

SQA changes to National 5 Courses

Rapid response from members indicates strength of feeling

SSTA conducted a survey following the announcement of National 5 changes by the SQA on 31 January; 837 members responding within the first 48 hours. SSTA delayed publishing the returns to allow time for discussions between the SQA and Government officials.

The survey was broken down by subject and changes to the elements within the course.

SQA not achieving its objectives

The decision to remove National 5 Units was to reduce pupil and teacher workload. 54% of SSTA members indicated that removal of the units would reduce teacher workload. However, a further 27% said there would be no reduction in workload.

The response from members was that 63% believed proposed SQA changes overall would result in an increase in workload with a further 18% indicating no change to workload (see detailed breakdown below).

Concern for pupils

The overriding concern by SSTA members to the changes was for their pupils. Members believed that candidate stress would rise as a consequence of the SQA's proposals. Candidates at the margins risked having additional barriers that could reduce their chances of success. Members also noted the introduction of an unnecessary attainment hierarchy with pupils in the same class being divided between Nat 5 and Nat 4.

Unnecessary changes

Members believed many of the SQA changes to be unnecessary, perceiving them as a punishment for teachers complaining about workload. Many felt that extending exam papers that were already demanding was unfair on the pupils. Including other elements like additional coursework and additional papers was simply moving unit workload into another place.

SQA too remote

The SQA was criticised by many members for lacking an understanding of conditions in schools in terms of multi-course classes where subjects are being taught with 2 or even 3 different qualification levels. The SQA appeared not to appreciate the amount of time required for ordering and preparing materials for assignments. A constant response was the lack of consultation about the changes with teachers delivering the courses.

Other concerns

SSTA members also highlighted:

- another change on top of a number of years of constant change;
- lack of materials from SQA that would not be available until after the courses had begun in May;
- no time to understand the changes;
- lack of time to develop and change teaching materials;
- more time needed to prepare pupils for the exams and coursework.

No change

In addition, members believed that the assessment of units would not be removed from their workload as local authorities and headteachers will be insisting on detailed evidence and portfolios as part of the internal tracking and monitoring. This material and evidence would be used to provide justification to subject leaders, headteachers, local authority officers and to parents in relation to the appropriate presentation at Nat 4 and Nat 5.

Survey Results

1) Removal of Units

- 54% Reduction in workload
- 27% No reduction in workload
- 18% Increase in workload

2) Extension of question paper (14% not applicable)

- 29% No reduction in workload
- 53% Increase in workload

3) Extension/modification of coursework (18% not applicable)

- 18% No reduction in workload
- 57% Increase in workload

4) New question paper (30% not applicable)

- 17% no reduction in workload
- 50% Increase in workload

5) New item of coursework (39% not applicable)

- 52% Increase in workload

6) Overall change to workload (1% not applicable)

- 18% no reduction in workload
- 63% Increase in workload

Please note:

118 of the 837 returns were received from Biology teachers indicated significant concerns within this subject area (13% no reduction in workload and 86% increase in workload).

SSTA Survey National 5 Changes February 2017																	
	Removal of Units		Extension to Question Paper			Ext/Mod Coursework			New Question Paper			New Item of Coursework			Overall		
	No Red	Increase	No Red	Increase	n/a	No Red	Increase	n/a	No Red	Increase	n/a	No Red	Increase	n/a	No Red	Increase	
SSTA	27%	18%	29%	53%	14%	18%	57%	18%	17%	50%	30%	52%		39%	18%	63%	
837																	
Admin IT	10%	33%	5%	57%	33%	24%	57%	5%	10%	76%	10%	0%	35%	65%	19%	71%	
21																	
Art&Des	43%	32%	18%	82%	0%	18%	82%	0%	4%	75%	21%	11%	63%	26%	21%	79%	
29																	
Bus Manag	24%	6%	47%	53%	0%	35%	35%	29%	33%	40%	27%	7%	50%	43%	18%	41%	
17																	
Biology	52%	25%	50%	46%	3%	9%	90%	0%	30%	47%	22%	4%	72%	25%	14%	86%	
118																	
Chemistry	31%	25%	25%	72%	1%	12%	81%	5%	17%	56%	25%	5%	59%	35%	13%	81%	
75																	
Computing	16%	24%	24%	72%	0%	20%	64%	8%	16%	68%	12%	12%	60%	24%	4%	72%	
25																	
Design & Manu	24%	16%	28%	52%	4%	17%	58%	4%	13%	50%	25%	13%	63%	13%	12%	52%	
25																	
English	29%	9%	20%	29%	51%	32%	41%	21%	11%	29%	60%	26%	51%	20%	24%	38%	
36																	
Geography	12%	4%	40%	48%	4%	33%	25%	33%	12%	56%	28%	4%	33%	58%	16%	40%	
25																	
Graphic	17%	19%	22%	69%	0%	22%	50%	3%	17%	49%	26%	6%	53%	29%	20%	51%	
36																	
History	15%	12%	26%	71%	0%	35%	32%	31%	15%	58%	24%	5%	36%	59%	20%	53%	
74																	
Maths	32%	16%	58%	40%	2%	7%	13%	80%	23%	29%	48%	0%	18%	82%	28%	39%	
57																	
Mod Lang	20%	3%	21%	18%	55%	8%	53%	30%	13%	13%	71%	10%	82%	3%	28%	50%	
40																	
Mod Studies	20%	7%	20%	73%	0%	27%	40%	30%	13%	60%	23%	13%	40%	47%	31%	59%	
30																	
Music	17%	25%	20%	24%	56%	9%	64%	18%	26%	22%	52%	13%	67%	17%	4%	75%	
25																	
Physics	25%	33%	27%	68%	3%	7%	85%	3%	16%	55%	28%	5%	58%	35%	11%	84%	
61																	
PE	4%	4%	4%	26%	70%	24%	56%	8%	0%	13%	83%	4%	40%	52%	25%	42%	
25																	
Pr Woodwork	50%	9%	5%	20%	75%	15%	70%	5%	9%	87%	4%	10%	62%	24%	5%	82%	
23																	
Courses with small returns have not been included																	
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