co-ordinators with support and guidance in preparation for the changes to National 5 courses. An event for college co-ordinators will take place at a later date.

## **Is support available for heads of centre?**

Our Liaison Managers are available to visit each local authority in assisting school leaders make the right decisions for their school. Please contact your local [Liaison Manager](#) or e-mail [mycentre@sqa.org.uk](mailto:mycentre@sqa.org.uk).

## History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
1.1	Section on literacy and numeracy added	May 2017