

## NextGen: HN Design Principles: Review of Evidence

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has proposed a number of adaptations to current Higher National (HN) qualifications to help achieve the aim of preparing our learners for 21st century work and society. SQA has commissioned and carried out several pieces of research relating to the evaluation of Next Generation Higher National (NextGen: HN) as an ongoing, iterative project.

This report collates and reviews the following pieces of evidence gathered so far:

- ◆ Learner Engagement – Final Report 22/23
- ◆ Prototype Evaluation 2022
- ◆ change requests 2022–23
- ◆ review of quality assurance process 2022–23
- ◆ change impact assessments 2022–23
- ◆ Ashbrook research with HEIs 2023
- ◆ Lessons Learned 2023
- ◆ Grading Review
- ◆ NextGen: HN Employer Engagement research 2023
- ◆ NextGen: HN Non-pilot Practitioner research 2023

**Overall views of NextGen: HN:** Learners experiencing the pilot and employers presented with the proposals expressed positive views of the NextGen: HN qualifications overall. Practitioners who took part in the pilot also shared mainly positive views, particularly that NextGen: HN qualifications allow more flexibility in learning and teaching. Non-pilot practitioners expressed broad support for the approach of NextGen: HN but shared concerns around the perceived lack of communication from SQA regarding the rollout. Higher education institutions (HEIs) similarly felt that there had been a lack of consultation and engagement from SQA in terms of developing the NextGen: HN courses. Since the research took place, there has been significant HEI involvement through subject level consultation and engagement exercises, and through staff being involved in Qualification Design Teams.

**Separation of HNCs and HNDs:** Overall, stakeholders were either supportive of separating Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), or took a neutral position. In many cases, respondents raised some potential concerns, but expressed that if those were considered and resolved, they would be comfortable with separating the qualifications.

**Larger and fewer units:** The findings related to larger and fewer units varied. Some stakeholders were supportive of the idea of having a smaller number of larger units, but there were concerns about the volume of planning and preparation required to manage delivery. Some felt that the larger and fewer units proposed would require more independent learning, which may be difficult for some learners. Additionally, some stakeholders felt that some units had too many criteria per learning outcome.

**Reduced assessment load:** In general, participants welcomed the idea of a reduction in assessment load. Most of the concerns raised were around whether a reduction in the assessment load had been successfully implemented in all subjects.

**Learning for Sustainability:** There was significant support for the inclusion of learning for sustainability in NextGen: HN qualifications among stakeholders, and little opposition in principle. There were concerns as to the extent to which this can be done across all subjects.

**Meta-skills:** Feedback around meta-skills can be split into two main types. Firstly, there was feedback on the principle of including meta-skills in NextGen: HN qualifications. This feedback was broadly supportive, but respondents raised a number of issues that may require further consideration. Secondly, there was feedback from learners and practitioners who had been involved in NextGen: HN pilot qualifications, who questioned the way in which meta-skills had been integrated into their qualification and felt that the approaches to integrating meta-skills did not work well.

**Grading:** There was a large volume of feedback on grading. There were concerns that the approach to grading was relatively radical and different from that used in other qualifications. There was no clear consensus across different stakeholder groups either in favour of or against the proposals on grading. However, there was agreement that providing as much information as possible to all relevant stakeholders would be helpful.

**Quality assurance:** Stakeholders felt that the approach to quality assurance (QA) was broadly working well, but that knowledge of any QA process changes would need to be developed. Centres felt that new QA models would impact centres' existing internal QA processes, and non-pilot practitioners held mixed views about the model.

**Digital by design:** Participants were generally supportive of the digital by design approach, although, as with other design principles, they raised a number of issues which require some consideration. These were mainly related to concerns about digital poverty, security, digital literacy, and whether all subjects are suitable for digital learning.