

National Qualifications

The Government established the 'Assessment and National Qualification Working Group' in January 2016 and was tasked to produce a report, by the end of March that would reduce teacher workload in relation to national qualifications in the 2016-17 session and beyond. Under the regulations governing the Scottish Election the report cannot be disseminated until after the election.

However, the SSTA National Executive sought clarifications of the measures proposed within the report to reduce teacher workload. As part of that process SSTA met with SQA to identify the measures that may reduce teacher workload.

The working group recognised that at present, aspects of the introduction of new national qualifications have involved an unintended and unsustainable level of work for learners and teachers. The Scottish Government, Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), teachers, schools, colleges, and local authorities, all have an important role to play in reducing this workload. The full Report will be issued to members when published.

It is proposed that a number of modifications will be made which will potentially have a positive impact in the 2016/17 session and thereafter. However, the proposals for changes in policy and practice must be accompanied by a wider programme of engagement with, and support for, teachers, in 2016/17 to help develop effective and efficient practice across the education system.

The SQA have confirmed that under the current arrangements they would only be able to issue certificated qualifications in 2016/17 if prescribed Unit Assessments are successfully completed.

SQA Proposals

End of May 2016

Reports from each subject area with key issues and an action plan for implementation. This will include actions for 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and longer term. The Key messages would be to reduce the need for over assessment and remove duplication where possible.

August 2016

To produce guidance for teachers in all subjects for the 2016-2017 cycle.

Category 1: applying a threshold score to unit assessments.

This will apply to Mathematics and Sciences.

For 2016/17, SQA will further refine the knowledge and understanding tests to incorporate reasoning skills (Mathematics) and problem solving (Sciences), bringing both into one test with marks and a threshold score.

Category 2: illustrating that 100% mastery is not required by in effect applying a threshold to the number of assessment standards. This will apply primarily to social subjects, RMPS, social sciences, business subjects and technical subjects.

In these subjects there are often a relatively high number of Assessment Standards within the units. As an interim short-term measure for 2016/17 SQA will introduce for each unit, within each subject, a reduction in Assessments Standards to identify a threshold for the number of Assessment Standards.

Category 3: illustrating that 100% mastery is not required by in effect applying a threshold judgement within each assessment standard.

This will apply to creative/performance based subjects which have Units with relatively few and broad Assessment Standards. These include Performing and Expressive Art, PE, Languages and English.

These Assessment Standards are expressed in open and/or broad terms, and seek to judge evidence holistically. As such they do not require 100% subject mastery – in effect a threshold judgement is applied within each assessment standard.

Often the evidence is gathered over time and sometimes across Units. They do not require 100% subject mastery and place an onus on the use of professional judgement

Quality Assurance and Verification Review

The review to be completed by October 2016 and recommendations to be implemented in the 2017-2018 cycle

Quality Assurance approach – LA has a joint-responsibility to build the verification structure to support teachers in schools. Existing in school quality assurance and internal moderation should form part of embedded practice and should be the foundation of the verification process. Verification is not about remarking but the benchmarking standard

The SQA has trained 4 times the number of verifiers than needed for SQA purposes in an attempt to spread the understanding of standards and help the introduction of the new qualifications. The SQA continues to train verifiers each year to increase the expertise.

There will be NO random verification sampling of Units in 2016/17 but existing internal quality assurance and moderation arrangements should continue.

However for those Centres who are either delivering qualifications for the first time, or those who failed verification in previous years will still be subjected to the verification process.

Those selected for Unit verification in 2016/17 will be notified as soon as possible after entry data is received by SQA in early November 2016.

Further Action

SSTA has continually highlighted specific concerns in Technical and Computing assessments. SQA is considering interim changes in current arrangements for 2016/17 but any move to centralised marking of those elements could only be implemented in 2017/18 if deemed appropriate.