



9 March 2017

Sent by Post and email to [DFMCSE@gov.scot](mailto:DFMCSE@gov.scot)

John Swinney MSP  
Deputy First Minister / Cabinet Secretary for Skills & Education  
The Scottish Government  
St. Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

Dear Mr Swinney

### ***SQA Changes to National 5 2017-2018***

The SSTA position at the establishment of the Assessment and National Qualifications Working Group in January 2016 was for a reduction in teacher workload with temporary arrangements, if necessary to allow time for full consideration on a long term solution.

The SSTA welcomed your decision to reduce workload for learners and teachers by making the National 5 Units non-mandatory. However, the solutions announced by SQA on 31 January have not been received well in schools by SSTA members. As you are aware the SSTA conducted a survey of its members to assess the impact of the changes and we have shared the returns with your officials. The survey showed a concern for pupils and a belief that teacher workload will be increased as a result of the changes.

The SSTA saw the SQA changes, for the first time, at the ANQ meeting on the 31 January and at no point did the SQA consult SSTA on the changes. We met with the SQA on 10 February and discussed the changes and the initial findings of the survey. We received the impression that SQA had completed the task and this was the end of the process for National 5 (other than the course content and specimen papers later in the year).

At the SSTA Council meeting on 4 March a lively debate took place, with a good number of members asking for the SQA changes to be stopped. A resolution was agreed that urgent measures needed to be put in place for the S3 pupils that have already made decisions on subject choices and would be embarking on courses in May of this year.

***"We welcome the changes to National Courses to remove unit assessments as these added to work and stress for both teachers and pupils for little educational benefit.***

***We express concern at the SQA's recent decision to add additional work and complexity to some National Courses which are not in the interests of either pupils or teachers. We would welcome the opportunity to be fully consulted as part of a subject-by-subject review.***

***On the basis that something has to be in place to allow time for the SQA to consult fully and to reconsider arrangements for future years, we call on the Cabinet Secretary to provide additional time for the changes to be implemented for this coming session."***

However, it is worth returning to the ANQ report issued in May 2016 that acknowledged the position we had reached, the intended direction of travel and warnings to reach the right conclusion. Unfortunately, this report appears to have been forgotten in the drive for change.

***"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 group has reflected on previous innovations in Scotland and recognises the need to take action to address the very real pressures on teachers, but to do so in a way that avoids taking action to address short term issues that lead to longer term problems".***

***"The Group recognised that there was a need to support professional development and build capacity in the system. This would not be achieved by more guidance – what was needed was appropriate support and engagement from the national bodies, backed up by support at local authority level – to make sure teachers have time and space to develop their practice".***

***"Detailed plans for this will be developed and published for the start of the 2016/17 session. Local authorities should be cognisant of these timelines in local planning, e.g. School Improvement Plans and Working Time Agreements".***

Looking forward to meeting you and discussing this matter with you in the near future.

Yours sincerely



**Seamus Searson**  
General Secretary