



# **Monitoring Standards over Time Report 2016:**

## **National Qualifications, Higher National Units and Scottish Vocational Qualifications in 2016 compared with previous years**

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# CONTENTS

<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
The 2016 programme	1
Methodology	2
<b>2 Findings: National Qualifications</b>	<b>4</b>
Materials provided for National Qualifications	4
Compiling the report	4
Advanced Higher English 2016 compared to Advanced Higher English 2011	5
Advanced Higher Mathematics 2016 compared to Advanced Higher Mathematics 2012	10
Higher Business Management 2016 compared to Higher Business Management 2012	14
Higher Computing Science 2016 compared to Higher Computing 2012	18
Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies 2016 compared to Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies 2012	22
National 5 Geography 2016 compared to Intermediate 2 Geography 2013	26
<b>3 Findings: Higher National Units</b>	<b>31</b>
Materials reviewed	31
Compiling the report	31
Unit: Beauty Therapy: Management and Practices of Body Therapies (DN6X 34) 2016 compared to Beauty Therapy: Management and Practices of Body Therapies (DN6X 34) 2011	32
Unit: Beauty Therapy: Graded Unit 1 (F3SA 34) 2016 compared to Beauty Therapy: Graded Unit 1 (F3SA 34) 2014	35
Unit: IT in Business: Spreadsheets (F84V 34) 2016 compared to IT in Business: Spreadsheets (F84V 34) 2012	38
Unit: Research Skills (F60A 34) 2016 compared to Research Skills (F60A 34) 2012	41
<b>4 Findings: Scottish Vocational Qualifications</b>	<b>44</b>
Materials reviewed	44
Compiling the report	44
SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GK6X 22) 2016 compared to SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GA3V 22) 2011	45
<b>5 Summary of findings</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>6 SQA's response</b>	<b>50</b>
National Qualifications	50
Higher National Units	53
Scottish Vocational Qualifications	54



# 1 Introduction

As part of its monitoring standards programme, SQA reviews a range of qualifications each year to check that standards are maintained over time. For National Qualifications (NQs) this complements the Awarding Meeting procedures which ensure year-to-year comparability of grade boundaries for course assessments, and for Higher National Qualifications (HNs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) it complements the work carried out by Verifiers year on year.

The reviews play an important role in ensuring that SQA continues to offer qualifications of a consistently high standard and help inform future developments in qualification specification and assessment.

The reviews:

- ◆ compare the assessment demands made on students
- ◆ compare the levels of performance required to achieve a particular grade/pass
- ◆ consider how these are related taking into account a range of available information (eg educational context, known student characteristics, results, etc)

## The 2016 programme

This review compares evidence collected during the academic year 2015–16 with evidence archived from a previous year. The reviews were carried out in January–February 2017.

This report brings together the findings of the comparisons over time conducted for the following qualifications.

### National Qualifications

Advanced Higher English	2016 and 2011
Advanced Higher Mathematics	2016 and 2012
Higher Business Management	2016 and 2012
Higher Computing Science Higher Computing	2016 and 2012
Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies	2016 and 2012
National 5 Geography and Intermediate 2 Geography	2016 and 2013

### Higher National Units

<b>Beauty Therapy</b>	
Beauty Therapy: Graded Unit 1 (F3SA 34)	2016 and 2014

Beauty Therapy: Management and Practices of Body Therapies (DN6X 34)	2016 and 2011
<b>Business</b>	
Research Skills (F60A 34)	2016 and 2012
IT in Business: Spreadsheets (F84V 34)	2016 and 2012

### Scottish Vocational Qualifications

SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GK6X 22) and SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GA3V 22)	2016 and 2011
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## Methodology

The purpose of a standards review is to establish whether our qualifications have remained comparable over time. For SQA, this means that a course, unit or group award 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.

This is done by collating and analysing the views of a number of qualification specialists (normally three) who have reviewed the specifications and associated assessment instruments and samples of candidate work across the comparator years.

The reviewers are given access to a set of materials for the relevant qualification for the two comparator years from SQA's archive. This includes details of what the qualification was designed to assess, how it was assessed and examples of candidates' performances.

Reviewers provide feedback by completing a standard questionnaire for the qualification type, detailing the reasons for their responses and giving an overall judgement. The questionnaires comprise a series of questions under the following headings:

National Qualifications	Higher National Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualifications
Educational context	Educational context
Course and assessment specification	Unit specifications/standards and guidance
Course assessment	Assessment practice
Marking and grading	Quality of evidence
Scripts	Judgement of evidence
Overall judgement	Overall judgement

The reviewers review the level of demand of a qualification in two years by comparing:

- ◆ the demands set by arrangements and/or course specification/group award specification
- ◆ the demands set by assessment specifications
- ◆ the demands set by the assessments based on the above

The work is carried out by each reviewer independently. The completed questionnaires containing the judgements and comments from the reviewers have been summarised in the following sections of the report.

The findings are presented in the following sections:

- ◆ National Qualifications
- ◆ Higher National Units
- ◆ Scottish Vocational Qualifications

# 2 Findings: National Qualifications

## Materials provided for National Qualifications

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

- ◆ course arrangements/course specification documents (which describe the skills, knowledge and understanding, and grade related criteria, and specify the assessment)
- ◆ SQA course assessment instruments and marking instructions
- ◆ 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)

## Compiling the report

The completed questionnaires have been summarised for each subject. Normally there are three reviewers, but occasionally there are only two. Where different views were expressed, these have been reported.

It should be appreciated that the task is a difficult one and there are often fine judgements being made, so it should not be surprising that different individuals interpret the evidence in slightly different ways or focus on different aspects of the qualification.

For National Qualifications standard tables and commentary have been included for each subject:

- ◆ entries and attainment
- ◆ entries and attainment by gender
- ◆ grade boundaries

This is part of the statistical information provided to reviewers to assist them in making comparisons.



# Advanced Higher English 2016 compared to Advanced Higher English 2011

## Educational context

Session 2015–16 was the first year of the Advanced Higher English course introduced to support Curriculum for Excellence. Candidates in 2011 followed Standard Grade/Intermediate/Higher (Higher Still)/Advanced Higher courses, while the 2016 candidates followed Curriculum for Excellence National 5/Higher/Advanced Higher courses.

## Entries and attainment

Year	Entries	A	A–B	A–C	A–D	No Award
2016	2,303	26.3%	53.5%	82.1%	91.6%	8.4%
2011	1,861	24.6%	57.8%	85.2%	91.3%	8.7%

Entries:

- ◆ there was a 24% increase in the number of entries between 2011 and 2016
- ◆ in both years, more than twice as many females as males followed the course

Attainment:

- ◆ the grade A pass rate was similar in both years (26% and 25%)
- ◆ the A–C rate was 3% lower in 2016 (82% and 85%)

Breakdown of entries and attainment by gender:

Year	% Entries		% Grade A		% Grade A–C	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2016	26.6	73.4	26.4	26.2	79.0	83.2
2011	29.8	70.2	27.9	23.2	86.1	84.8

## Course specification

The **2011** course had three units:

### Mandatory units

D9GT 13	English: Specialist Study
D8VJ 13	English: Literary Study

### Optional unit – one from

D8VH 13	English: Language Study
D9GV 13	English: Textual Analysis
D9GX 13	English: Reading the Media
D9GW 13	English: Creative Writing

The **2016** course had two units:

### Mandatory units

H7Y1 77	English: Analysis and Evaluation of Literary Texts (Advanced Higher)
H23T 77	English: Creation and Production (Advanced Higher)

## Assessment specification

2011	2016
<i>To gain an award the candidate was required to pass:</i>	
Three internally-assessed units and the course assessment	Three internally-assessed units and the course assessment
<b>Course assessment components</b> ( <i>components are numbered as in assessment specifications documents</i> )	
<b>2. English: Literary Study – question paper</b>	<b>1. Question paper: Literary Study</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 30 marks</li> <li>◆ mandatory</li> <li>◆ 1 hour 30 minutes</li> <li>◆ set text</li> <li>◆ single specific question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 20 marks</li> <li>◆ mandatory</li> <li>◆ 1 hour 30 minutes</li> <li>◆ open choice</li> <li>◆ seven possible general questions for each genre</li> <li>◆ use of recognisable command words</li> </ul>
–	<b>2. Question Paper: Textual Analysis</b>

2011	2016
<i>see Options component</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 30 marks</li> <li>◆ analyse one extract from choice of four genres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 20 marks</li> <li>◆ mandatory</li> <li>◆ 1 hour 30 minutes</li> <li>◆ analyse one extract from choice of four genres</li> </ul>
–	<b>3. Portfolio – Writing</b>
<i>see Options component</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 30 marks</li> <li>◆ two genres from choice of four</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 30 marks</li> <li>◆ mandatory</li> <li>◆ two genres from choice of seven</li> </ul>
<b>1. English: Specialist Study - Dissertation</b>	<b>4. Project Dissertation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 40 marks</li> <li>◆ mandatory</li> <li>◆ 3,500 to 4,500 words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 30 marks</li> <li>◆ mandatory</li> <li>◆ 2,500 to 3,000 words</li> </ul>
<b>3. Options component</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 30 marks</li> </ul> <p>one from 4 options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ English: Language Study – Question paper</li> <li>◆ English: Textual Analysis – Question paper</li> <li>◆ English: Reading the Media – Question paper</li> <li>◆ English: Creative Writing – a folio comprising two pieces of creative writing in different genres</li> </ul>	–

In some regards, the 2016 course was regarded as slightly more demanding than in 2011. This was, however, balanced by other factors.

Aspects contributing to increasing demand in 2016:

- ◆ the removal of the optionality of the third component
- ◆ the increase in the number of components assessed from three to four
- ◆ making the writing portfolio compulsory, leading to increasing focus on application of knowledge and skills
- ◆ making the textual analysis compulsory, leading to an increased focus on understanding, analysis, and evaluation skills

Aspects mitigating against increasing demand in 2016:

- ◆ the increased choices of genres in the writing portfolio
- ◆ the increased range of options in the 2016 literary study; there were no set texts/authors as in 2011
- ◆ better clarity of purpose in, for example, the literary study paper through the use of command words

Overall the course arrangements/course specification and course assessment specifications were judged to be no more demanding in 2016 by two reviewers and more demanding by one reviewer.

## Course assessment

Overall, two reviewers judged the course assessment in 2016 to be more demanding than 2011. This was ascribed to:

- ◆ the increase in the number of compulsory element to four
- ◆ the more open questions in the question papers, which required candidates to focus on more abstract concepts in general than the previous focus on literary techniques and themes

One reviewer judged 2016 as no more demanding, reasoning that the increase in demand in the number of components was balanced by changes to the dissertation and writing folio.

## Marking and grading

Grade boundaries:

Year	Max Mark	GRADE BOUNDARIES				
		Upper A	A Mark	B Mark	C Mark	D Mark
2016	100	79	66	57	48	43
2011	100	78	65	56	48	44

## Scripts

Ten pairs of scripts were reviewed at each of Grade A and Grade C. Two assessors judged both years similar in quality, while one judged the 2011 scripts to be, on balance, of better quality. One assessor commented on consistency in the application of the standard over the two years.

## Overall judgement

The Advanced Higher English 2016 was judged to be no more demanding in 2016 compared to Advanced Higher English in 2011 by two reviewers. Some aspects of the course were

viewed as more demanding in 2016, such as four mandatory components compared to three and a lack of the optionality that characterised the 2011 course. Despite this, the overall conclusion was that the balance of knowledge, skills, analysis, understanding and evaluation had retained a measure of equivalence between the two years.

The third reviewer judged that 2016 was less demanding than 2011, judging that candidate performance was, in general, poorer in 2016 for similar awards achieved, but acknowledged that this may be the result of the differing balance of assessments.

# Advanced Higher Mathematics 2016 compared to Advanced Higher Mathematics 2012

## Educational context

Session 2015–16 was the first year of the Advanced Higher Mathematics course introduced to support Curriculum for Excellence. Candidates in 2012 followed Standard Grade/Intermediate/Higher (Higher Still)/Advanced Higher courses, while the 2016 candidates followed Curriculum for Excellence National 5/Higher/Advanced Higher courses.

## Entries and attainment

Year	Entries	A	A–B	A–C	A–D	No Award
2016	3,358	41.2%	58.3%	73.8%	80.7%	19.3%
2012	3,239	22.8%	44.2%	68.3%	77.9%	22.1%

Entries:

- ◆ There was a small increase in the number of entries between 2012 and 2016. However, it was noted that entries in 2016 had **decreased** by almost 8% compared to **2015** (down from 3641). (It is possible that a number of candidates had chosen to re-sit at Higher in 2016 following poorer than expected grades in 2015, rather than embarking on the Advanced Higher course.)
- ◆ Entries showed a gender bias towards males and with 62% males and 38% females in 2012 and 64% males and 36% females in 2016.

Attainment:

- ◆ the grade distribution shows a significantly different pattern between the two years
- ◆ A–C awards increased from 68% in 2012 to 74% in 2016
- ◆ 18% more candidates achieved Grade A in 2016 (41%) compared to 2012 (23%)
- ◆ the pattern of increased attainment is repeated for both males and females
- ◆ grade boundaries were significantly higher in 2016 across all grades

Breakdown of entries and attainment by gender:

Year	% Entries		% Grade A		% Grade A–C	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2016	63.5	36.5	39.8	43.7	71.4	78.0
2012	62.5	37.5	22.2	23.7	65.2	73.5

## Support

Reference was made to pressures on teaching time available for candidates at this level. It was also noted that calculator advances, although not necessarily affecting candidate ability, have led to changes in the way that certain questions are set, or whether they are asked at all.

## Course specification

The **2012** course had three units:

D321 13	Mathematics 1 (Advanced Higher)
D322 13	Mathematics 2 (Advanced Higher)
D323 13	Mathematics 3 (Advanced Higher)

The **2016** course had three units:

H7X2 77	Mathematics: Methods in Algebra and Calculus (Advanced Higher)
H7X1 77	Mathematics: Applications of Algebra and Calculus (Advanced Higher)
H7X3 77	Mathematics: Geometry, Proof and Systems of Equations (Advanced Higher)

Changes in the specification of the course with the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence was not judged as changing demand for candidates. Changes to content at Higher were not considered to have a significant effect on prior knowledge requirements, and the breadth of skills knowledge and understanding was judged to be similar across the two years.

The 2012 arrangements document was viewed as more definitive than the 2016 course specification document — the earlier document defined for both teachers and learners what content was deemed to be A/B level.

## Assessment specification

2012	2016
<i>To gain an award the candidate was required to pass:</i>	
Three internally assessed units and the course assessment	Three internally assessed units and the course assessment
<b>Course assessment components</b>	
<b>1. Question paper</b>	<b>1. Question paper</b>

2012	2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 100 marks</li> <li>◆ 3 hours</li> <li>◆ 16 mandatory questions</li> <li>◆ calculator permitted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 100 marks</li> <li>◆ 3 hours</li> <li>◆ 16 mandatory questions</li> <li>◆ calculator permitted</li> <li>◆ formulae list provided</li> </ul>

Overall the course arrangements/course specifications and assessment specifications were judged as no more demanding by two reviewers and (slightly) less demanding by the third.

## Course assessment

Overall the course assessment was judged as less demanding in 2016 compared to 2012 by all three reviewers.

While the complexity of extended questions was considered to be of a similar level, the following factors were judged to reduce demand for 2016 compared to 2012:

- ◆ the number of Grade C questions was judged to be greater in 2016, making the 2016 paper overall more accessible
- ◆ the introduction of the formulae list was perceived as decreasing the demand of the assessment:
  - by reducing candidates' requirements to recall standard results  
(In 2016 there were seven occasions when formula sheet information had to be recognised and applied; in 2012 there were seven occasions when a mark was given for knowledge available on the formula sheet in 2016)
  - by reducing the degree of difficulty with regards to the strategy components of the question paper
  - given that starting the question was significantly eased in 2016, it was likely that follow through marks were available where they would not have been in 2012

The final question of 2016 was judged, in terms of strategy and complexity, the most demanding of all questions over the two papers, but this was balanced by 2012 being generally more demanding than the rest of 2016.

## Marking and grading

Marking instructions were judged to have greater clarity in 2016 compared to 2012, with the likely effect of:

- ◆ improving consistency in marking
- ◆ improved candidate awareness



The general marking instructions in 2016 detailed marking principles at the beginning, clarified points such as positive marking, how to deal with transcription errors, multiple attempts and scored out working, to the likely benefit of candidates.

The increase in grade boundaries in 2016 was judged as indicative of an increased accessibility of the qualification. It was noted that there was less discrimination at the upper end, making a Grade A more accessible.

Grade boundaries:

Year	Max Mark	GRADE BOUNDARIES				
		Upper A	A Mark	B Mark	C Mark	D Mark
2016	100	89	73	63	53	48
2011	100	77	69	57	45	39

## Scripts

Ten pairs of scripts at grades A and C were independently reviewed. None of the assessors judged the quality 2016 scripts as 'better' overall than 2012; they were viewed as either 'poorer' or 'variable' for C grade scripts, while for A grade scripts opinion varied between 'same', 'poorer' and 'variable'.

## Overall judgement

The Advanced Higher Mathematics 2016 was judged to be less demanding compared to Advanced Higher Mathematics in 2012. The factors that were judged to contribute to this were:

- ◆ the 2016 paper was significantly more straightforward than the 2012 paper
- ◆ the introduction of an explicit split between grade C and grade A content
- ◆ the introduction of the formula list
- ◆ the level of processing, elegance and rigour required by a pupil in 2016 was much less than in 2012

The 2016 assessment was judged a fairer assessment of pupils' ability to apply their mathematical knowledge without the requirement of remembering a significant quantity of standard results.

The changes to the structure of the marking scheme was judged to improve fairness and consistency across every candidate.

# Higher Business Management 2016 compared to Higher Business Management 2012

## Educational context

Session 2015–16 was the second year of the Higher Business Management course introduced to support Curriculum for Excellence. Candidates in 2012 followed Standard Grade/Intermediate/Higher (Higher Still)/Advanced Higher courses, while the 2016 candidates followed Curriculum for Excellence National 5/Higher/Advanced Higher courses.

## Entries and attainment

Year	Entries	A	A–B	A–C	A–D	No Award
2016	9,108	28.0%	52.4%	75.4%	83.7%	16.3%
2012	7,067	26.2%	53.8%	77.6%	85.4%	14.6%

Entries:

- ◆ entries increased by 29% between 2012 and 2016
- ◆ the course is more popular with S6 students than with S5, although there has been an increase in the proportion of S5 entries from 38% in 2012 to 43% in 2016
- ◆ more females than males took the course, with a 57% to 43% split in both years

Attainment:

- ◆ the A–C pass rate was 75% in 2016 and 78% in 2012
- ◆ the A pass rate was 28% in 2016 and 26% in 2012

Breakdown of entries and attainment by gender:

Year	% Entries		% Grade A		% Grade A–C	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2016	42.9	57.1	25.0	30.3	72.8	77.3
2012	42.8	57.2	22.0	29.3	76.5	78.4

## Support

The need for candidates to have appropriate levels of skills before being presented for the course was highlighted, as was the need to balance teaching and learning to prepare candidates for the two different assessment components. Continuing professional development to support teachers in delivering this new qualification was provided, for example, through publication of support materials and Understanding Standards events.

## Course specification

The **2012** course had three mandatory units:

DV4G 12	Business Enterprise (Higher)
DV4K 12	Business Decision Areas: Marketing and Operations (Higher)
DV4L 12	Business Decision Areas: Finance and Human Resource Management (Higher)

The **2016** course comprised three units, with optionality in the Understanding Business unit:

H20R 76 OR H6N3 76	Understanding Business (Higher) OR Understanding Business with a Scottish Context (Higher)
H20S 76	Management of People and Finance (Higher)
H20V 76	Management of Marketing and Operations (Higher)

The rationale and aims, specification of prior knowledge and support materials were judged to be of a similar standard in 2012 and 2016.

Some aspects of the new qualification were judged to increase demand in terms of the breadth and depth of skills knowledge and understanding.

- ◆ There are more topics in the 2016 Higher course with topics such as motivation theorists being brought down from AH, while the removal of some topics from National 5 such as channels of distribution, has resulted in more unfamiliar/new content in the 2016 Higher.
- ◆ The expansion of some topic areas — eg motivation theory, financial and non-financial motivation, leadership styles, HR planning — have increased the breadth of knowledge required for the ‘understanding people and finance’ topic.
- ◆ The Marketing topic has also increased in scope (from the 4 Ps to the 7 Ps).
- ◆ The introduction of a coursework component requires the development of research and analytic skills.

## Assessment specification

2012	2016
<i>To gain an award the candidate was required to pass:</i>	
Three internally-assessed units and the course assessment	Three internally-assessed units and the course assessment
Course assessment components	
<b>1. Question paper</b>	<b>1. Question paper</b>
◆ 100 marks	◆ 70 marks

2012	2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 2 hours 30 minutes</li> </ul> <p>Section 1: (50 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ compulsory case study</li> </ul> <p>Section 2: (50 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ choice of 2 from 5 questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 2 hours 15 minutes</li> </ul> <p>Section 1: (30 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ compulsory case study</li> </ul> <p>Section 2: (40 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 4 compulsory 10 mark questions</li> </ul>
–	<b>2. Assignment</b>
–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 30 marks</li> <li>◆ 1 hour 30 minutes (report production stage)</li> <li>◆ researched under some supervision, written up in class under controlled conditions</li> <li>◆ externally marked</li> <li>◆ maximum length 6 x A4 pages + appendices up to 4 x A4 pages</li> </ul>

Overall the course arrangements/course specification and assessment specifications were judged to be more demanding in 2016 by two reviewers and no more demanding by one.

Aspects highlighted as being more demanding in 2016 compared to 2012 included:

- ◆ Greater breadth of skills, knowledge and understanding required with expansion of several topic areas.
- ◆ A greater depth of skill, knowledge and understanding was required.
- ◆ The entire question paper is compulsory, with more topics sampled at greater depth and application.
- ◆ The assignment requires candidates to use research and analytic skills not previously assessed. While this was viewed as increasing demand, it was also viewed as creating a better balanced Higher course.

## Course assessment

Overall, the course assessment in 2016 was judged to be more demanding by two reviewers and no more demanding by one. The 2016 course assessment was viewed in a number of respects as more demanding than that of 2012:

- ◆ The case study contains a greater range of information than in 2012, including graphical, diagrammatic and statistical elements.
- ◆ The requirement to process and analyse the range of information presented has increased the level of demand.

- ◆ The compulsory nature of the four questions in Section 2 of the question paper, combined with the increased course content from which the questions can be sampled, was also considered to increase demand for candidates.

The assignment requires candidates to use research and analytic skills that were not previously assessed. While this was viewed as increasing demand, it was also viewed as creating a better balanced Higher course.

## Marking and grading

On the whole, the level of demand associated with marking and grading decisions was judged to be no more demanding in 2016 compared to 2012.

The 2016 marking instructions were considered more detailed, and consequently more demanding. A lowering of the grade boundary in 2016 was viewed as an exceptional adjustment in response to centres adjusting to teaching and learning requirements of the new course.

Grade boundaries:

Year	Max Mark	GRADE BOUNDARIES				
		Upper A	A Mark	B Mark	C Mark	D Mark
2016	100	80	65	55	45	40
2012	100	87	72	61	51	46

## Scripts

Ten pairs of A grade scripts were reviewed and nine pairs of C grade scripts. All reviewers found the quality of the A grade scripts 'variable', while opinion was divided on the C grade scripts (one 'better', one 'poorer', one 'variable').

## Overall judgement

The Higher Business Management 2016 was judged by two reviewers to be more demanding in 2016 compared to Higher Business Management in 2012, and was judged to be no more demanding by the third reviewer.

# Higher Computing Science 2016 compared to Higher Computing 2012

## Educational context

Session 2015–16 was the second year of the Higher Computing Science course introduced to support Curriculum for Excellence. The course replaced two previous Higher courses: Higher Computing and Higher Information Systems. The Higher Computing Science includes content from the two previous qualifications, new content and content from legacy Advanced Higher courses. The comparison here is between Higher Computing Science (2016) and Higher Computing (2012).

## Entries and attainment

Year	Entries	A	A–B	A–C	A–D	No Award
2016	4,454	20.1%	43.5%	70.8%	82.7%	17.3%
2012	4,028	23.7%	48.4%	71.7%	80.7%	19.3%

Entries:

- ◆ there has been a decline in comparison to the *combined* entries for the previous Highers which stood at 5,236 in 2012
- ◆ there is an increasing proportion of entries from males, with females accounting for just less than 17% of the entries in 2016

Attainment:

- ◆ pass rates were similar in both years for A–C grades (71%), while in 2016, 20% achieved a grade A compared to 24% in 2012
- ◆ the pass rate was higher for females in both years

Breakdown of entries and attainment by gender:

Year	% Entries		% Grade A		% Grade A–C	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2016	83.3	16.7	19.6	22.7	69.7	76.3
2012	77.1	22.9	22.9	26.5	70.6	75.5

## Support

The need for continuing professional development to support teachers in delivering this new qualification was highlighted, in addition to the availability of teachers in the subject area more generally. SQA has provided a range of measures to support the former, for example, Understanding Standards and Key Messages supported by exemplar materials.

## Course specification

The merging of two distinct courses from 2012 (namely Higher Computing and Higher Information Systems) into the Curriculum for Excellence Higher Computing Science, with the range of content previously covered over ten units (including optional units) now covered by only two units (each 1.5 credits), was a major change. (NB the 2012 Higher Information Systems course is not being considered here.)

The **2012** Computing Higher course had two mandatory units and one optional unit.

### Mandatory units

DF2X 12	Computer Systems (Higher)
DF2Y 12	Software Development (Higher)

### Optional units – one selected from

DF31 12	Artificial Intelligence (Higher)
DF30 12	Computer Networking (Higher)
DF32 12	Multimedia Technology (Higher)

The **2016** Computing Higher course had two mandatory units (each worth 1.5 credits).

H223 76	Software Design and Development (Higher)
H226 76	Information System Design and Development (Higher)

## Assessment specification

2012 Computing	2016 Computing Science
To gain an award the candidate was required to pass:	
Three internally-assessed units and the course assessment	Two internally-assessed units and the course assessment
Course assessment components	
1. Question paper	1. Question paper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 140 marks</li> <li>◆ 2 hours 30 minutes</li> </ul> <p>Section 1: (30 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ objective and short answer questions covering the two mandatory units</li> </ul> <p>Section 2: (60 marks)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 90 marks</li> <li>◆ 2 hours</li> </ul> <p>Section 1: (20 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ short answer questions)</li> </ul> <p>Section 2: (70 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ structured responses</li> <li>◆ approximately 50% of the marks are awarded for questions relating to</li> </ul>

2012 Computing	2016 Computing Science
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ extended response questions covering the two mandatory units</li> </ul> <p>Section 3: (50 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ choose one from three sub-sections covering the three optional units</li> </ul>	<p>software design and development and 50% to information system design and development</p>
<b>2. Practical coursework task</b>	<b>2. Assignment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 60 marks</li> <li>◆ internally assessed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 60 marks</li> <li>◆ practical application of knowledge and skills related to the design and development of software and information systems</li> <li>◆ choice of topics</li> <li>◆ carried out under some supervision</li> <li>◆ internally marked using generic marking instructions</li> </ul>

Overall, the course arrangements/course specification and course assessment specifications were judged as more demanding in 2016 for the following reasons:

- ◆ More emphasis on computational thinking, applying knowledge rather than recall and on problem solving has made for greater demand.
- ◆ An increase on the amount of prior knowledge and skills than in 2012 eg prior knowledge in database design, HTML.
- ◆ A greater emphasis on reading and understanding code and more code writing as a percentage of the course than before. In 2016, all pupils had to apply their knowledge of one high-level language (or SQA reference language), CSS, HTML, JavaScript and use of database queries (in coursework tasks).
- ◆ The use of record data structure and object-oriented programming features were also considered to be more demanding.
- ◆ Implementing a program *as well as* either a database or website when completing coursework (2016) was viewed as more challenging than creating a program and writing a research systems report (2012).

## Course assessment

Overall, the course assessment was judged as more demanding in 2016 for the following reasons:

- ◆ greater emphasis on application of knowledge in a problem-solving context (the 2012 paper had greater emphasis on recall of knowledge over a wider range of content)
- ◆ requirement to read and understand code in the question paper



One reviewer also noted that the unit assessment tasks in 2016 were more demanding and time-consuming than the multiple choice unit assessment in 2012.

## Marking and grading

The increase in content has resulted in a much more demanding paper for 2016 candidates, who had to retain knowledge over a greater range of topics to be awarded marks that are more widely distributed than for the 2012 paper.

Grade boundaries:

Year	Max Mark	GRADE BOUNDARIES				
		Upper A	A Mark	B Mark	C Mark	D Mark
2016	150	129 (86%)	107 (71%)	92 (61%)	77 (51%)	69 (46%)
2012	200	160 (80%)	135 (68%)	116 (58%)	98 (49%)	89 (45%)

## Scripts

The differences in content between the two courses made comparison of scripts difficult for the reviewers. A total of ten pairs of scripts were reviewed at Grade A and ten at Grade C. For the grade A scripts, there was a clear consensus that 2016 was on the whole better than 2012, while for grade C two reviewers judged 2016 better and one judged 2012 better.

## Overall judgement

All reviewers found the comparison difficult as a result of the changes to the pre-Curriculum for Excellence qualification, when two Higher courses were merged into one course.

Overall, though, Higher Computing Science 2016 was found to be more demanding in terms of the breadth and depth of skills, knowledge and understanding required than Higher Computing 2012. The greater emphasis on the application of knowledge in context and problem solving was contrasted to a greater emphasis on recall in 2012.

The increased demands of the 2016 question paper were judged to be balanced to some extent by the greater weighting given to the assignment, which tends to be more accessible to all candidates.

# Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies 2016 compared to Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies 2012

## Educational context

Session 2015–16 was the second year of the Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) course introduced to support Curriculum for Excellence. Candidates in 2012 followed Standard Grade/Intermediate/Higher (Higher Still)/Advanced Higher courses while the 2016 candidates followed Curriculum for Excellence National 5/Higher/Advanced Higher courses.

## Entries and attainment

Year	Entries	A	A–B	A–C	A–D	No Award
2016	4,383	22.2%	42.2%	65.5%	76.2%	23.8%
2012	4,053	30.3%	55.0%	77.8%	84.9%	15.1%

Entries:

- ◆ the number of entries in 2016 was 8% higher than in 2012
- ◆ approximately two thirds of entries are S6 candidates and one thirds from S5, with a small shift toward S6 over the period (62% to 65%)
- ◆ more than twice as many females as males take the course

Attainment:

- ◆ there is a significant difference between the pass rates for the two years
- ◆ 66% of candidates achieved grades A–C in 2016 compared to 78% in 2012
- ◆ for A grades, the figures were 22% for 2016 and 30% for 2012

Breakdown of entries and attainment by gender:

Year	% Entries		% Grade A		% Grade A–C	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2016	30.1	69.9	21.2	22.7	60.1	67.9
2012	33.3	66.7	24.8	33.0	72.9	80.2

It was noted that there had been significant changes in the learning and teaching between 2012 and 2016 as a result of the introduction of the new course and assessment. There was a greater emphasis on teaching research, analysis and evaluation skills which reflected the reduction in short answer questions and the increase in essay type questions and the introduction of the extended essay for the coursework component.

## Course specification

The **2012** Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies Course had three mandatory units:

F59E 12	World Religion (Higher)
F59K 12	Morality in the Modern World (Higher)
F59Y 12	Christianity: Belief and Science (Higher)

The **2016** Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies Course had three mandatory units:

H263 76	World Religion (Higher)
H264 76	Morality and Belief (Higher)
H265 76	Religious and Philosophical Questions (Higher)

The rationale, aims, and specification of prior knowledge were judged as similar for both years. However, the 2016 course specifications contain dramatically less mandatory content compared to the 2012 arrangements. In 2012 the arrangements were very specific about what should be taught and assessed, while the 2016 course assessment specification gives much broader headings, with the choice of content being very open to allow personalisation and choice. The lack of specificity was considered to have the effect of increasing the breadth and depth of skill, knowledge and understanding required.

## Assessment specification

2012	2016
<i>To gain an award the candidate was required to pass:</i>	
Three internally-assessed units and the course assessment	Three internally assessed units and the course assessment
Course assessment components	
1. Question paper 1	1. Question paper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 80 marks</li> <li>◆ 1 hour 45 minutes</li> </ul> <p>Section 1: (40 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Morality in the modern world</li> <li>◆ choice of 5 topics</li> <li>◆ 3 multi-part questions on topic studied (16, 10, 14 marks)</li> <li>◆ question parts ranged from 4-10 marks</li> </ul> <p>Section 2: (40 marks)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 60 marks</li> <li>◆ 2 hours 15 minutes</li> </ul> <p>Section 1: (20 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ World religions</li> <li>◆ choice of 6 religions</li> <li>◆ 2 x 10 mark questions on chosen religion</li> </ul> <p>Section 2: (20 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Morality and Belief</li> </ul>

2012	2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Christianity: Belief and science</li> <li>◆ 3 mandatory multi-part questions (10, 12, 18 marks)</li> <li>◆ question parts 3-10 marks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ choice of 5 topics/parts</li> <li>◆ 2 x 10 mark questions from one topic/part</li> </ul> <p>Section 3: (20 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Religious and philosophical questions</li> <li>◆ choice of 4 topics</li> <li>◆ 1 x 20 mark question</li> </ul>
<b>2. Question Paper 2</b>	–
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 40 marks</li> <li>◆ 55 minutes</li> <li>◆ World Religions</li> <li>◆ choice of 6 religions</li> <li>◆ 3 multi-part questions on religion studied (14, 12, 14 marks)</li> <li>◆ questions parts 4-8 marks</li> </ul>	(see Section 1 of QP)
–	<b>2. Assignment</b>
–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 30 marks</li> <li>◆ 1 hour 30 minutes (production of evidence stage)</li> <li>◆ researched and written up in class under supervision then externally marked.</li> </ul>

Overall, the course arrangements/course specification and course assessment specifications were judged as no more demanding by two reviewers and less demanding by one reviewer.

## Course assessment

The course assessment was considered to be more demanding in 2016 compared to 2012 by all three reviewers for the following reasons:

- ◆ In 2012, candidates had more opportunities to gain marks across a range of shorter response questions (questions ranged from 3 to 10 marks).
- ◆ In 2016, the 10 or 20 mark extended responses required made it more difficult for candidates to accumulate marks across a number of questions and generally required a greater degree of application of skills, knowledge and understanding.
- ◆ The compulsory nature of the questions in the 2016 examination.

This was countered by:

- ◆ The new assignment, which offered candidates a very wide choice of topic and freedom to set and answer their own question relating to an issue from within or outwith the course content.
- ◆ Candidates planned, researched, drafted and finalised an essay as part of their coursework, but then had to rewrite it using only a 250-word resource sheet. This could have the effect of making the task more of a memory exercise.

## Marking and grading

Generally, marking was considered to be more demanding in 2016. This was judged as a consequence of the format of the question papers, with 2012 offering candidates the opportunity to achieve marks in, for example, shorter three-mark or four-mark questions. In 2012 marking instructions were more specific than in 2016; more open-ended questions necessarily have more open-ended marking instructions, which in turn require greater interpretation by markers. In 2016 the longer (either 10 or 20 marks) 'essay-type' questions contained no guidance as to the breakdown of skills being assessed. Candidates therefore were required to do much more planning and structuring before answering. This may have resulted in some candidates not accessing the full range of available marks.

Although grade boundaries were lower in 2016, the A–C pass rate was still considerably lower than 2012 at 66% compared to 78%:

Year	Max Mark	GRADE BOUNDARIES				
		Upper A	A Mark	B Mark	C Mark	D Mark
2016	90	72 (80%)	59 (66%)	50 (56%)	41 (46%)	36 (40%)
2012	120	102 (85%)	84 (70%)	72 (60%)	60 (50%)	54 (45%)

## Scripts

(Note: only 6 pairs of scripts at each grade boundary were available for comparison.)

All reviewers found the C grade scripts poorer in 2016 and the A grade scripts the same or better than 2012.

## Overall judgement

Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies 2016 was judged to be more demanding than Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies 2012 by two of the three reviewers. The third reviewer came to the overall conclusion that the demands had remained largely consistent between the two years. All reviewers agreed that the 2016 question paper required a greater depth of knowledge, and that the extended nature of the questions created more challenges for candidates. The introduction of the assignment was judged to create new challenges in teaching in learning.

# National 5 Geography 2016 compared to Intermediate 2 Geography 2013

## Educational context

Session 2015–16 was the third year of the National 5 Geography course introduced to support Curriculum for Excellence. It is compared to Intermediate 2 Geography course in 2012–13 (the final year in which this qualification was offered was 2014–15).

## Entries and attainment

Year	Entries	A	A–B	A–C	A–D	No Award
<b>National 5 2016</b>	11,017	36.4%	60.4%	80.6%	88.4%	11.6%
<b>Intermediate 2 2013</b>	3,565	38.1%	61.5%	80.3%	86.0%	14.0%

Entries:

- ◆ the number of entries for National 5 Geography in 2016 was almost three times that of Intermediate 2 in 2013
- ◆ more males than females took both courses; 54% of entries in 2016 and 58% in 2013

In 2013 there were significantly more pupils following Standard Grade Geography courses than Intermediate 2.

Attainment:

- ◆ the A–C pass rates for the two qualification years were similar at just over 80%
- ◆ for females the A–C pass rate was higher at 83% in 2016 and 84% in 2013
- ◆ the A pass rate was higher in 2013 at 38% compared to 36%
- ◆ significantly more females achieved a Grade A in both years

Breakdown of entries and attainment by gender:

Year	% Entries		% Grade A		% Grade A–C	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>National 5 2016</b>	53.7	46.3	31.8	41.7	78.5	82.9
<b>Intermediate 2 2013</b>	58.2	41.8	34.0	43.8	77.9	83.6

## Support

It was observed that while the content of the two courses had not changed significantly, there had been a change in emphasis in learning and teaching with the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence with greater emphasis on the application of skills, and on analysis and evaluation within the Added Value Unit. Reference was also made to the availability of a

wide range of teaching materials and information about National Standards, for example on SQA's Understanding Standards website and through Understanding Standards events.

Differences in course assessment were also judged to impact on educational practices. The Intermediate 2 course was assessed on the basis on an external examination while the National 5 course was split 75% to the question paper and 25% to an assignment undertaken in controlled conditions within school but marked externally. Preparing pupils for this assignment was considered as directly impacting on classroom practices.

## Course specification

The 2013 Intermediate 2 course had three mandatory units:

DF3C 11	Geography: Physical Environments (Intermediate 2)
DF43 11	Geography: Human Environments (Intermediate 2)
DF44 11	Geography: Environmental Interactions (Intermediate 2)

The 2016 National 5 course had three mandatory units:

H27G 75 OR H6N9 75	Geography: Physical Environments (National 5) OR Geography: Physical Environments with a Scottish Context (National 5)
H27H 75	Geography: Human Environments ((National 5)
H27J 75	Geography: Global Issues (National 5)

Both courses were designed to assess knowledge, skills and understanding in a variety of geographical contexts and provide progression into Higher Geography courses. While some aspects of the specification were judged to be more or less demanding in one or other year, these cancelled each other out across the whole. For example, a perceived greater demand of prior knowledge in 2013 was balanced by an increased depth of knowledge in 2016 for topics such as weather, or the requirement to handle up to three Ordnance Survey maps in 2016 against one in 2013.

## Assessment specification

2013 Intermediate 2 Geography	2016 National 5 Geography
<i>To gain an award the candidate was required to pass:</i>	
Three internally-assessed units and the course assessment	Three internally-assessed units and the course assessment
Course assessment components	
1. Question paper	1. Question paper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 80 marks</li> <li>◆ 2 hours</li> </ul> <p>Section A: (50 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Q1: Physical Environments</li> <li>◆ Q2: Human Environments</li> <li>◆ 2 x 25 mark compulsory questions</li> </ul> <p>Section B: (30 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Environmental Interactions</li> <li>◆ choice of 2 from 5 topics/questions</li> <li>◆ 2 x 15 mark questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 60 marks</li> <li>◆ 1 hours 45 minutes</li> </ul> <p>Section 1: (20 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Physical Environments</li> <li>◆ Q 1 or 2 + 3 compulsory questions</li> </ul> <p>Section 2: (20 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Human Environments</li> <li>◆ Three compulsory questions</li> </ul> <p>Section 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Global Issues (20 marks)</li> <li>◆ choice of 2 out of 6 topics</li> <li>◆ 2 x 10 mark two-part questions</li> </ul>
–	2. Assignment
–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 20 marks</li> <li>◆ 1 hour (production of evidence stage)</li> <li>◆ set by centres within SQA guidelines</li> <li>◆ conducted under a high level of supervision and control</li> <li>◆ externally marked</li> </ul>

Overall, the course arrangements/course specification and course assessment specifications were judged as no more demanding by two reviewers and more demanding by one reviewer.

While the 2016 course was thought to present greater breadth of challenge, the personalisation and choice element of Curriculum for Excellence, particularly on the assignment, was viewed as a potential motivating factor for pupils, so that overall the changes were judged to have little effect on the ability of candidates to meet the demands of the course.



## Course assessment

On the whole, the 2016 course assessment was considered to be no more demanding than 2013, although a few aspects were judged as more demanding in 2016.

- ◆ The inclusion of the weather topic made the 2016 Physical Environments section more demanding than 2013 as interpretation and analysis of synoptic charts is a high-order skill.
- ◆ The interpretation of a cross-section (2016) is a higher-order skill than naming areas from a map in the 2013 Intermediate 2 exam.
- ◆ Some questions were judged as much easier in 2013. An example given was the Environmental Interactions question on the impact of a disaster — both questions are similar, but the 2013 paper asks the candidates to *describe* damage/impact for six marks, whilst the 2016 paper asks the candidates to *explain* the impact/damage. This makes the 2016 paper more demanding in this area.

On the other hand, the new assignment introduced for National 5, while potentially making the course more demanding by increasing the range of skills assessed, was in practice less demanding due to the degree of choice permitted, the support and guidance given by teachers, and the amount of preparation that may be done.

## Marking and grading

It was considered that the 2016 marking instructions were more detailed, and for some types of questions it was more difficult to gain full marks, with candidates expected to write more to get the marks allocated. For example, in the 2016 Global Issues questions, candidates were required to give figures to back up their answer, eg '57 people killed by Mt St Helen's eruption' (1 mark in 2016) as opposed to 'people were killed by the eruption' (1 mark in 2013). The perceived increased demand in marking some aspects of the question paper was, however, judged to be more than offset by high scores on the assignment.

Grade boundaries:

Year	Max Mark	GRADE BOUNDARIES				
		Upper A	A Mark	B Mark	C Mark	D Mark
National 5 2016	80	71 (89%)	59 (74%)	50 (63%)	41 (51%)	36 (45%)
Intermediate 2 2013	80	68 (85%)	56 (70%)	47 (59%)	39 (49%)	35 (44%)

## Scripts

Ten pairs of scripts were reviewed at each grade boundary. On the whole, scripts at the C boundary were judged to be similar for both years. There was less agreement for A boundary scripts although the majority of pairs were rated the same/better for 2016.

## **Overall judgement**

National 5 Geography in 2016 was judged to be no more demanding compared to Intermediate 2 Geography in 2013. The inclusion of a wider range of skills in National 5 was judged to be balanced, for example, by a wider number of topics at Intermediate 2; and more demanding questions and marking instructions for 2016 was balanced by strong performances on the internally completed assignment.

# 3 Findings: Higher National Units

## Materials reviewed

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 material reviewed was available electronically in SQA, and consists of the following materials relating to the academic year of 2015–16 and materials from a prior academic year:

- ◆ unit specifications (which describe the standard)
- ◆ assessment materials (including internal assessment instructions, instruments and marking guidelines)
- ◆ candidates' evidence

## Compiling the report

The completed questionnaires have been summarised for each unit. Normally there are three reviewers, but occasionally there are only two. Where different views were expressed, these have been reported.

It should be appreciated that the task is a difficult one and there are often fine judgements being made, so it should not be surprising that different individuals interpret the evidence in slightly different ways or focus on different aspects of the qualification.

It is worth noting that the range of statistical presented for National Qualifications is not available for Higher National Units.

The following Higher National Units were included in the monitoring standards programme for 2016:

<b>Beauty Therapy</b>	
Unit: Beauty Therapy: Management and Practices of Body Therapies (DN6X 34)	2016 and 2011
Unit: Beauty Therapy: Graded Unit 1 (F3SA 34)	2016 and 2014
<b>IT in Business</b>	
Unit: IT in Business: Spreadsheets (F84V 34)	2016 and 2012
<b>Research Skills</b>	
Unit: Research Skills (F60A 34)	2016 and 2012

# **Unit: Beauty Therapy: Management and Practices of Body Therapies (DN6X 34) 2016 compared to Beauty Therapy: Management and Practices of Body Therapies (DN6X 34) 2011**

## **Educational context**

The comparison being made is between the 2016 and 2011 unit. The structure of the unit remained exactly the same over the comparator years. A number of general changes in the teaching practice for Beauty Therapy were noted by the reviewers:

- ◆ The merger of colleges was noted to have impacted on reducing class contact time, with courses being delivered over two semesters rather than three academic blocks.
- ◆ The reduction in classes from three to two hours was perceived to have a negative impact on teaching and learning.
- ◆ An increased pressure on lecturers to achieve results, and on colleges to fill courses, was possibly reflected in colleges accepting less well qualified candidates.
- ◆ The loss of experienced lecturers was considered to have negative impact, as was the perceived squeeze on college resources.
- ◆ An increased use of online material for teaching, learning, and submitting evidence, which candidates prefer. However, it was noted this can cause issues with plagiarism.

The reviewers indicated a number of changes to the candidate cohort, including:

- ◆ A perception that the general ability of candidates has declined, with many lacking academic qualifications from school and the academic ability to meet the SCQF level 7 and 8 requirements of the HN.
- ◆ All reviewers indicated the candidates were lacking in literacy and communication skills.
- ◆ An increase in the number of college candidates requiring additional support through the college socially, emotionally or financially.
- ◆ A comment that many candidates need additional arrangements for assessments and learning support.
- ◆ An indication that many candidates were withdrawing from, or only partly achieving, the course.

One reviewer noted a particular challenge with increasing competition from other training establishments who are offering short courses in the beauty industry, indicating this is impacting on the number of candidates opting for the college route.

## **Unit specifications/standards and guidance**

Across all centres, the unit specification/standards and guidance were judged by all three reviewers to be less demanding overall in 2016 in comparison to 2011. The reviewers provided the following reasons for this:

- ◆ The unit specification and assessment exemplar was amended by SQA in 2013 to remove specific reference to 'Physical, Physiological and Psychological' and the 'requirements for body analysis and measurements', resulting in the treatment plan and evaluation being weaker.
- ◆ Candidates struggle to display knowledge of anatomy and physiology due to the absence of 'prompts' within the log books.
- ◆ The paperwork used to capture and record tasks has been re-formatted and streamlined, resulting in it being more user-friendly but less demanding.
- ◆ The requirement for body analysis and measurements has been omitted.

## **Assessment practice**

Most aspects of the assessment were judged by the reviewers to be either no different or no more difficult for the candidate in 2016 in comparison to 2011. However, the reviewers indicated three areas of assessment which were less demanding (general approach to assessment; level of demand; layout and presentation) and therefore provided an overall judgement of the assessment as less demanding. The following reasons were provided:

- ◆ Adjustments to the paperwork and the language used in the unit specification were considered to have removed some of the potential barriers to achievement.
- ◆ Additional guidance given within the assessment exemplar acts as prompts for candidates to follow.
- ◆ Whilst the assessment exemplars have reduced unnecessary repetition, some underpinning knowledge has been removed in the new case study documentation.

## **Quality of evidence**

Two reviewers indicated there were no changes to the quality of evidence and judged it the same in both years. The other reviewer indicated the quality of evidence was lower, but made no comments to support this.

## **Judgement of evidence**

Two reviewers indicated that judgement of evidence was similar over both years. The other reviewer indicated the evidence had been judged more leniently in 2016, supported by the following comments:

- ◆ Assessors are marking assessment evidence as passed when candidates have not covered all the unit evidence criteria.
- ◆ There is a lack of constructive feedback provided by assessors.

## **Overall judgement**

Taking into account all aspects of the unit specification, assessment specification, assessment instrument, marking and grading and the quality of the candidate evidence, the unit, Beauty Therapy: Management and Practices of Body Therapies SCQF level 7 (DN6X

34) 2016 was judged by all reviewers to be less demanding in 2016 compared to Beauty Therapy: Management and Practices of Body Therapies SCQF level 7 (DN6X 34) 2011. The following explanations were provided regarding the differences:

- ◆ Overall the work sampled lacked evidence in the technical and product knowledge. For example: information was incorrect; there was very little evidence of anatomy and physiology underpinning knowledge; treatment plans were basic and very repetitive and often did not reflect the aims and objectives; poor evaluation of case studies often descriptive rather than evaluative.
- ◆ Constructive feedback was often limited, perhaps impacting on the candidates' opportunities to enhance their understanding.
- ◆ The omission of 'physical, physiological and psychological' factors has placed less demand on candidates undertaking the unit.
- ◆ The standards sampled for this unit over both years are not strong and demonstrate room for improvement.
- ◆ Changes to format, structure and use of language make completion less time consuming and more user friendly, but there is scope for further improvement.
- ◆ It appears some lecturers did not adhere to assessment marking guidelines and accepted less evidence than the minimum for the unit.

# **Unit: Beauty Therapy: Graded Unit 1 (F3SA 34) 2016 compared to Beauty Therapy: Graded Unit 1 (F3SA 34) 2014**

## **Educational context**

The comparison being made is between the 2016 and 2014 unit. The structure of the unit remained exactly the same over the comparator years. A number of general changes in the teaching practice for Beauty Therapy were noted by the reviewers:

- ◆ The merger of colleges was noted to have impacted on reducing class contact time, with courses being delivered over two semesters rather than three academic blocks.
- ◆ The reduction in classes from three to two hours was perceived to have a negative impact on teaching and learning.
- ◆ An increased pressure on lecturers to achieve results and on colleges to fill courses was possibly reflected in colleges accepting candidates with a lower level of entry qualifications.
- ◆ Loss of experienced lecturers was considered to have a negative impact, as was the perceived squeeze on college resources.
- ◆ There was an increased use of online material for teaching, learning, and for submitting evidence, which candidates prefer. However, this can cause issues with plagiarism.

Whilst the graded unit required limited teaching, with the lecturer acting as a mentor and facilitator to the candidates, it was noted by one reviewer that lecturers may find it difficult to avoid giving specific guidance and assistance during unit delivery.

The reviewers indicated a number of changes to the candidate cohort, including:

- ◆ A perception that the general ability of candidates has declined, with many lacking academic qualifications from school and the academic ability to meet the SCQF level 7 and 8 requirements of the Higher National Group Award.
- ◆ All reviewers indicated the candidates were lacking in literacy and communication skills.
- ◆ One reviewer noted an increase in the number of college candidates requiring additional support through the college socially, emotionally or financially.
- ◆ A comment that many candidates need additional arrangements for assessments and learning support.
- ◆ An indication many candidates were withdrawing from, or only partly achieving, the course.
- ◆ A significant number of candidates were in part-time employment, reducing the time they have available.

One reviewer noted a challenge with increasing competition from other training establishments who are offering short courses in the beauty industry, indicating this is impacting on the number of candidates opting for the college route.

## **Unit specifications/standards and guidance**

Across all centres, all aspects of the unit specification/standards and guidance were judged by all three reviewers to be no different in 2016 in comparison to 2014, and therefore no more demanding on the learner. The following comments reflect this:

- ◆ The unit specification, overall purpose and aims, evidence requirements and the paperwork used to record tasks have remained the same for this unit since 2008.
- ◆ Practically, the candidates are asked to perform exactly the same level and volume of tasks.
- ◆ A new marking scheme introduced to standardise marking across centres has been a positive addition.

## **Assessment practice**

All aspects of the assessment were judged by all reviewers to be no different, and therefore no more demanding on the learner, in 2016 in comparison to 2014.

The additional support materials produced through the Training and Assessment Programme (since 2013) were perceived to be clear and concise, and the new marking criteria was intended to tighten up the marking. However, two reviewers noted the guidance and process did not always appear to have been followed, resulting in instances where poor quality evidence was accepted and minimal standards of assessment.

## **Quality of evidence**

All reviewers indicated the quality of evidence was the same in both years. One reviewer indicated the evidence presented in the sample was not of a high standard and provided various examples to illustrate why this was the case:

- ◆ a lack of underpinning knowledge and technical knowledge in the areas of anatomy and physiology, electrotherapy, product knowledge, and lifestyle
- ◆ candidates continuing to struggle with producing evaluative writing, eg typically repeat the treatment plan and how they employed the treatment, with little or no reflection on the outcome or degree to which aims and objectives were achieved
- ◆ treatment plans were perceived as 'basic' and 'repetitive' and often failed to accurately reflect the aims and objectives

## **Judgement of evidence**

All reviewers indicated the judgement of evidence over both years to be similar.

## **Overall judgement**

Taking into account all aspects of the unit specification, assessment specification, assessment instrument, marking and grading, and the quality of the candidate evidence, the



Beauty Therapy: Graded Unit 1 (F3SA 34) 2016 was judged by all reviewers to be no more demanding compared to Beauty Therapy: Graded Unit 1 (F3SA 34) 2014. The following points were noted:

- ◆ Overall, comparing samples from the two years provided, the standard of candidates' work has remained consistent.
- ◆ The samples displayed poor academic standards of work which could be improved on.
- ◆ The revised marking guidelines and TAP have been a positive addition, encouraging a more concise and standardised approach to grades across centres.
- ◆ There were some examples of good, constructive feedback to candidates, but this was not consistent across all centres.
- ◆ More emphasis on preparing candidates with the units 'Management and Practices of Face', and 'Body Therapies' could assist candidates in the graded unit submission.
- ◆ The new marking guidelines are not always being used, with examples noted in both years of marks often higher than they should have been for the quality of evidence, and examples of work awarded additional marks with lack of evidence to support this.
- ◆ There were issues highlighted with limited examples of evaluative writing, and repetitive information being copied and pasted across sections.
- ◆ The practical element appears to be meeting the demand of the unit.

# Unit: IT in Business: Spreadsheets (F84V 34) 2016 compared to IT in Business: Spreadsheets (F84V 34) 2012

## Educational context

The comparison being made is between the 2016 and 2012 unit. The structure of the unit remained exactly the same over the comparator years. A number of general changes impacting on the teaching and assessment practice for this unit were noted by the reviewers, including:

- ◆ the increasing role of technology between 2012 and 2016 in the teaching, learning, presentation of evidence and assessment of this unit
- ◆ the tendency of candidate evidence to be submitted electronically rather than on paper
- ◆ a wider variety of electronic resources, available through college virtual learning environments for a more interactive learning experience (eg smartboards)
- ◆ the impact of changes in the college sector with regionalisation, merging of centres, and the loss of experienced staff is resulting in increased pressure on college staff delivering and assessing courses

The reviewers also referred to a number of changes in the workplace over the period including:

- ◆ There is an expectation from employers that college leavers will display a high level of competence in IT applications, particularly in the use of spreadsheets as one of the most widely used tools in business.
- ◆ There is a wider use of data analytics and cloud storage which have been customised to meet business needs.
- ◆ Employment opportunities have improved since the 2008 downturn, but this is increasingly fragmented, providing little job security.
- ◆ The development and use of remote access to systems and social media has resulted in an increase requirement for employee flexibility.
- ◆ Organisations are facing increasing pressures on costs.

All reviewers reported on some changes in the profile of candidates, in particular:

- ◆ a reduction in part-time, mature and international candidates
- ◆ an increase in school leavers  
candidates appear more familiar with ICT since 2012, particularly as a means of communication, and in the use of smart phones and social media

The noted increased awareness in ICT was perceived to have impacted negatively on some general skills, such as the use of software applications, numeracy, and communication and keyboarding. Candidates were perceived to have lower concentration levels and poor listening skills, and the number of candidates requiring additional support needs has increased.

Additionally, two reviewers noted there had been no change to the approaches to assessment and evidence over both years sampled, despite the nature of this unit and the perceived increased use of ICT more widely. In general, centres chose to use SQA Assessment Support Packs rather than centre-devised alternative assessment approaches that would expose candidates to more innovative ICT approaches rather than, for example, using screen captures and printing out work, which could be regarded as outdated.

## **Unit specifications/standards and guidance**

Across all centres, all aspects of the unit specification/standards and guidance were judged by all three reviewers to be no different in 2016 in comparison to 2012, and therefore no more demanding on the learner. The same unit specification remained in place for 2012 and 2016.

Reviewers judged this to be a challenging unit, in particular the statistical outcome, which was difficult to achieve. The unit specification was therefore revised in 2016 to address this, and the revised unit was made available during 2017.

## **Assessment practice**

All aspects of the assessment were judged to be no different, and were therefore judged overall to be no more demanding on the learner in 2016 in comparison to 2012. All reviewers provided additional comments in relation to the assessment support packs used in centres in both years, which they deemed equally demanding.

In addition, it was noted the suggested format for candidate evidence in the assessment support packs has encouraged centres to continue to ask for screen captures and print out the candidate evidence, rather than submitting electronic files which could then be marked without the need for printing. By 2016, the use of screen-captures and printing work was perceived to look old fashioned and dated for a computer application unit (a new unit that resolves these issues is now in place).

## **Quality of evidence**

All reviewers judged the quality of evidence to be the same in both years.

## **Judgement of evidence**

All reviewers said the judgement of evidence was similar over both years. One reviewer indicated there was genuinely no difference between any of the candidate submissions made by the different centres over the two years.

## Overall judgement

Taking into account all aspects of the unit specification, assessment specification, assessment instrument, marking and grading, and the quality of the candidate evidence, the unit, IT in Business: Spreadsheets (F84V 34) in 2016 was judged by the reviewers to be no more demanding than the same unit in 2012. The following explanations were provided:

- ◆ There were no differences in the unit specification over the two comparative years.
- ◆ The different assessments used were equally demanding, with no discernible difference in difficulty or in the evidence that candidates were expected to produce.
- ◆ The work was correctly judged in 2012 and again in 2016, and both sets would have been accepted in either of the years.
- ◆ There was a high degree of consistency between different centres across the two years in terms of how they assessed and judged the candidate evidence.
- ◆ Much of the evidence could only be assessed as right or wrong, and there are few situations where the evidence could be questioned over acceptability due to a variation in the quality of the response.
- ◆ The revised unit produced as part of the HN Review was viewed as a positive development.

# Unit: Research Skills (F60A 34) 2016 compared to Research Skills (F60A 34) 2012

## Educational context

The comparison is being made between the 2016 and 2012 unit. The structure of the unit remained exactly the same over the comparator years. This unit was selected for formal integration with the investigative project unit F8LE 35, Business: Graded Unit 2 in the 2013 HN Enhancements Project. The reviewers indicated this was an important change as the subsequent creation of a bespoke SQA assessment support pack provided centres with a clearer indication of the evidence requirements and how the two units linked together, potentially improving candidate evidence. However, the unit is also offered in many other courses, so improvements in its delivery and assessment as a result of the Enhancements Project would be fairly limited. Other changes in teaching practice noted included:

- ◆ the increasing role of technology between 2012 and 2016 in the teaching, learning, presentation of evidence and assessment of this unit
- ◆ the tendency for candidate evidence to be submitted electronically rather than on paper
- ◆ a wider variety of electronic resources, available through college virtual learning environments for a more interactive learning experience (eg smartboards)
- ◆ the impact of changes in the college sector with regionalisation, merging of centres, and the loss of experienced staff, resulting in increased pressure on college staff delivering and assessing courses
- ◆ the trend towards progressing to university, placing an increasing emphasis on referencing, with centres more likely to use plagiarism detection software such as 'Turnitin'

The reviewers referred to a number of changes in the workplace over the period including:

- ◆ the increasing importance of skills including information handling, collaboration and data analytics
- ◆ an improvement in employment opportunities since the 2008 downturn, though this is increasingly fragmented, providing little job security
- ◆ a trend towards self-employment with a greater emphasis on enterprise
- ◆ the development and use of remote access to systems and social media, resulting in increased requirements for employee flexibility
- ◆ public and private sector are facing increasing pressures on costs

Two of the reviewers reported no major changes in the profile of candidates, whilst the third reviewer noted the following changes:

- ◆ a reduction in part-time, mature and international candidates
- ◆ an increase in school leavers
- ◆ the declining standards in numeracy and literacy of candidates
- ◆ the widely reported evidence of the increasing time spent by young people in front of screens and the adverse impact of this on communication skills and retaining information

The increased awareness in ICT was noted to have impacted negatively on some general skills such as the use of software applications, numeracy, and communication and keyboarding. Candidates were perceived to have lower concentration levels and poor listening skills and the number of candidates requiring additional support needs has increased. One reviewer indicated that the changes within centres such as the mergers and loss of experienced staff, may have impacted on candidate performance. That said, two reviewers noted there is no evidence to support whether or in what way the changes have directly impacted on candidates.

## **Unit specifications/standards and guidance**

Across all centres, all aspects of the unit specification/standards and guidance were judged by all three reviewers to be no different in 2016 in comparison to 2012 therefore no more demanding for the learner. The same unit specification remained in place in 2012 and 2016. Further support materials developed in 2016 included guidance on integration with other units, the collection of evidence and opportunities for developing Core Skills. This did not add to the level of demand, rather, it provided more of a context for the candidate evidence and clarity in meeting the required standards.

## **Assessment practice**

All aspects of the assessment were judged to be no different, and therefore no more demanding for the learner, in 2016 in comparison to 2012. The reviewers provided the following explanations:

- ◆ Assessments used in both years were of a similar standard and there was no significant difference in coverage of the standards.
- ◆ The use of templates was more common in 2012, which made the assessment slightly less demanding for candidates to complete.
- ◆ Although there is no assessment support pack (ASP) for the unit, the instructions provided in the unit specification were noted to be very clear about evidence requirements and were the same in 2016 and 2012.
- ◆ The SQA integrated assessment support pack which combines Research Skills with Business: Graded Unit 2 could make it easier for staff assessing both units than in 2012. However, there is no evidence to confirm any direct impact on candidate performance.

## **Unit specifications/standards and guidance**

All reviewers judged the quality of evidence to be higher in 2016 than in 2012.

## **Judgement of evidence**

All reviewers judged the judgement of evidence to be similar over both years.

## Overall judgement

Taking into account all aspects of the unit specification, assessment specification, assessment instrument, marking and grading, and the quality of the candidate evidence, the unit, Research Skills (F60A 34) was judged by two reviewers to be no more demanding in 2016 than in 2012. The remaining reviewer judged the unit overall as more demanding. The following explanations were provided:

- ◆ No significant differences were found in the comparison of unit specification and judgement of evidence.
- ◆ Although the assessment exemplar in 2016 is of the same standard as 2012 in terms of outcomes and evidence requirements, it provided more detailed guidance than before on integration with the Business: Graded Unit 2.
- ◆ In 2012, where research skills were integrated with the project Graded Unit in HND Accounting, this did not provide realistic opportunities for candidates to provide relevant evidence. This may have been improved as a result of instruction from the SQA integrated assessment support pack.
- ◆ Evidence in 2016 appeared to be of slightly better quality where the research skills were assessed on a standalone basis.
- ◆ In 2016 the research plan was more detailed, and more use was made of a standard referencing system.
- ◆ The overall presentation of the final reports was of a higher standard in 2016.
- ◆ Whilst the quality of work was generally slightly improved in 2016, there is insufficient evidence to conclude either that assessment demands or the interpretation of the required standards have changed.

# 4 Findings: Scottish Vocational Qualifications

## Materials reviewed

Relevant centres are asked to submit all evidence for a small number of candidates achieving the specified qualification. The material reviewed was available electronically in SQA and consists of the following materials relating to the academic year of 2015–16 and materials from 2010–11.

- ◆ qualification structure
- ◆ candidates' evidence (including witness testimonials, work records, questioning, observations, etc; evidence of assessor feedback; indexing of evidence to the standards)

## Compiling the report

The completed questionnaires from the three reviewers have been summarised. Where different views were expressed, these have been reported.

It should be appreciated that the task is a difficult one and there are often fine judgements being made, so it should not be surprising that different individuals interpret the evidence in slightly different ways or focus on different aspects of the qualification.

It is worth noting that the range of statistical information presented for National Qualifications is not available for Scottish Vocational Qualifications

The following Scottish Vocational Qualifications were included in the monitoring standards programme for 2016:

<b>Business and Administration</b>	
SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GK6X 22)	2016
SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GA3V 22)	2011



# **SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GK6X 22) 2016 compared to SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GA3V 22) 2011**

## **Educational context**

The comparison being made is between the 2016 and 2011 qualification. Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are work-based qualifications where competence is assessed through evidence collected by the candidate in the workplace and is supported by assessment planning. The training of the candidate is usually carried out in the workplace by the candidate's employer.

There is much wider use of ICT in the workplace in 2016 than in 2011. Typical offices have faster and more sophisticated computer equipment; most organisations are embracing social media and instant messaging/e-mail in place of the traditional letter posted out from the mail room; and they provide digital content that can be e-mailed or published online rather than being printed off, bound and posted. Organisations are also increasingly using web tools and apps to provide a more efficient service to their customers. These are used on hand-held devices, phones and tablets in addition to the more traditional web tools found on computers. Printers and other office equipment is becoming ever more sophisticated, with many pieces of equipment multi-functional, but the trend in organisations is to reduce the numbers of these devices and to encourage information to be shared digitally.

In the past, candidates had to spend time learning how to use computer application packages; now it is the norm for candidates to be fully conversant with these packages and other technology. Candidates are leaving school with a wider understanding of the workplace and of the various types of office equipment and software used. They tend to have more variety within the jobs they carry out than their 2011 counterparts — this is reflected in the choice of units and the evidence produced in 2016.

It is worth noting there has been an increase in the use of e-portfolios. Whilst some changes have been made to the standards to clarify performance and knowledge criteria and to provide more scope for different types of evidence, this has not changed the level of demand on the qualification or influenced the ability of candidates over the two years sampled.

## **Unit specifications/standards and guidance**

Across all centres, all aspects of the unit specification/standards and guidance were judged by all three reviewers to be no different in 2016 in comparison to 2011, and therefore no more demanding on the learner. The reviewers provided the following explanations:

- ◆ The unit specifications/standards are similar between the two years.
- ◆ The number of units making up the award remains the same.
- ◆ The balance of mandatory and optional units remains the same.
- ◆ Changes made to the standards have clarified context and evidence requirements.

- ◆ Changes made to the 2016 qualification structure limits IT and Accounts units to a maximum of two, amalgamates two Customer Service units, and ensures at least two of the optional units selected are administration units.
- ◆ SQA's Understanding Standards website provides examples of observation reports, professional discussion, witness testimony and product evidence. Centres have indicated these are useful, especially for new assessors who are making better use of evidence through annotation, cross-referencing and holistic assessment.

## Assessment practice

All aspects of the assessment were judged by the reviewers to be no different, and therefore no more demanding on the learner in 2016 in comparison to 2011.

Further comments were provided by all reviewers about assessors adopting a more holistic approach to assessment, which is regarded as a positive development and best practice. Various other comments were provided by the reviewers:

- ◆ Differences in the standards and the assessment in 2016 have not affected the demands of the overall assessment.
- ◆ Additional information regarding the unit specification was useful to candidates.
- ◆ The examples presented in 2016 more closely follow best practice exemplified during Quality Network Meetings and guidance provided to centres by external verifiers.

The reviewers indicated the following areas for improvement:

- ◆ It was disappointing to see from the sample how many resorted to the use of direct questions with written responses as opposed to adopting best practice of incorporating such knowledge questions into observations, professional discussions and relying on performance evidence.
- ◆ There was some confusion in some centres around the wording in unit S205 where performance criteria 11–15 are about communicating in writing rather than communicating verbally.
- ◆ One of the portfolios provided in the sample was for an SVQ level 3 therefore it was outwith the scope for direct comparison.

## Quality of evidence

One reviewer indicated there were no changes to the quality of evidence in both years. The other two reviewers indicated the quality of evidence to be higher, suggesting the reasons for this included:

- ◆ candidates being more comfortable with assessment
- ◆ candidates leaving school better equipped for the workplace
- ◆ increased responsibilities in the workplace providing capacity to produce better, more varied evidence
- ◆ the use of direct evidence has improved in centres, with better examples of evidence produced in 2016
- ◆ evidence of fully contextualised product evidence

- ◆ good use made of direct observation

## **Judgement of evidence**

All reviewers indicated the judgement of evidence to be similar over both years.

## **Overall judgement**

Taking into account all aspects of the unit specification, assessment evidence, marking and grading, and the quality of the candidate evidence, the SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GK6X 22) in 2016 was judged by all three reviewers to be no more demanding than Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GA3V 22) in 2011. The following explanations were provided:

- ◆ The foundations of good SVQ delivery are evident in both years sampled.
- ◆ Good evidence was provided of assessment planning, use of evidence tracking sheets, observations, and reflective accounts which contextualise evidence.
- ◆ 2016 examples have more fully embraced holistic assessment, better exemplify competence, and show evidence referenced across units.
- ◆ The content of the standards is similar over both years.
- ◆ Assessors are getting better at interpreting the standards and making better use of holistic assessment.
- ◆ Some excellent examples of observations and annotated product evidence were provided.
- ◆ The use of electronic portfolios is being embraced by an increasing number of centres.
- ◆ The majority of candidates who are new to the workplace in 2016 have a greater understanding of technology than those in the 2011 sample. This means they may be ready for assessment of some units sooner than their 2011 counterparts.

## 5 Summary of findings

Qualification	Outcome (2016 compared to previous year...)	Comment (on differences)
<b>National Qualifications</b>		
Advanced Higher English	No more demanding (by 2 out of 3 reviewers)	n/a
Advanced Higher Mathematics	Less demanding	♦ the introduction of a formula list made 2016 more accessible
Higher Business Management	More demanding (by 2 out of 3 reviewers)	♦ increased course content, introduction of a coursework component, more demanding question paper
Higher Computing Science and Higher Computing	More demanding	♦ merger of two courses ♦ increase breadth and depth; greater emphasis on application of knowledge
Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies	More demanding (by 2 out of 3 reviewers)	♦ more demanding open-ended questions partly balanced by 'prepared' coursework component
National 5 Geography and Intermediate 2 Geography	No more demanding	n/a
<b>Higher National Units</b>		
Beauty Therapy: Graded Unit 1 (F3SA 34)	Less demanding	♦ the unit specification, overall purpose, aims and evidence requirements had remained the same, but the assessment was judged as less demanding
Beauty Therapy: Management and Practices of Body Therapies (DN6X 34)	No more demanding	n/a
IT in Business: Spreadsheets (F84V 34)	No more demanding	n/a

Research Skills (F60A 34)	No more demanding (by 2 out of 3 reviewers)	n/a
<b>Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ)</b>		
SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GK6X 22) and (GA3V 22)	No more demanding	n/a

# 6 SQA's response

## National Qualifications

### Advanced Higher English: 2016 compared to 2012

#### Conclusion

On balance the overall demand of Advanced Higher English in 2016 was similar to that in 2012.

#### Action

The revised course, with all four components now compulsory, aims to more consistently assess the skills and knowledge required for success in an English course at SCQF level 7. The course still retains the significant opportunities for depth of study and personalisation and choice.

### Advanced Higher Mathematics: 2016 compared to 2012

#### Conclusion

Overall demand of Advanced Higher Mathematics was lower in 2016 than in 2012.

#### Action

The Advanced Higher papers have been made more accessible, allowing more candidates to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do. The introduction of a formula sheet allows assessment of greater application and depth in the use of standard results, as opposed to recall. This means that more challenging items can be included to better discriminate high performance.

The 2016 assessment was judged a fairer assessment of pupils' ability to apply their mathematical knowledge without the requirement to remember a significant quantity of standard results. The changes to the structure of the marking scheme was judged to improve fairness and consistency across every candidate.

### Higher Business Management: 2016 compared to 2012

#### Conclusion

On balance the overall demand of Higher Business Management in 2016 was more demanding than in 2012.

#### Action

The broader set of skills assessed in the revised course, including research skills, is appropriate for a Business course at SCQF level 6.

The new coursework assignment, while broadening the skills required, also allows a greater degree of personalisation and choice, and is judged to be an accessible element of the overall course assessment.

The removal of optional questions ensures that all content areas are covered and also allows SQA to consistently maintain the standard from year to year.

## **Higher Computing Science 2016 compared to Higher Computing 2012**

### **Conclusion**

Overall Higher Computing Science in 2016 was more demanding than Higher Computing in 2012.

### **Action**

The comparison was between two different courses with different content was difficult.

The 2016 Higher Computing resulted from the merger of two courses with an increase breadth and depth and greater emphasis on the application of knowledge.

## **Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies: 2016 compared to 2012**

### **Conclusion**

On balance Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies was more demanding in 2016 than in 2012.

### **Action**

We note that the panel concluded that the 2016 Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) question paper was judged to be more demanding than in 2012. Under CfE, SQA introduced a revised Higher RMPS course in 2015 and, as a result, and as per the ethos of CFE, the course has a greater emphasis on skills than the previous course.

The overall A–C pass rate in 2012 was 77.8% whereas in 2016 this decreased to 65.5%. It was noted that a proportion of the cohort had been entered at a level that was overly challenging for them as 23.8% gained a 'no award'.

It was also noted that candidates struggled to meet the requirements for the skills assessed in the examination, which had been agreed as appropriate by subject specialists during the CfE development. However, the grade boundaries were adjusted by 4 marks to allow centres further development and delivery experience of evaluation. Since then, several Understanding Standards Events have been held with special attention being given to the teaching of skills and how to apply these in answering questions.

The 2018 grade boundaries were set at notional, and there is confidence that the assessment is of appropriate demand for SQCF level 6.

## **National 5 Geography 2016 and Intermediate 2 Geography 2013**

### **Conclusion**

Overall demand of National 5 Geography in 2016 and Intermediate 2 Geography in 2013 was similar.

### **Action**

No action is necessary as the standard remained constant.

Two different courses, with different cohorts, are being compared in this report. Intermediate 2 Geography 2013 had a much smaller number of entries (3565) than National 5 Geography 2016 (11017). For Intermediate 2, 45% of the candidates came from S4 and 53% from S5/S6; whereas for National 5, 85% came from S4 and 14% from S5/S6. National 5 Geography was developed as part of the CfE review. As a result, and as per the ethos of CfE, the course has a greater emphasis on skills than the previous Geography courses at this level. This greater emphasis on skills in the course assessment is referred to in the report.

It is interesting to note that the report describes the National 5 question paper as being more demanding than the Intermediate 2 question paper, stating that candidates were required to write more to obtain marks in the National 5 paper. Post-examination analysis found that the 2016 National 5 question paper was less demanding than intended and, as a result, the grade boundaries were raised.

The report refers to the assignment being less demanding 'due to the degree of choice permitted, the support and guidance given by teachers and the amount of preparation that may be done'. The amount of support and guidance provided by centres cannot be commented on since this is an unknown. However, guidance to centres in relation to 'reasonable assistance' has been made clearer; any evidence that centres have not adhered to the conditions of assessment in relation to the support provided to candidates are dealt with via the malpractice process. Post-examination analysis in 2016 found that the assignment was less demanding than intended. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries and addressed in the marking instructions for the 2017 diet.

The National Rating for National 5 Geography in 2016 was -0.09, which is an excellent position on the spectrum of level of challenge across subjects.

As a result of the revision of National Qualifications, the National 5 question paper has been strengthened, resulting in the assignment now being worth a lower percentage of the overall mark.



# Higher National Units

## Beauty Therapy

### **Beauty Therapy: Management and Practices of Body Therapies (DN6X 34): 2016 compared to 2011**

#### **Conclusion**

It was judged that the assessment demand of the unit in 2016 and in 2011 was the same.

#### **Action**

No action is necessary as the standard remained constant.

### **Beauty Therapy: Graded Unit 1 (F3SA 34): 2016 and 2014**

#### **Conclusion**

The assessment demand of the unit in 2016 was less than in 2014.

#### **Action**

It is noted that the unit specification, overall purpose, aims and evidence requirements had remained the same but that the assessment was judged as less demanding.

A review is currently underway.

## IT in Business

### **IT in Business: Spreadsheets (F84V 34) 2016 and 2012**

#### **Conclusion**

It was judged that the assessment demand of the unit in 2016 and in 2012 was the same.

#### **Action**

No action is necessary as the standard remained constant.

### **Research Skills (F60A 34): 2016 and 2012**

#### **Conclusion**

It was judged that on balance the assessment demand of the unit was similar in 2016 and 2012.

#### **Action**

No action is necessary as the standard remained constant.

# Scottish Vocational Qualifications

## **SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GK6X 22) 2016 compared to SVQ 2 Business and Administration SCQF level 5 (GA3V 22) 2011**

### **Conclusion**

It was judged that the demands of GK6X 22 in 2016 were similar to those of GA3V 22 in 2011.

### **Action**

No action is necessary as the standard remained constant.