

A selection of comments made by SSTA members.

"Teaching three different course in one class is incredibly difficult but unfortunately in our Authority it is now being seen as the 'norm'. I am finding it very difficult to cope with this at times and feel that I am not doing my job the best I can. The pupils are not getting the attention they need as I am feeling stretched; at times to breaking point".

"With N4 and N5 in a single class is a complete destruction of the subject. Duplication and stupid nonsensical splitting of outcomes. If the N4 and N5 were in same class over two years then all pupils in class would achieve the exam as pupils did in standard grade".

"The system makes a mockery of subject knowledge and has destroyed pupils' ability to succeed if they are not a high flyer. Work load for staff is ridiculous".

"When you are teaching a bi-course class with around 30 pupils then keeping track of the unit assessments and reassessments becomes time consuming and difficult. It takes time away from teaching the course".

"I am saddened that the pressure is now on all schools is to measure passes in order to fuel the league tables. In so many individual cases this is not relevant. Schools are being judged by their performance in a way that is misleading and unhelpful".

"Current set up with National 3-5 in same class make it difficult to give N3/4 any real worth or value alongside N5".

"There is a desperate need to have the N4 and N5 courses tie in together. For example the N4 content is a complete mismatch in comparison to N5. Students dropping out of N5 are put in the position of having to do extra assessments (unit assessments) plus learn a massive amount of material not in the N5. Who on Earth thinks that a student who has just dropped out of N5 is going to embrace this onerous task with enthusiasm? A lot more work for a lower level qualification".

"In our subject due to lack of staffing and low uptake in subjects by level we are expected to teach multi-level classes which is near impossible as there is little if any correlation between the subjects this is impacting on staff in terms of workload and increasing stress levels which is totally unnecessary. With schools now looking after the staffing budgets this is just going to get far worse. We are already seeing the impact on staffing with more and more people leaving the profession or coming into it showing a lack of awareness of how demanding a career this is; not understanding the fact that you need to work long hours and be dedicated otherwise pupils' results will be affected. Schools are results driven and expecting all pupils to be taking subjects at the correct level but teachers judgement is not listened to parents overrule this constantly and pupils therefore do not attain in the exam and we have to answer to that".

"The reading standard for Biology is high as is the vocabulary and I was criticised by an ASN teacher for making Nat 4 work too difficult with too many 'big' words. Also they totally fail to realise that the courses for Nat 2/3/4/5 Sciences are not taught by differentiation, as they are in some other subjects, but are different courses. Please, please tell them they will not listen to us".

"The current system of bi-course teaching in some schools is detrimental to the learning of pupils - teachers cannot split themselves in two and this can lead to demotivation and poor behaviour. It is an unnecessary stress on teachers who are already struggling to be a classroom teacher, a social worker and a special needs teacher".

"An ex-member of SLT threw a course document showing the differences between the Nat 4 and Nat 5 courses back at us when we tried to open a dialogue about it. I am teaching Nat 4 again this year. I may have some pupils who will end up Nat 3 perhaps Nat 2. I received an e-mail about one pupil, asking me to be sure he was doing Nat 5 work as he may be moved up to Nat 5 if his behaviour and marks improved. This assumption again that it's all one course".

"If you really want to reduce workload for Scottish teachers, inspire a passion for science that encourages the next generation to be forward thinking and make the system fair for all pupils let's teach N5 over 2 years, let's give all pupils' the opportunity to prove themselves, let's scrap Nat 4 units and all the nonsense that goes with it, replace N4 with a single exam that will determine N5 grades and N4 ability".

"Restructure the course so that it could be assessed largely in the same way as the former Standard Grade course. All that was really required was an update of the course content. The structure, whereby General and Credit pupils could be taught the same course and sit both exam papers at the end, actually worked quite well. The trouble with the current format, for Biology and the other sciences, is that the course content for the different levels has significant differences, making it a great (and stressful) challenge to deliver the courses to the best of our ability. Little recognition has been given to this by the Scottish Government".

"Trying to teach bi-course classes is very difficult as most of your attention is focused on pupils doing the more advanced level e.g. Nat 5 therefore Nat 4 pupils are often disregarded. In my view there was nothing wrong with Standard Grade, it allowed all pupils to do the same course but exam paper then catered to pupils' ability, now we have different courses with different outcomes which makes managing and teaching the subjects a nightmare".

"Our N4 and N5 courses have significantly different content that needs to be delivered (i.e. it is factual content that pupils need to know, understand and remember - not just skills to practise and not just things that need to be experienced). There can be no "differentiation by outcome". Different levels require different knowledge. This requires the teacher to tell the pupils two entirely different things at the same time if N4 & 5 are taught together".

“Simply put, it's not possible. I had a very fraught meeting with my senior manager one year who told me that I must teach N4 & N5 together. I was told that, as the subject specialist that I needed to find out how to do it. In return, I said that as the subject specialist that it cannot be done to any level of professional satisfaction. The senior manager merely replied that they were being told by others that it can be, so I just needed to do it. It does not work: success rate has been minimal and everyone loses out”.

“In some classes we have N3, N4 and N5. It is impossible to teach to my normal standard at these three very different levels. In my subject they are effectively 3 different courses. That's three lots of teaching in 50mins and no pupil wins from this. There is no time to go into additional details for the pupils who could be pushed and very little time to give additional support to those who require it”.