



Monitoring Standards over Time:

National Qualifications, Higher National Units and Scottish Vocational Qualifications in 2014 compared with previous years

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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 2015.

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 and Scottish Vocational 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 (see next sub-section) 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 Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualifications, 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 and SVQ 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. The panels report their findings in a form, indicating whether the aspects mentioned were more, no more, or less demanding in 2014.

The 2014 –15 programme

This report covers the following comparisons:

National Qualifications

Advanced Higher Graphic Communication	2014 and 2009
Higher Art and Design	2014 and 2006
Higher Geography	2014 and 2009
Intermediate 2 English	2014 and 2011
Intermediate 2 Mathematics	2014 and 2010

Higher National Units

Business	
2014	2008
Economic Issues: An Introduction (F7J8 34)	Economic Issues: An Introduction (DE3A 34)
Managing People and Organisations (F84T 34)	Managing People and Organisations (DE3D 34)
Economics 1: Micro and Macro Theory and Application (F7J6 35)	Economics 1: Micro and Macro Theory and Application (DE3G 35)
Accounting	
2014	2007
Preparing Final Accounts (F7JT 34)	Preparing Final Accounts (DE5C 34)
Recording Financial Information (F7JV 34)	Recording Financial Information (DE5D 34)
Cost Accounting (F7JR 34)	Cost Accounting (DE5F 34)
Management Accounting Using Information Technology (F7JS 34)	Management Accounting Using Information Technology (DE9G 34)
Administration and Information Technology	
2014	2008
Information and Communication Technology (F84W 35)	Information and Communication Technology in Business (DE3K 35)

Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Food and Drink Operations	
2014	2011
Maintain Workplace Food Safety Standards in Manufacture (F2MD 04)	Maintain Workplace Food Safety Standards in Manufacture (F2MD 04)

Findings: National Qualifications

Advanced Higher Graphic Communication

Overall judgement

In Advanced Higher Graphic Communication, it was judged that the overall level of demand of the question paper between 2009 and 2014 was different. This is a result of the addition of a fourth drawing style question. The expectation would be that this would have made it more difficult for candidates to achieve a higher grade, as candidates were required to have a working knowledge of four of the five drawing styles. However, appears to have given candidates a wider opportunity to gain a higher score. This was perhaps due to the same marks being spread over four questions and allowing the candidates to gain starter marks for each of the four questions. The change in demand was compensated for by higher grade boundaries in 2014.

Educational context

The number of candidates presented for Advanced Higher Graphic Communication shows an increase from 773 in 2009 to 956 in 2014, an overall increase of 24%. No comparator information on the number of centres presenting is available for 2009 to 2014. However, an assumption can be made that with an increase in the number of candidates being presented there follows an increase in the number of centres presenting.

2014 was the penultimate year of this subject and since the Course has been well established for over 10 years now, an assumption can be made that teachers and centres are familiar with the subject matter, examination style and marking style. In addition, with the introduction of *Curriculum for Excellence* Graphic Communication, some Knowledge & Understanding elements of the Advanced Higher Course have filtered down to lower levels. This should mean that teachers' and candidates' familiarity with these items will have increased.

Centres have had access to a wide range of support via the SQA website. This has been in the form of improved detail in internal & external assessment reports, marking instructions, past papers, Thematic and CAD folio guidance documents and BSI Symbols for Graphic Communication. In addition, within the SQA secure site, a range of exemplification materials are made available to aid centres in the delivery and assessment of Unit and Folio work. This includes exemplar modelling techniques, NABs and a range of folio work for both the computer aided graphic presentation and the 3D modelling presentation, all of which include marking commentaries. This information has given teachers a greater understanding of the course requirements and of ways in which candidates can achieve in their course work and in the final examination.

Course Arrangements/Specification

The Course Arrangements and Specification were originally published in April 2000. There have been three revisions since then, with version 3 being published in June 2009. Any changes made in this document were grammatical and did not affect the overall demand for candidates from 2009 onwards.

Assessment

On first inspection the 2014 paper might be considered more demanding. There are, for example, a wider range of topics covered and therefore greater coverage of the Course content. The 2014 paper has 25 distinct areas of knowledge: 21 distinctive aspects of graphic communication theory and four drawing topics. The 2009 paper has 11 distinctive aspects of theory and three drawing topics. On closer examination of both the questions and the implications for candidates, the demands of the 2009 paper become clearer.

The 2009 paper has three questions worth a total of nine marks, which are primarily dependent on the candidate's knowledge — the information they have managed to retain — but there are four questions (worth 26 marks) where they must analyse, evaluate or apply that knowledge. The 2104 paper, in comparison, has three questions (worth a total of 12 marks) where these higher-order thinking skills are required, the rest of the theory questions being primarily knowledge based. This makes the 2009 paper more demanding.

Both papers make it a requirement for the candidate to use sketches as part of their response: four questions in 2014, and three in 2009. This would appear to make 2014 more, not less, demanding, as it requires the candidate to demonstrate a wider application of this skill. However, in 2014 candidates who had read their notes in preparation for the exam could reproduce images from the notes with annotation to gain the marks, whereas in 2009 the candidates had to generate original graphics in both question 3 and question 4: one requiring further analysis and the others making greater demands on the candidates in terms of the clarity required to gain the marks.

With respect to the drawing questions (2009 questions 6–8 and 2014 questions 7–10) the candidate must show understanding of particular technical graphic techniques. The level of demand placed on candidates is similar in both 2009 and 2014. The complexity of the shapes, the manual dexterity and the requirements to apply the techniques precisely and logically are similar in both papers. The 2014 paper places more demand on the candidate with respect to the number of techniques required. The 2009 paper requires the candidate to apply the technique in a greater variety of ways and, one could argue, in greater depth, and therefore by implication increasing the marks available for each question.

For example, in 2009 question 7 on Interpenetrations, the candidate is required to draw a complete end-elevation and development, whereas the question on the same topic in 2014 requires completing an elevation and end-elevation, arguably making the 2014 question slightly easier. In addition, the implication of this for the candidate is that, if they are not able to understand a particular drawing topic, or the more complex aspects of a drawing topic, they will lose a greater proportion of the total mark in 2009 than if they misunderstand, or fail to attempt/complete, the question on the same topic in 2014.

Marking and grading

The additional drawing should have added to the degree of difficulty of the paper and forced the candidates to have a good knowledge of four out of the five Drawing Abilities, with the percentage of marks remaining the same. However, the structure and the type of questions that have been asked over the years have allowed candidates to be better prepared as the years have progressed. Teachers have also become more aware of the type of questions and how they are marked.

The restrictions in the Knowledge and Understanding allowed candidates to gain marks more easily as the Course progressed.

When comparing Grade C level responses there was, in general, a better quality of response to questions on Design Elements and Principles in 2014. Responses to questions on Printing Terminology were poor in both years. Candidates who achieved grade C appeared to prefer explaining how a part would be modelled to describing specific modelling processes. There was no clear distinction between responses to drawing questions. Candidates who achieved Grade C found drawing questions — certainly those on interpenetration and oblique cones — challenging. When comparing Grade A responses, these reflected the same trends as those identified for Grade C responses.

Higher Art and Design

Overall judgement

In Higher Art and Design it was judged that the overall level of demand was lower in 2014 than in 2006.

The introduction of Higher Still in 1999 made very high assessment demands on candidates in terms of the volume of assessment, with:

- ◆ a two-hour question paper, as in 2006
- ◆ a practical assignment
- ◆ folios of coursework containing 5 x A2 sheets of Expressive Art material and 5 x A2 sheets of Design material

Over the years the volume of assessment has become more realistic, with:

- ◆ a reduced question paper in 2014
- ◆ no practical assignment
- ◆ a folio of coursework containing 3 x A2 sheets of Expressive Art and 3 x A2 sheets of Design

Nevertheless, Art and Design remains highly demanding in the time required to produce a large body of physical evidence, the level of skills required, the standards of quality, the knowledge and understanding involved, and the sophistication of critical/analytical thinking. The quality of the candidate responses has not diminished over time — indeed they have improved — and there is no reduction in the merit of the awards.

Educational context

Familiarity with the format of the question paper has grown over this period and the predictability of the questions derived from the scrutiny of past papers has increased as time goes on. This is an issue that the new Higher seeks to address.

There was no significant difference in numbers sitting the exam — the 2014 uptake was 4% smaller than in 2006.

Increasing emphasis on Assessment is for Learning (AifL) to raise attainment has brought about significant changes in learning and teaching. The use of assessment to support learning has become more universally embedded over this period. Tracking and monitoring of student performance and personal learning plans are among many new strategies employed in recent times to raise attainment.

In 2006 the question paper was two hours long. It contained an even weighting of marks awarded for historical study and critical/evaluative comment. Breadth of study was ensured by requiring candidates to tackle two different artistic genres and two distinct design areas in the critical element. Learning and teaching accommodated this broad study. In 2014 the question paper was one and a half hours long. The critical/evaluative element had been reduced and candidates need now tackle only one artistic genre and one design area. This freed up time and allowed for greater focus on a narrower syllabus. A consequence of this was to place greater weighting on the historical element and thus the predictability of the paper.

From 2006 SQA ran a series of touring exhibitions of 'Inspirational Artworks'. Books containing images of the artwork were issued to all centres and these highlighted both the high quality of work being produced but also the variety of approaches and themes. Also at this time, SQA's marking procedures were made more transparent, with teachers being given the opportunity to visit marking in progress. There were also visits by the Qualifications Manager and Principal Assessor to local authorities to support Understanding Standards.

Through the annual Principal Assessor's report, the exemplification of benchmarks and the publication of marked scripts, SQA has been proactive in providing a strong support to centres. SQA has increased the transparency of the assessment procedures and increased the involvement of teachers through Understanding Standards events. SQA verification and development visits have also given support to centres.

The enhanced predictability of the question paper and the increased familiarity with the assessment procedures and assessment standards has benefitted candidates. The reduction in demand from a two-hour exam to a one-and-a-half-hour exam with a narrower focus has also benefitted candidates.

Standards are high and the slight increase in the A–C rate between both years indicates that the Course is being delivered effectively.

Course Arrangements/Specification

In 2006 there was a practical assignment — a three-hour examination which complemented the Course Assessment Folio. This was no longer a requirement in 2014 and as a result greater focus in learning and teaching could be placed on the Folio.

The reduction from two hours to one and a half hours in the question paper, between 2006 and 2014 means there is less demand on candidates. The examination requirement was reduced by two questions. The remaining questions maintained the same degree of challenge as before but the shorter exam is less taxing. Removal of the two questions reduced the breadth of the critical/analytical element of the paper. Candidates were no longer required to respond to two artistic genres and two design areas, but to concentrate on one area of art and one area of design.

Assessment

In 2006 the component marks consisted of 100 marks for the expressive folio, 100 for the design folio, 50 for the practical assignment and 80 for the written paper — a total of 330 marks. In 2014 the component marks consisted of 80 marks for the expressive folio, 80 for the design folio and 60 for the written paper — a total of 220 marks. This change increased the weighting of the written paper from 24% in 2006 to 27% in 2014.

The removal of the two questions in the written paper reduced the critical/analytical element and increased the weighting of the knowledge and understanding element. The effect of this was to increase the predictability of the paper and to enhance the candidates' opportunities for preparing answers prior to the exam. The time reduction in the written paper maintained the time available for each question, but fewer questions and a shorter examination is less taxing for the candidates.

The narrowing of the focus in Paper 2 to one area in each of art and design, rather than two areas, has reduced the breadth of the syllabus and permitted greater depth of study.

The removal of the practical assignment (three-hour) examination has also freed up time and allowed candidates to focus their efforts on the remaining components. In 2006 the overall experience of the candidates in practical work terms was more demanding because they had to apply their knowledge and experience under exam conditions during the assignment.

Marking and grading

In 2006 the candidates answered six questions, two historical (40 marks) and four critical/analytical (40 marks). Total 80 marks. In 2014 the candidates answered four questions, two historical (40 marks) and two critical/analytical (20 marks). Total 60 marks

The level of demand in 2014 was lower because of the removal of the two additional critical/analytical questions. There were no changes in the grade boundaries that would affect candidates' results. The change in the question paper from 2006 to 2014 resulted in a different teaching approach where one question could be targeted; this allowed candidates to be more focused in their response. This also results in less breadth being covered in the teaching and learning.

The reduction in the number of questions to be answered in the written paper, and there no longer being a three-hour practical assignment, meant that the level of demand in 2014 was lower. In practice this will have had a limited effect on candidates in that the demands of Course Assessment are similar as reflected in there being no change in the Grade Boundary percentages.

With more questions to be answered, covering a broader range of art and design genres, the answers in 2006 were more brief and shallow in content. It was a common occurrence that candidates failed to answer all questions well. Often, (as in the sample), candidates failed to attempt to answer all six questions. In 2014 there was a significant improvement in the candidate responses. All four questions were attempted (It was much less common for questions to be missed).

The 2006 candidates generally responded with shorter answers, particularly the critical/analytical questions. Furthermore, the 2006 responses seemed less strictly structured and offered a more conversational response than the 2014 candidates. A candidate in 2014 wrote a considerable amount compared to 2006.

In 2006 candidates answered more questions. Often a sixth answer was rushed, too short, or missed out, which had an effect on the number of marks gained. Although more time was available, more questions had to be answered covering a broader awareness of Art and Design. To a slight extent this rewarded candidates' literary skills as much as their understanding of Art and Design work. The 2014 scripts are therefore more focused on candidates demonstrating their knowledge within the context of exam questions.

The assessment standards were consistently applied by markers in both years.

The 2014 candidates at C level seem to be performing less well in the unseen section of the paper. However, the same candidates perform well in the prepared questions, which seems to suggest that the centres are preparing their candidates to respond to the prepared questions but not developing the generic critical analysis skills required for the unseen question. This was also evident in the 2006 responses, where candidate's knowledge was diluted over a series of two additional questions.

Higher Geography

Overall judgement

The overall judgement of the level of demand of the qualification as a whole, taking into account arrangements, assessments, marking and graded scripts is that 2009 and 2014 are clearly comparable and the standard has been maintained.

Educational context

There has been an increase in the number of candidates presented for Higher Geography. There were 7234 candidates in 2009, and 8496 in 2014, a rise of over 17% (the previous period from 2005 to 2009 saw no significant increase).

There was a rise in the number of candidates being presented from S6 (30% in 2009, 35% in 2014), and a corresponding drop in the percentage of S5 candidates. The numbers passing A to C has been stationary in this time period, however the percentage of candidates achieving an A grade has risen from 27.7% to 30.9%.

The external assessment report highlights areas of strength and weakness which has been used increasingly by teaching staff over the years.

The A–C rate has remained broadly similar over the period, but there are more candidates gaining an A pass in 2014. This increase in quality passes at A grade by 2014 may be attributed to the number of Understanding Standards events, which allowed for greater dissemination of good practice and sharing of the specific examination standard. Their availability, and teachers' familiarity not only with the curriculum and questions, but also with detailed marking instructions and methods of marking, was greater than in previous years.

The Understanding Standards materials on the SQA secure site will also have been of great support to teaching staff in preparing candidates for Higher Geography. Concurrently with this improvement in sharing standards was the national push in schools on schemes to greatly improve teaching and learning and strategies to raise attainment. Often this was done through Teaching and Learning communities, and there was a trend in Geography for greater sharing of revision strategies and materials within local authority clusters, in particular, but also through national bodies.

As a result of *Curriculum for Excellence*, there has been an increased move towards pupil-centred learning, more active learning, and more peer learning and assessment. Through CfE and the strategies mentioned above, the improved variety of pedagogy across schools may have led to a greater understanding and interest for pupils and therefore an improvement in the quality of passes (A grades). An increasing focus on moderation within departments and between schools to share standards and raise attainment will also have contributed.

The support offered overall by SQA, Education Scotland and commercial providers is likely to have helped candidates to be better prepared in 2014. The topics examined are all visited regularly, especially in Paper 2, and the increased familiarity, along with published Marking Instructions and Understanding Standards exemplars, is likely to have helped centres prepare their candidates to a greater degree.

Course Arrangements/Specification

There were no changes to the Course Arrangements and Specification documents between 2009 and 2014. Changes were made to Unit 1 (in the Hydrosphere and Atmosphere topics) in 2008, but these new areas were not assessed in either 2009 or 2014.

Assessment

There were no differences in the types of questions or the weighting of questions between the two years. The assessment in 2014 was deemed to be slightly more difficult than a notional paper due to an increase in marks allocated to Q6b in Paper 2. As the vast majority of candidates choose this option, it was felt that this would affect most candidates at all grade boundaries.

In 2009 the assessment was also regarded as slightly more difficult than a notional paper due to the performance in Q4b (Paper 1). This was felt to affect A candidates more than C candidates, reducing the headroom in the question.

In both instances adjustments were made to the grade boundaries to ensure candidates received the grade they deserved. In 2009, the C6 boundary was set at 99, the B4 at 119, the A2 at 140, and the A1 at 168. In 2014, the C6 boundary was set at 98, the B4 at 118, the A2 at 138, and A1 at 168.

Having compared the individual component questions for mark allocation, difficulty of task, language used and topic selection, the two papers not only have a remarkably similar level of demand but also have utilised the same accessible language in questions and the same style of resources. Similar questions have been used utilising different contexts and resources, thus ensuring a consistent standard within the examination paper. Paper 1 is almost identical in demand and in Paper 2 there are very slight variations in individual questions, such as the 2014 question 6 appearing to be slightly more challenging in the data-handing part, and the large allocation of marks in Q6b, but with Q1 being directly comparable.

Marking and grading

The marking instructions have changed little over the period.

The grade boundaries are very close for 2009 and 2014, but adjusted slightly to take into account small issues. The A1 boundary is the same in both years, at 168/200. The A2, B, C and D grade boundaries are 1–2 marks apart, with the lower value being accepted for the 2014 paper (in 2014: 138, 118, 98 and 88 for B, C, and D). This is 1 percentage point off the notional grade boundaries.

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 2009 and 2014 were consistent with each other, and that candidates would have received the same result in both assessments. The distribution of candidate awards is very similar.

Scripts in the Grade A category had variable marks per topic and in fact, for all the scripts compared, some candidates have very strong topics where they score well and weaker topics where they score poorly. Grade A candidates, in the papers sampled, answered all questions. A candidate with clearly weaker literacy, writing in extended bullets and using an organised and systematic strategy to gain maximum points, managed to get an A grade by utilising good exam techniques, eg good use of process description, good use of maps and diagrams to compensate for an occasional lack of understanding and narrative flow to the answers.

The Grade C candidates sampled did not answer all questions in all the scripts sampled, a noticeable discriminating factor. There was a difference in quantity and quality of responses, but the positive marking in 2009 and 2014 allows for this variety of responses, awarding C grades to candidates who didn't have a good course overview but had one or two strong questions to compensate for missing questions.

In the scripts sampled for 2014 C candidates did better in Lithosphere and Rural than other sections.

Intermediate 2 English

Overall judgement

In Intermediate 2 English it was judged that the overall level of demand between 2011 and 2014 was constant.

In the Close Reading component (where there was a new set of marking instructions each year), the approaches to setting and marking remained the same. To take an example, in Analysis questions, marks were awarded as follows: one mark for a correctly identified reference, and one mark for an appropriate comment. In devising questions, key words were given in bold in both papers.

Marking instructions for Critical Essay and Folio were generic in type and had remained unchanged throughout the sample years. Teachers' assessment approaches had been supported by previous years' Personal Development Workshops (PDW), along with Understanding Standards events, external assessment reports, etc.

Grade boundary decisions were very similar in both sample years. The 2014 decision was not affected by the reasonably significant reduction in candidate entries. This again suggested a stable position.

Educational context

There was a significant decrease in the number of entries for English Intermediate 2 between 2011 and 2014. In 2014 the entries were 19,453, but in 2011 entries were 23,210. It would appear that this reduction was due (largely) to S4 candidates migrating to N5 in 2014. Interestingly, prior to 2014, English Intermediate 2 had been growing in terms of entries, with the figure for 2010 being 21,511. The majority of candidates for English Intermediate 2 come from S5; however, significant numbers come from S4, and a minority from S6 and colleges.

The A–C rate remained stable, however, with a figure of 81.6% in 2014, and 82.2% in 2011. This stabilisation follows a period of increase: 73% in 2006, 75.4% in 2010.

The period from 2011 to 2014 was a time of stability in approaches to teaching and learning for Intermediate 2 English. The Folio of Writing had become an established part of teaching programmes, and standards had been established through, for example, the Understanding Standards online and Professional Development Workshops (PDWs) conducted by the Principal Assessor and Senior Examiner in 2012. Centres' understanding of the standard for course assessment for Intermediate 2 English had previously been supported by several large PDW events across the country (in 2007, 2008, and 2010).

External assessment reports had been available to centres following each year of the diet, and had allowed centres to adapt teaching and learning approaches to meet key development needs. The same was true of marking instructions. Marking instructions for both Critical Essay and Folio had been stable throughout this period, allowing centres to approach these components with confidence. Candidate evidence showed that the selection of texts for Critical Essay in 2011 and 2014 again showed a high degree of stability. It was clear that centres had established confidence in their text selection for teaching and learning programmes.

This period of stability, in teaching and learning approaches, has been reflected in the clear similarity of candidate performance between 2011 and 2014. The candidate population decrease did not result in any changes to the pattern of candidate ability.

Course Arrangements/Specification

There were no changes in Course Arrangements and Assessment Specification for English Intermediate 2 between 2011 and 2014.

Assessment

The level of demand of the assessment in 2014 was neither more, nor less, demanding than in 2011.

Paper 3 (Folio) was exactly the same assessment task for 2014 as it was in 2011, and teaching and learning approaches for this had become well established in centres. The marking instructions for this component were exactly the same, and had been exemplified through markers' meetings and Understanding Standards events and online support.

Paper 1 (Close Reading) had the same individual as setter, and the same principles were followed: the selection of a non-fiction passage of approximately 1000 words with a level of reading demand appropriate to SCQF level 5. Clarity in the wording of questions was a strong priority in terms of checking/vetting, in the hope that clear strategies for answering questions would immediately be apparent to candidates. Key terms within questions were printed in bold.

A careful balance was set between questions testing understanding, and those testing analysis/evaluation. This balance was again in line with a level of demand suitable for SCQF level 5. These core question types were signalled at the side of the question page with codes for each element. However, a real effort was made to ensure that the key demands of each question were clear from a reading of the question alone, without any need to refer to the accompanying code.

Paper 2 (Critical Essay) was written by one setter in 2011, but 2014 was done by Item Bank methods, involving several writers. However, care was taken in checking and vetting to ensure consistency of demand. The guiding principle for the setting of this paper has been to ensure that there are no artificial barriers to candidates' access to the paper. Essay questions should allow candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of texts as well as showing their mastery of the skills of analysis and evaluation. There was a good degree of similarity between Critical Essay questions in 2011 and 2014. For example, in the Drama section, there were two similar questions on relationship and character across the years; in Prose, both years had an incident question, and both had character/emotion. In both years, opportunity was given for candidates to answer on prose non-fiction instead of prose fiction. There appeared to be a fair balance of questions in both years, which allowed candidates to write about the texts they had studied.

Marking and grading

In 2011, the boundary for grade C was fixed at 49; in 2014 it was 48. Grade A was set at 69 in 2011; in 2014 it was 68.

In the question papers there was a high degree of parity between the questions asked in 2011 and in 2014, for both Close Reading and Critical Essay. In Close Reading, the passages selected were of equal reading difficulty and accessibility.

The marking instructions for Folio and Critical Essay remained essentially the same. For Close Reading, there was, of course, difference in terms of content, but approaches remained the same. The marking instructions for Close Reading were reviewed at Preparation stage in line with how they performed in terms of candidates' responses.

There was much similarity between scripts at A and C grades across the two years. A-grade candidates generally had strong performance at Folio, with demonstrated ability to deal quite comfortably with skills of analysis and evaluation in both Critical Essay and Close Reading. A-grade candidates were able to draw on detailed knowledge of the texts they had studied for Critical Essay, and their responses to the questions showed some insight into the central concerns of the text. C-grade candidates showed competent writing skills in the Folio, but had difficulty with 'own words' and dealing with metaphorical language in Close Reading. C-grade candidates coped more confidently with less sophisticated texts in Critical Essay.

Intermediate 2 Mathematics

Overall judgement

For Intermediate 2 Mathematics it was judged that the overall level of demand in 2010 was the same as in 2014.

Educational context

The number of candidates fell significantly from 21,938 in 2010 to 18,297 in 2014.

Year	No of candidates	A Pass (%)	B Pass (%)	C Pass (%)	Total passes (%)
2010	21,938	34.5	19.1	17.1	70.7
2014	18,297	33.2	18.7	18.1	70.0

This can be explained by the introduction of the new National 5 examination in 2014. At least some of the candidates from S3 and S4 who may have been presented for Intermediate 2 in previous years were now being presented for National 5 (or National 4). Information (available at the Grade Boundary Meeting) tells us that the S3 and S4 candidates presented for Intermediate 2 tend to be from higher ability ranges than the S5 candidates. The table below shows the percentage of the cohort represented by S3 and S4 in each of the relevant years.

Year	S3	S4
2010	5.6%	26.8%
2014	0.2%	15.1%

From 2010 to 2014 there was a significant fall in the percentage of the cohort represented by S3 and S4 candidates. It would be reasonable to expect a slight fall in the percentage of candidates in 2014 achieving the higher grades (A and B), based on this knowledge.

Curriculum for Excellence had been introduced in schools by 2014. It is difficult to estimate what difference, if any, this would have made to the A–C rate for Intermediate 2 Mathematics.

Course Arrangements/Specification

The fourth edition of the Arrangements Documents for Intermediate 2 Mathematics was published in March 2002 and was therefore in use for both the 2010 and 2014 Examinations. There are no differences to the Course Arrangements that affect the level of demand, and there were no changes to the Assessment Specifications between 2010 and 2014.

Assessment

In 2010 and 2014, the Intermediate 2 Mathematics examinations:

- ◆ tested every outcome within each Unit
- ◆ had no duplication of a topic (ie no topic was tested twice)
- ◆ had marks spread evenly across each of the three Units
- ◆ had the same percentage of A/B marks (35%)
- ◆ had the same percentage of non-routine marks (35%).

In 2010 the A/B marks appeared in both Paper 1 (7 marks) and Paper 2 (21 marks). In 2014 the A/B marks appeared in both Paper 1 (6 marks) and Paper 2 (22 marks). Even the distribution of A/B marks across the papers was very similar in both years.

In 2010 the non-routine marks appeared in both Paper 1 (1 mark) and Paper 2 (27 marks), and in 2014 the non-routine marks appeared in both Paper 1 (6 marks) and Paper 2 (22 marks). In 2010 the non-routine marks mainly appeared in Paper 2; however, this in itself would not make the overall examination any more or less difficult.

Considering the spread of content over the course, and the allocation of marks to more difficult questions (A/B material) and to non-routine questions, the 2010 and 2014 examinations papers seem to be of a very similar standard.

Marking and grading

Where questions from each of the years are totally different, it is impossible to make any meaningful comparison of the marking instructions. As a result, although all the marking instructions were checked, sampling focused on questions that are similar.

The table below indicates a detailed breakdown of the contents from 2014. Against each question is listed, where applicable, a corresponding question from 2010 (which tests the same or similar content). The paired questions are not always of the same level of difficulty or worth the same marks or both routine / non-routine.

The marks are listed in brackets at the end of each line. Questions at a basic level of difficulty are denoted by C and more difficult questions by A. The presence of an asterisk (*) indicates that a question is non-routine, ie it involves some reasoning processes

2014	2010
Paper 1	
Q1 Equation of a straight line (3C)	Paper 1 Q1 (3C)
Q2 Removing brackets (3C)	Paper 1 Q4(b) (3A)
Q3 Trigonometry problem (3C)	Paper 1 Q6 (3C)

Q4(a) Quartiles (3C) Q4(b) Boxplot (2C) Q4(c) Comparison (2A*)	Paper 1 Q2(a) (2C) Q2(b) (3C) Q2(c) (2C)
Q5 Surds (3C)	Paper 2 Q8 (3C)
Q6 Quadratic graph (2C)	Paper 1 Q5 (1C)
Q7 Trigonometric graph (2C)	Paper 1 Q9 (1A)
Q8(a) Equation of a parabola (2C) Q8(b) Nature of turning point (1C)	Paper 1 Q10(a), (b) and (c) (1C + 1C + 2A)
Q9 Using a chord in a circle (4A*)	Paper 2 Q13 (4A*)
Paper 2	
Q1 Depreciation (3C)	Paper 2 Q1 (4C)
Q2(a) Volume (3C) Q2(b) Volume (3A*)	Paper 1, Q3 (2C) Paper 2, Q11 (3A*)
Q3 Factorisation (3A*)	Paper 1, Q4(a) (2C)
Q4(a) Constructing an equation (1C) Q4(b) Constructing an equation (1C) Q4(c) Simultaneous equations (4C*)	Paper 2, Q5 (3C)
Q5(a) Standard deviation (4C) Q5(b) Comparison / comment (1A*)	Paper 2 Q4(a) and (b) (4C + 2A*)
Q6 Using quadratic formula (4A)	Paper 1, Q8(a) and (b) (1C + 1A*)
Q7 Change the subject of a formula (3C)	Paper 2, Q7 (2C)
Q8 Indices (3C)	Paper 1, Q7 (2C)
Q9 Algebraic fractions (3C)	Paper 2, Q6 (2C)
Q10 Probability (1C*)	Not tested
Q11(a) Trigonometry problem (3A) Q11(b) Bearings (2C*)	Paper 2, Q12 (5A*)
Q12 Trigonometric equations (3A*)	Paper 2, Q14(a) and (b) (2C + 3A*)
Q13 Area of a sector (5A*)	Paper 2, Q9 (4C*)

Note that the following topics from 2010 were not tested in 2014:

Paper 2, Q2 Pie charts (2C)

Paper 2, Q3 Scattergraphs (1C)

Paper 2, Q10(a) and (b) Problem involving quadratic equation (2C* + 4A*)

The General Marking Principles were identical in both years.

When looking at the detailed instructions, it was found that on several occasions, a direct comparison of the marking instructions could be made when questions were of an identical / very similar type. This occurred with the following questions in 2014 (see table above) which had a direct correspondence with a question from 2010.

Paper 1, Q1 Equation of a straight line (3C)
 Paper 1, Q4(a) Quartiles (3C)
 Paper 1, Q4(b) Boxplot (2C)
 Paper 1, Q5 Surds (3C)
 Paper 1, Q9 Using a chord in a circle (4A*)
 Paper 2, Q1 Depreciation (3C)
 Paper 2, Q2(b) Volume (3A*)
 Paper 2, Q5(a) Standard deviation (4C)
 Paper 2, Q5(b) Comparison / comment (2A*)

A comparison of the marking instructions for these questions showed that the detailed marking instructions were very similar (often identical) in both years. When a difference did occur, it seemed to arise as a result of a particular detail in the question, eg Q1 in Paper 1 of both 2010 and 2014 were of an identical nature, yet the Marking instructions in 2010 contained one extra note (other than that they were the same). The extra note arose from one particular common wrong answer in 2010 which did not arise in 2014. Minor differences in the marking instruction from one year to the other tended to arise from the particular circumstances of the question rather than a deliberate attempt to change the style of the instructions.

In general, marking instructions were clear and consistent throughout both years. There were detailed notes on many occasions. Where notes differed in similar questions, as mentioned, it was in response to a particular situation rather than a change in focus. The number of marks awarded for similar questions was consistent throughout.

In conclusion, the marking instructions would seem to lead to great consistency for markers over both years and to make no difference to the ability of candidates to gain marks from one year to the other.

Grade Boundary

The grade boundaries were the same for each year, as illustrated in the table below:

Year	A Boundary	B Boundary	C boundary
2014	70%	60%	50%
2010	70%	60%	50%

In conclusion, the grade boundaries were no more demanding than before.

Candidate scripts

In an effort to compare the scripts from different years, much thought was given as to how to go about it in a meaningful way. From the comparison of the marking instructions, it can be seen that instructions to markers were much the same for both years (with the exceptions mentioned above). So if candidates had responded in the same way in each of the years, they should have been allocated the same marks. However, two candidates, each of whom is awarded 2 out of 4 for a question, will not necessarily have responded in exactly the same way. In Mathematics examinations, each mark is awarded for a specific requirement (an interpretation, strategy, process, communication), so 2 out of 4 is arrived at by showing evidence of 2 out of the 4

requirements. However, it does not have to be the same 2 as someone else who has also gained 2 out of 4.

A Candidates

The panel looked at the scripts and focused on the questions that were similar and that had been allocated 'A' marks, ie from 2010 Paper 2: Q4b, 10b, 11, 13 and 14 (statistical comparison, factorise quadratic, height of solid, chord in a circle (Pythagoras) and trig equation in context). For each candidate, the mark awarded for these questions was checked and compared with what each candidate had been awarded for the corresponding questions in 2014, namely Paper 1 Q4c and Paper 2 Q5b, Paper 2 Q3, Paper 2 Q2b, Paper 1 Q9 and Paper 2 Q12.

All candidates scored full marks when calculating the height of a solid (4/4), and marks for solving a trig equation were identical (0, 1, 1, 1, 3, 3 out of 3). However, on the other three questions, the candidates in 2014 appear to generally more successful scoring a total of 9 out of a possible 18 marks on statistical comparisons as opposed to 4/12; 23/24 as opposed to 16/24 on chord in a circle; and 12/18 as opposed to 4/24 on factorising quadratic, although this is possibly a false comparison as in 2014 the question asked candidates to factorise a quadratic expression, while in 2010 they firstly had to form an equation and then solve it usually by factorisation. Candidates making an error in part (a) of the 2010 question would be at a serious disadvantage here, as would anyone who failed to form the correct equation.

The panel also looked at the extended trigonometry question, 2010 Paper 2 Q12 (sine rule followed by SOHCAHTOA) and 2014 Paper 2 Q11a (cosine rule), worth 5 and 3 marks respectively. Again 2014 candidates appear more successful than their earlier counterparts, with half of the candidates gaining some credit (2, 2 and 3 out of the available 3 marks) while only one candidate scored in 2010, achieving 4/5. This may in part be due to the question being split into distinct parts in the later paper, which may have been less intimidating for candidates. Indeed, the 2010 question is classified as non-routine unlike that of 2014.

In conclusion, it appears that where some similar topics were examined in 2010 and 2014 at level A, the sample of candidates from 2014 outperformed the sample of candidates from 2010. However, despite this, the candidates produced scripts of a similar worth overall.

As a result, it was concluded that the quality of the provided scripts from 2014 is very similar to that of the provided scripts from 2010.

C Candidates

A similar analysis was carried out for the C candidates, but this time with a focus on those that had been allocated 'C' marks in 2010 and 2014. The panel checked what each candidate had been awarded for these questions and compared the results.

In 2014, candidates were more successful when calculating the volume of a solid (15 out of a possible 18 marks as opposed to 4/12), though this may be partly due to the 2010 question appearing in the non-calculator paper and a mark in 2014 being allocated for approximation which was not available in 2010. Similarly, the index question in 2014 showed a better performance than 2010 (12/18 opposed to 4/12). Breaking brackets was also done rather more

successfully in 2014 with full marks (18/18), while only half of the marks were scored in 2010 (6/12), though this is not unexpected as the earlier question was designated as non-routine.

Conversely in 2010 there were questions where candidates outperformed those sitting the later exam in similar topics — namely median, quartiles and boxplot (29/30 as opposed to 25/30); algebraic fractions (5/12 as opposed to 3/18); depreciation (17/24 as opposed to 11/18); and simultaneous equations (12/18 as opposed to 21/36) — although this may be accounted for by 2014 being a non-routine question, requiring equations to be formed and final answer to be in context, whereas 2010 question involved only solving given equations.

In other questions the marks scored were close to each other (≤ 2 marks over 6 candidates).

There were more marks available on these common topics in 2014 than in 2010 (41 as opposed to 34). For these topics the mean mark in 2014 was 67%, while in 2010 it had been 65%. On such a small sample (6 candidates) this is not significant, and we would conclude that overall candidates at level C performed equally well on similar topics in 2010 and 2014.

Overall the scripts from 2010 and 2014 were of a similar quality.

Findings: Higher National Units

Business

Educational context

There is widespread use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) in the delivery of Business Units in FE/HE colleges. Notes and video clips are commonly uploaded, and links are given for useful websites such as the BBC Business News, The Guardian, Tutor2u etc. This means that information given to candidates is now more likely to be up-to-date and can make teaching more relevant. The candidates themselves are better able to source their own materials when required, and are not as reliant as before on materials given to them in paper or electronic format. The widespread use of VLEs can also mean that Courses are better structured as well as being better resourced. The use of technology such as social media is now widespread and the impact on teaching practice is still evolving.

It was noted that in general there is a far greater use of computers by candidates and there is a move away from handwritten work that teaching practice has to accommodate. Centres are often utilising plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin, and this not only impacts on candidates but also has training implications for staff. There is an increasing recognition of the importance of referencing skills, and staff and candidates have to adapt to this demand.

The Assessment Support Packs/Assessment Exemplars are clearer in the more recent versions.

Unit: Economic Issues: An Introduction

- ◆ Economic Issues: An Introduction (F7J8 34)
- ◆ Economic Issues: An Introduction (DE3A 34)

Overall judgement

Overall a similar standard has been applied in both years by centres, with a more consistent judgement of candidate evidence in 2014 due to clearer Assessment Support Packs/Assessment Exemplars.

Specification

The main difference in the Unit Specification Standards between the two years is that, in 2008, Outcome 3 is assessed under supervised conditions whereas in 2014 it is assessed under open book conditions. This change has not, however, meant a change in standard. Candidates are allowed notes as before in the first two Outcomes. However, they are now restricted to 250 words, whilst in 2008 it was one side of A4. This improved definition has made it much more equal and fair but has not had any significant impact on the demands of the assessments.

There has been very little change between the two years, with the same command verbs used in the Outcomes for both years.

Assessment

In both years all centres scrutinised used SQA Exemplar Assessments, which were of the same standard. In 2008 and 2014 the assessments for Outcome 1 and Outcome 2 were directly comparable. Notes allowed in both assessments 1 and 2 were restricted to 250 words in 2014, rather than an A4 side of paper that students could fill with notes. Outcome 3 in 2008 was completed under supervised conditions and all students sat the same assessment, whereas in 2014 the assessment was open book (a short investigative exercise). The level of demand in both years was the same.

Quality and judgement of evidence

There were more focused answers in 2014, possibly due in part to the new exemplar assessments. Outcome 3 responses improved due to the change in assessment conditions, with a greater range of economic policies being cited in 2014 than 2008. Judgement of evidence was consistent across both years. Remediation was used and was appropriate in the examples provided. There were however, variations in the amount of remediation allowed between centres.

Unit: Managing People and Organisations

- ◆ Managing People and Organisations (F84T 34)
- ◆ Managing People and Organisations (DE3D 34)

Overall judgement

The quality of evidence was higher in 2014 than in 2008. There was also greater standardisation across centres in 2014 than 2008 due to the new Unit Specification and assessment exemplars. In 2008 the amount of notes used by candidates varied as candidates were allowed one A4 page of notes. Also, marks allocated to questions on the same topics varied across centres in 2008 as no marking scheme was provided. In 2014 there is a greater scope for the development of research skills and referencing skills.

Specification

Overall in 2014 the Unit Specification is more demanding as the 'command' verbs for the Outcomes are not only 'explain' as in 2008 but also 'analyse', 'identify' and 'compare'. This increased level of difficulty is to some extent offset by the assessments for 2014 being all open book, when in 2008 the assessments were completed under closed book controlled conditions with a cut-off score. Expectations regarding the application of knowledge were higher in 2014, so in 2014 the standards are more demanding.

Assessment

Overall the change from closed book to open book has made the assessment slightly more demanding as it should require a higher level of analytical writing skills from students in their responses to assessments. It also means that sampling has been removed and all evidence requirements now have to be met. The closed book assessments difficulty was tempered by the 50% cut off score and less application of the concepts to the stimulus material, whilst now candidates must achieve all evidence requirements to an acceptable standard defined by SCQF level 7.

Quality and judgement of evidence

The quality of evidence was higher in 2014 due to assessments being open book, allowing students to demonstrate a greater application and understanding of their knowledge. The judgement of the evidence is broadly the same.

Unit: Economics 1: Micro and Macro Theory and Application

- ◆ Economics 1: Micro and Macro Theory and Application (F7J6 35)
- ◆ Economics 1: Micro and Macro Theory and Application (DE3G 35)

Overall judgement

Overall standards applied are very similar across both years. There is increased consistency in judgement of candidate evidence in 2014 due to clearer statement of standards and clearer Assessment Exemplars. This has also resulted in less remediation being required in 2014.

Specification

Despite a change in 'command' verbs for Outcome 2, there has been little change in the level of demand. Outcome 1 is an open book report of approximately 1000 words in both years.

Outcomes 2 and 3 are assessed in supervised conditions in both years, and in both years candidates are allowed reference notes. They are allowed 250 words for each assessment in 2014, while in 2008 they were allowed 1 side of A4 notes. This has made it fairer without having any significant effect on the level of demand. The reference to time allowed and number of sittings in 2008 was removed in 2014, but this has had no significant impact on level of demand. Guidance is provided in the 2014 Unit Specification regarding the expected length of responses for Outcomes 2 and 3.

Assessment

In both years, centres used SQA Exemplar Assessments which were of the same standard.

In Outcomes 1 and 2 notes were restricted to 250 words for each outcome in 2014 rather than one side of A4 notes in 2008. The 2008 statement led to some candidates cramming as much as they could possibly fit on a single A4 page. In the 2008 exemplar, candidates were restricted to two hours for the completion of Outcomes 2 and 3. This restriction was removed from the 2014 exemplar and this has made the assessment a more relaxed occasion than previously, where a two-hour limit perhaps specified an exaggerated sense of difficulty.

Quality and judgement of evidence

A greater range of supply-side policies are discussed in the 2014 candidate evidence as the assessment is now less prescriptive than in 2008.

Administration and Information Technology

Educational context

The HND Administration and Information Technology and HND Business continue to be popular Courses, both providing good progression opportunities to employment and higher level study.

In 2014, the ICT in Business Unit was mandatory in HND Administration and Information Technology and HND Business. In 2008, HND Administration and Information Technology students were presented for alternative Units (Business Management and Project Management). Between 2008 and 2014, there was a limited review to both group awards, which resulted in the ICT in Business Unit being mandatory in both programmes. Minor changes to the Unit Specification resulted in changes to assessment conditions. Further development created integration opportunities with the Presentation Skills Unit.

While ICT in Business sits in the Administration verification group, in the past it may have been delivered by computing, rather than business, staff. College mergers may have re-focused the delivery to business staff delivering this Unit, which would contextualise the Unit to business.

Good integration of ICT in Business and Presentation Skills has been observed during visits. At some centres, a further link with graded Unit projects has also been witnessed. Centres are working actively to maximise integration opportunities and contextualisation. The Unit Specification provides guidance for integration of assessment.

Based on feedback from external verification visits and HN Quality Networks, it is clear that centres are making good use of technology to enhance and engage students — VLEs, video-conferencing, Turnitin, and electronic assessment and marking. It is very important that staff delivering the Unit keep up to date with new and emerging technologies, and changes to working practices and legislation, in line with the Unit Specification. Student feedback, from visiting external verification, indicates that candidates find this Unit challenging, although they appreciate the value of the skills developed in their future study and employment.

In the HND Business Course, for many students this is the only mandatory IT subject studied in Year 2 of the programme. It builds their core skill profile in terms of IT and critical thinking, and enhances their technical ability in presentation skills. In the HND Administration and Information Technology, where the students develop higher level IT skills, this Unit develops critical thinking skills (reviewing and evaluating) in a business context.

Unit: Information and Communication Technology (in Business)

- ◆ Information and Communication Technology (F84W 35)
- ◆ Information and Communication Technology in Business (DE3K 35)

Overall judgement

On the whole, the panel judged the assessment as slightly less demanding in 2014. There are two issues that may have affected the level of demand for this Unit — the removal of verbal presentation in Outcome 5 and the change from restricted open book to open book.

Specification

The 2014 Unit Specification has removed the need for candidates to deliver a presentation. They are still required to plan and produce a presentation, making effective use of presentation software. This makes one part of Outcome 5 less demanding, in terms of the assessment, for both the student and the assessor. This is not a significant change but is worth highlighting in this report. In the context of a double-credit Unit, this change has not made any difference to the overall standard.

This Unit is mandatory in both HND Administration and Information Technology and HND Business. HND Administration and Information Technology students undertake a mandatory Unit in Year 1 (IT in Business: Word Processing and Presentation Applications) which prepares them well for this Unit. It is likely that HND Business students will have made more presentations, in Year 1 of their programme, but not making full use of the tools available in presentation software. This has a balancing effect.

Assessment

There are two changes which may affect the level of demand for this Unit, when comparing 2014 to 2008:

- ◆ Candidates are no longer required to make a verbal presentation in LO5. This reduces the effort from both candidate and assessor. However, HND Administration and Information Technology students are required to make the presentation as they undertake Presentation Skills (which can be integrated with the ICT in Business Unit). This is an option for HND Business students.
- ◆ LO1, LO3 and LO4 have changed from restricted open book to open book. This places an additional burden on assessors to ensure authenticity of evidence. Candidates will be able to access numerous sources of information, making the process more demanding (deciding on the relevance of information).

It was felt that these two changes have made the assessment, on the whole, slightly less demanding.

Quality and judgement of evidence

The quality of evidence from 2014 was judged to be slightly lower than that presented for 2008 (based on the limited sample of candidate work).

Accounting

Educational context

The HN Accounting group award was updated and re-validated in 2010. This revision included updating to current National Occupational Standards, where necessary, and other revisions to Units to ensure currency.

A major change across the assessment of all Units, was the removal of 'Threshold Scores' (which were generally 70%) in line with the ethos of vocational qualifications where candidates are required to demonstrate competence. An allowance for a small number of errors in assessment, referred to as 'Error Tolerances', was introduced to ensure the assessment process was practicable. These tolerances are set at appropriate levels for each outcome of each Unit individually, and are often split into 'Errors of Principle' and 'Arithmetic Errors'. Overall, the error tolerances generally ensure that a candidate achieves greater than 90% at all assessment events.

The accounting environment continues to embrace the use of IT, and this now includes very small businesses that previously may have maintained manual accounting records. This change in the workplace led to the removal of a topic from on 'Control accounts for the sales and purchase ledgers', as this control would not be operated where an accounting software package is being used.

The assessment instruments were revised to be more efficient and less time-consuming by reducing the number of accounting transactions to be processed, while still ensuring coverage of all required topics and Outcomes. Further, the assessment conditions for two Outcomes were changed from closed book to open book supervised.

The change from marking thresholds to error tolerances has resulted in an improvement in the assessment of candidate competence and a more robust assessment process. Taking all factors into account, overall the ability of candidates to meet the demands of the specification and assessments remains broadly similar.

Unit: Preparing Final Accounts

- ◆ Preparing Final Accounts (F7JT 34)
- ◆ Preparing Final Accounts (DE5C 34)

Overall judgement

Taking into account revision to the judgement of assessment evidence and the changes to the assessment conditions, overall it was found that the Preparing Final Accounts Unit in 2014 remains equally demanding. Passes have been awarded to evidence of comparable quality and overall standards have been maintained.

Specification

The Outcomes and knowledge and skills for this Unit remain unchanged. However, the assessment conditions for all Outcomes were changed to be more lenient. This is offset by the change from marking thresholds of 70% to error tolerances, resulting in an improvement in the assessment of candidate competence and a more robust assessment process.

Taking all factors into account, overall the Unit Specification Standards in 2014 are no more demanding than before.

Assessment

The instruments of assessment for this Unit in 2014 are very similar to those of the predecessor Unit. However, as detailed above, the assessment of candidate evidence is now more robust through the replacement of the 70% threshold of attainment with a very low tolerance of errors, resulting in an improved assessment of a candidate's competence.

This change could have led to a more demanding assessment in 2014, but it is offset by the change of assessment conditions: for Outcomes 1 and 2 from closed book to supervised conditions with access restricted to a proforma layout only; and for Outcomes 3 and 4 from supervised conditions with access restricted to a pro forma layout and ratio formulae only to open book supervised conditions.

Overall it was concluded that the assessment in 2014 was, on the whole no more demanding than in 2007.

Quality and judgement of evidence

The quality of 2014 evidence was higher than that from 2007.

Unit: Recording Financial Information

- ◆ Recording Financial Information (F7JV 34)
- ◆ Recording Financial Information (DE5D 34)

Overall judgement

Taking into account changes to the standards, the split into four separate Outcomes, the assessment process and revision to the judgement of assessment evidence, overall it was concluded that the Recording Financial Information Unit in 2014 remains equally demanding. Passes have been awarded to evidence of comparable quality and overall standards have been maintained.

Specification

A topic on control accounts was removed from the Unit as part of the 2010 revision, and another smaller topic on the 'Effect of errors on profit' was also removed. However, the topic on 'Correcting errors using journal entries' was enhanced from six to eight errors and also to include correcting errors with VAT, as appropriate.

The assessments were revised to be more efficient and less time-consuming by reducing the number of accounting transactions to be processed, while still ensuring coverage of all required topics and Outcomes. Further, the assessment conditions for two Outcomes were changed from closed book to open book supervised. However, the change from marking thresholds of 70% to error tolerances has resulted in an improvement in the assessment of candidate competence and a more robust assessment process.

Taking all factors into account, overall the Unit Specification Standards in 2014 are no more demanding than before.

Assessment

The instruments of assessment for this Unit in 2014 are very similar to those of the predecessor Unit. However, the assessment of candidate evidence is now more robust through the replacement of the 70% threshold of attainment with a very low tolerance of errors, resulting in an improved assessment of a candidate's competence. Further, by splitting the previous Outcomes 1 into 3 separate outcomes, the assessment process now ensures that candidates' competence is assessed separately for each topic. These matters could have led to a more demanding assessment in 2014, but they are offset by the removal of two topics from the Unit and the change of assessment conditions for two outcomes from closed book to open book supervised.

Therefore, overall it has been concluded that the assessment in 2014 on the whole is no more demanding than before.

Quality and judgement of evidence

The quality of 2014 evidence was higher than that from 2007. It was judged that the 2014 evidence was judged less leniently than previously.

Unit: Cost Accounting

- ◆ Cost Accounting (F7JR 34)
- ◆ Cost Accounting (DE5F 34)

Overall judgement

Overall there is evidence to suggest that the changes in HN assessment policy from threshold of attainment to error tolerance has meant that there is a higher burden on teaching staff to finalise results due to the high incidence of remediation, due to candidates failing to meet the minimum standard. However, the content of the Unit specification has been reduced, which means that students are not covering topics in as much depth. There also seems to be evidence that theory (written) answers are less in-depth in the 2014 assessment papers, even although the Unit Specification requires largely similar coverage in both years. This means there is less demand on candidates to provide a full explanation in certain areas, eg Outcomes 1 and 2.

Overall, after assessing the evidence, the Cost Accounting Unit was considered less demanding and the coverage has been reduced.

Whilst the change from threshold of attainment to error tolerance has meant it may be difficult for candidates to achieve a pass first time, the overall changes in the Cost Accounting Unit has resulted in a reduction in content, hence a reduction in the overall standard.

Assessment

There are fewer assessments in 2014 compared to 2007 (six outcomes has been reduced to five). The assessment guidelines have been reduced resulting in slightly easier assessments overall, although the change in threshold of attainment to error tolerance means candidates have to have fewer errors but by covering easier assessments. There is a higher incidence of remediation and re-assessment due to the requirement to meet a minimum standard or to

ensure a student is within an error tolerance, requiring more coverage of knowledge and skills than in 2007 arrangements.

Quality and judgement of evidence

The quality of 2014 evidence was judged to be the same.

Unit: Management Accounting Using Information Technology

- ◆ Management Accounting Using Information Technology (F7JS 34)
- ◆ Management Accounting Using Information Technology (DE9G 34)

Overall judgement

Overall there is evidence to suggest that the changes in HN assessment policy from threshold of attainment to error tolerance has meant that there is a higher burden on teaching staff to finalise results due to the high incidence of remediation, due to candidates failing to meet the minimum standard. However, the content of the Unit specification has remained largely the same. There does seem to be a greater emphasis on use of formulae and linking worksheets, and less emphasis on the understanding eg Outcome 1 no opening balance sheet can result in less of an understanding of preparing a master budget.

Overall, it was felt that after assessing the evidence, the Management Accounting Using Information Technology Unit is of a similar standard between both years.

Specification

Whilst the change from threshold of attainment to error tolerance has meant it may be difficult for candidates to achieve a pass first time, the overall changes in the Unit has resulted in a slight reduction in content, hence a slight reduction in the overall standard, for the reasons already indicated above.

Assessment

There is the same number of Outcomes, knowledge/skills and assessments as in 2007. The assessment guidelines are similar between the two years, although there is more of an emphasis on preparing spreadsheets rather than developing an understanding of management accounting, due to the fact that the evidence requirements in the Unit specification are so specific that there is no real scope for developing some of the topics or assessing in a more innovative way. There is a higher incidence of remediation and re-assessment due to the requirement to meet a minimum standard or to ensure a student is within an error tolerance, requiring more coverage of knowledge and skills than in 2007 arrangements. However, that results in a higher burden on the assessor rather than a deeper understanding on the part of the candidate.

Quality and judgement of evidence

The quality of 2014 evidence was considered to be of the same quality and as being judged the same as that from 2007.

Findings: Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Unit: Maintain Workplace Food Safety Standards in Manufacture (F2MD 04)

Overall judgement

Unit standards have not changed between 2011 and 2014.

Educational Context

Candidates have access to learning materials and centre prepared worksheets. They also have access to online materials, PCs for learning and E-Portfolios.

Centres that have approval in their own right do not have the resources to be able to release staff to be assessors and/or internal verifiers; this has resulted in centres outsourcing assessors and internal verifiers from other training providers. This limits candidate access to assessment and support/guidance for learning.

There are currently an increased number of pathways available; the Unit selected is generic across all pathways and group awards.

Unit Specification or Standards and Guidance

There have been no changes made to the Unit Specification and guidance between 2011 and 2014.

Assessment

The assessment evidence in 2014 was of a higher standard. This is due to the centres and assessors being more aware of the evidence required to meet the standards. Answers to Knowledge and Understanding are more detailed; observations are focused on the task to be completed. This is due to the development of pathways that are related to specific industries and job roles. Candidates are able to provide additional supporting company documents in their evidence. Companies are more aware of the benefits of the awards as a mechanism to train and develop their staff. Evidence has moved away from the ticking of boxes to confirm competence.

Conclusions

The panels looked at the specifications, assessments and evidence of a selection of National Qualifications and Higher National Units and compared 2014 with a previous year. Standards were judged to be comparable in all but two National Courses.

The overall assessment demand of Higher Art and Design in 2014 was felt to be less than in 2006. This was felt to be a result of the unrealistic demands created by Higher Still, which were still in effect in 2006. Despite a reduction in the volume of assessment in 2014, with the removal of the practical assignment, reduced question paper and less material required for a folio of coursework, it was felt that the 2014 assessment remains highly demanding. A higher number of candidates passed Higher Art and Design in 2014 than in 2006. This can be explained by the wide range of support provided by SQA to help centres understand standards.

In Advanced Higher Graphic Communication, the overall level of demand of the 2014 assessment was felt to be less than in 2009. This was despite changes to the question paper which may have initially been seen to make it more demanding. The grade boundaries in 2014 were therefore higher to reflect this. The pass rate between 2009 and 2014 increased, and this can be explained by centres' familiarity of the course content and assessment, and the wide range of support made available by SQA.

Standards between 2014 and the comparison year were considered to be similar in most of the Higher National Units looked at. All panels commented on the increase in the use of technology in the delivery of HN programmes to enhance learning.

In Business it was noted that judgements made on candidate evidence seemed to be more consistent than previously, due to development of clearer assessment exemplification. The Unit Information and Communication Technology in Business was felt to be slightly less demanding than in 2008. This was a result of the condition of the assessment changing from restricted open book to open book, and the removal of an oral presentation.

In Accounting, the Cost Accounting Unit was considered less demanding in 2014, than in 2007, and the coverage has been reduced. It was noted that the removal of threshold scores and the introduction of error tolerances has led to an improvement in the assessment of candidate competence and a more thorough assessment process.

Although Unit standards have not changed, the quality of assessment evidence for the SVQ Unit looked at was considered to be of a higher standard in 2014 than in 2011, and this was felt to be directly related to centres and assessors having a greater understanding of standards.

SQA's response

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

Advanced Higher Graphic Communication: 2014 – 2009	
Conclusion	Action
It was judged that the overall demand of Advanced Higher Graphic Communication was different in 2014 compared with 2009.	The demand of the assessment did change as a result of changes to drawing questions. However, this was compensated for by the change to grade boundaries as stated in the report.
Higher Art and Design: 2014 – 2006	
Conclusion	Action
It was judged that the overall demand of Higher Art and Design was less in 2014 than in 2006.	The Course was reviewed after 2006 in response to what was considered to be an unrealistic volume of assessment. In addition, a great deal of work was done by SQA to exemplify standards via publications, exhibitions and understanding standards events — all of this would have contributed to the success of the revised assessment. The report makes the point that although volume of assessment is reduced, candidate responses have in fact improved over time rather than diminished.
Higher Geography: 2014 – 2009	
Conclusion	Action
It was judged that the overall demand of Higher Geography between 2009 and 2014 was the same.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
Intermediate 2 English: 2014 – 2011	
Conclusion	Action
It was judged that the overall demand of Intermediate 2 English between 2011 and 2014 was the same.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
Intermediate 2 Mathematics: 2014 – 2010	
Conclusion	Action
It was judged that the overall demand of Intermediate 2 Mathematics, between 2010 and 2014 was the same.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.

Business: 2014 – 2008	
Conclusion	Action
<i>Economic Issues: An Introduction</i>	
It was judged that the assessment demand between 2014 and 2008 was the same.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
<i>Managing People and Organisations</i>	
It was judged that the assessment demand in 2014 was slightly higher than in 2008.	The objective of the Unit review in 2010 was to ensure delivery of the Unit would enable candidates to gain the appropriate skills and knowledge which can then be further developed through the use of higher-order skills — analysis and evaluation. As such we are comfortable with the findings.
<i>Economics 1: Micro and Macro Theory and Application</i>	
It was judged that the assessment demand between 2014 and 2008 was the same.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
Administration and Information Technology: 2014 – 2008	
Conclusion	Action
<i>Information and Communication Technology</i>	
It was judged that the assessment in 2014 was slightly less demanding than in 2008.	The objective of the Unit review in 2010 was to focus on the key skills and knowledge required for the Unit: develop ICT skills within a business context. Therefore, presentation skills do not need to be assessed within the context of the Unit. Within the wider context of the HN Group Award (Admin and IT) presentation skills are developed and assessed.
Accounting: 2014 – 2007	
Conclusion	Action
<i>Preparing Final Accounts</i>	
It was judged that the assessment demand between 2014 and 2007 was the same.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
<i>Recording Financial Information</i>	
It was judged that the assessment demand between 2014 and 2007 was the same.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
<i>Cost Accounting</i>	

It was judged that the assessment in 2014 was less demanding than in 2007.	A key driver for the review of the HN Group Award in Accounting was to reduce the volume of assessment and this was actioned across all of the mandatory Units. The assessment standards define all the critical aspects of Cost Accounting that are required in both the computational and theory aspects of the Unit. The new Unit requires a higher level of first time accuracy from candidates which offsets any reduction in content.
<i>Management Accounting Using Information Technology</i>	
It was judged that the assessment demand between 2014 and 2007 was the same.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.
Food and Drink Operations: 2014 – 2011	
Conclusion	Action
<i>Maintain Workplace Food Safety Standards in Manufacture</i>	
Unit standards have not changed between 2011 and 2014.	No action necessary as standards remained constant.