

Review report general questions and answers



Q1 The subject review reports give the time allocated for delivery and assessment of courses as 160 hours. Where does this figure come from? The SCQF credit information seems to indicate that it should be 240 hours (24 SCQF credit points x 10 hours per credit point).

The national courses have been designed to be delivered and assessed in 160 hours, assuming the candidate was at the correct entry point in their learning. Accordingly, a candidate must be secure in their learning at curriculum level 4 prior to embarking on a National 5 course and 160 hours should be allowed for delivery and assessment. If either of these conditions is not met then the candidate will struggle — the time for learning, teaching and assessment will be squeezed and it is likely that more re-assessment may be required. This has always been the case for current and previous courses. Please see Appendix A for an explanation.

Q2 When do the changes in the review reports come into operation?

They operate from new academic session 2016–17.

Q3 Will the three assessment approaches apply for next year only?

No. The three approaches outlined in the subject review reports apply from session 2016–17 and will be incorporated into documentation for session 2017–18.

The table of subjects and approaches is available in SQA's [NQ Next Steps Guide](#).

Q4 Do the three approaches apply to the combined and portfolio approach or just unit-by-unit? For example:

- ◆ **Using Approach 1 (for Maths), is 60% of a test that combined more than one unit considered a pass, or does it have to be 60% of each unit within the combined test?**
- ◆ **In Approach 2, are 7/9 assessment standards in a combined assessment a pass, or would it have to be split into 3/4 assessment standards for Unit X and 4/5 assessment standards for Unit Y?**
- ◆ **Using Approach 3 (holistic), how does the combined approach work? Approach 3 varies between subjects (sometimes it involves the candidate using their evidence for both unit and course assessment — eg PE, Psychology — and sometimes it is to avoid duplication of assessment standards, eg Practical Cake Craft).**

Approach 1, applying a cut-off score to a test, has been designed primarily for use with unit tests. If centres use combined tests across units then they should use the same cut-off score, as long as they ensure candidates meet the minimum cut-off for each unit.

Approach 2 — the stated assessment standards thresholds are for each unit of the course. These assessment standards thresholds could be applied to combined/portfolio approaches as long as centres ensure that candidates meet the minimum assessment standards threshold for each unit.

Approach 3 could be applied to unit-by-unit, combined and/or portfolio approaches.

Q5 Are the new approaches optional or mandatory: can a centre still use the existing approach for 2016–17? Does this vary between Approaches 1, 2 and 3? For example:

- ◆ **Approach 1 — could centres use EITHER the single test that will be provided for Outcome 2 in Biology OR the existing unit assessment support pack?**
- ◆ **Approach 2 — could centres still require candidates to pass ALL assessment standards for a pass OR apply threshold (4/5, 6/8 as indicated for each subject)?**
- ◆ **Approach 3 — could centres apply the ‘holistic’ approach OR still require candidates to pass ALL assessment standards?**

Yes. Centres can use the existing approaches or the new approach. This would apply across Approaches 1, 2 and 3.

Some centres have said that they do not want to change existing practices as they want their candidates to be secure in all assessment standards in preparation for coursework assessment and the external examination.

Centres may, if they wish, ask their candidates to redo tasks associated with assessment standards they have not met. Please note that this will not reduce the workload demand for candidates.

However, for SQA purposes, if a candidate has passed the stated minimum number of assessment standards using Approach 2, they have passed the unit — ie if they redo an assessment standard and do not meet it but have exceeded the threshold then they should be awarded a pass not a fail.

For Approach 3 we still require candidates to meet the requirements of all assessment standards. However, subjects in this category generally have broader and fewer assessment standards and it is possible to take a holistic approach to assessing evidence. For example, if an assessment standard requires a candidate to identify the main points from a text then candidates do not need to identify every point to meet the standard. Even if they identify incorrect points, as long as they have made reference to the main points they will meet the standard.

Q6 Will the approach be stated in unit assessment support documents?

Unit assessment support documents will eventually reflect the changes to a course. We do not intend to indicate the approach taken in any document other than the subject review report.

Q7 Will the unit specifications, unit assessment support documents and 'judging evidence' table be changed to reflect these changes?

SQA has accelerated changes for session 2016–17 to address workload concerns. These changes had originally been planned for 2017–18, which would have allowed all the documents to be updated prior to implementation. Documents which are affected by the subject review reports will be changed in due course for session 2017–18. If there are further significant changes for 2017–18 in the subject review reports, there will be a second set of changes to documents.

Q8 In some review reports, actions to be implemented in 2016–17 are not clearly separated from those actions being consulted on/reviewed in 2016–17. Please clarify exactly what changes are being made next session.

We will clarify this for each relevant subject in a guidance note which will be available early in the new session. In general, if the 2016–17 section of the review report listed investigating or reviewing in 2016–17 then this would be for implementation in a future year, not in 2016–17. Please note that an investigation or review will not result in an inevitable change to the course.

Q9 There is too much change to documents: if changes were made in May can't the refresh occur the following May?

We are dealing with two sets of changes — those generated by the normal change process, eg issues raised by teachers last year which required amends to SQA course arrangements to clarify understanding, and accelerated changes emerging from the subject review reports. Given the volume of concern about workload, it was preferable to apply the changes for session 2016–17 rather than wait until the following year to have changes and documents in perfect alignment.

Q10 Our S4 candidates started their qualifications year in May and will be presented in session 2016–17. If we ask our candidates to complete unit assessments in June, can we apply the new arrangements with the new thresholds for a pass?

Yes, since the candidates will be presented for session 2016–17.

Q11 Our school plans to have some candidates take a course over two years, over S4 (session 2016–17) and S5 (session 2017–18). The standard for passing a unit changes over these two years. Can we take work for a unit done in S4 which did not achieve a pass and then scrutinise it in S5 against the different standard as it may then achieve a pass?

Yes. However, you may wish to reflect on how ready such a candidate would be for the more demanding coursework task and question paper in S5 when this work was carried out so long ago. You might wish to make arrangements to revise some of the skills and knowledge tested in the unit.

Q12 Do centres need to change the way they carry out internal verification in response to these changes?

No. The purpose of internal verification is to ensure that centres have robust moderation procedures so that centres are confident that they are assessing candidate work to the

national standard. The process of verification does not need to change, but centres need to verify work against the standard specified in the subject review report and continue to be aware of subject verification reports and course reports.

Q13 Will the re-assessment approaches be added to the unit assessment support or other documents, eg unit specifications?

SQA recommends one opportunity for assessment and, if the candidate is not successful, one opportunity for re-assessment. Re-assessment should only take place after further learning/teaching has taken place. The introduction of the threshold should help with the need for re-assessment, assuming candidates are presented at the correct level. This approach has not changed.

If candidates need more than one opportunity for re-assessment, they are probably being presented for a level of qualification that is too demanding for them and we would advise moving them down a level. Not doing this could be stressful for candidates and will result in a heavy burden of re-assessment for both candidates and teacher, which is not desirable or helpful.

The changes we have announced in the subject review reports will eventually be formalised in the subject documents.

Q14 The following sentence occurs in a few review reports: 'If a candidate successfully meets the requirements of the specified number of assessment standards, they will be judged to have passed the unit overall and no further re-assessment will be required.' Some people have interpreted this as meaning that it is only AFTER the candidate has failed an initial assessment that the new approach is relevant. Is this correct?

No. Please ignore the word 'further'. It should read ... 'no re-assessment will be required'.

Q15 In 2016–17, will teachers be able to use an assessment from the previous year if already banked?

Yes. If a centre has already carried out a unit assessment in a previous year then the unit result would still stand for 2016–17.

Q16 In 2016–17, can centres apply the threshold to re-assess candidates from an existing assessment that in 2015–16 was a fail?

Yes, you can do this if the candidate is being presented in session 2016-17.

Appendix A (with reference to Q1)

Based on SQA's [Design of National Courses and Units](#) policy document, March 2016

Notional hours of learning

Course and unit specifications describe the size of a qualification in terms of SCQF credit points. To help centres determine the size of a programme of learning, it may be useful to note that 1 SCQF credit point equates to a notional 10 hours of learning.

For national units at SCQF levels 1-6, it is expected that learners will need an additional 50% of the time required for programmed learning to prepare them for a successful learning experience. Most national units comprise 6 SCQF credit points, or a notional 60 hours of learning. Of these 60 hours, 40 hours involve programmed learning such as class contact and assessment. The other 20 hours include the time that an individual learner is expected to contribute to their learning through independent study, such as reading and revision for assessment.

Courses at National 4 and above include an additional 6 SCQF credit points for the Added Value Unit or course assessment, giving a total course time of 240 hours. This means that candidates undertaking a National 4, 5 or Higher course would have a notional 160 hours of programmed learning and a notional 80 hours of independent study.