

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**ADULT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**19<sup>th</sup> February 2014**

Agenda Item	19.
Report No	ACS/33/14

**New SQA National Qualifications**

**Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service**

**Summary**

- This report provides an overview of the new SQA qualifications being implemented in Highland secondary schools from 2013.
- The report also sets out a brief summary of the implementation strategy being developed in Highland schools.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The new qualifications **Nationals**, **Highers** and **Advanced Highers**, will be introduced in Scotland between 2013 and 2016. They will replace the existing Access, Standard Grade, Intermediate, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications.
- 1.2 The new qualifications have been developed to support Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) which introduced a new way of learning to secondary schools in 2010. SQA has attempted to design the new qualifications, with the interests of the learner at heart. They are designed to help learners demonstrate the knowledge and skills they've developed at school and enable them to prepare for further learning, training and employment. The new, simplified format of the qualifications is intended to be easier for learners, parents and prospective employers to understand.
- 1.3 Over 1,000 people - including sector professionals, subject experts and nominated representatives from partner organisations, among them stakeholders, teaching professionals and parent groups from across Scotland - have contributed to the development process.

## 2. Key information on new qualifications

### 2.1 What is changing?

The table shows how the new National Qualifications replace current qualifications:

SCQF Level	New National Qualifications	Replaces	Current National Qualifications
1 and 2	National 1 and National 2	>	Access 1 and Access 2
3	National 3	>	Access 3 Standard Grade (Foundation level)
4	National 4	>	Standard Grade (General level) Intermediate 1
5	National 5	>	Standard Grade (Credit level) Intermediate 2
6	Higher (new)	>	Higher
7	Advanced Higher (new)	>	Advanced Higher

### 2.2 When are the new qualifications being introduced?

The new qualifications will be introduced in phases in 2013, 2014 and 2015.

National 1, National 2, National 3, National 4 and National 5 will be available from August 2013, The new Higher will be introduced in August 2014 and the new Advanced Higher in August 2015.

In 2013-14 and 2014-15, the new qualifications will run in schools alongside some of the current qualifications – this is called ‘dual running’. This means that learners entering S5 or S6 in session 2013-14 will continue to study towards the current qualifications until they complete their education.

### 2.3 How will they be assessed?

National 1, National 2, National 3 and National 4 will be marked and assessed by the school. Schools are responsible for development and management of their internal assessment procedures. SQA will check assessments to ensure that assessment judgments are consistent and meet national standards.

National 4 Courses are made up of Units, including an Added Value Unit. In order to achieve a Course at National 4, learners will need to pass all Units plus an Added Value Unit assessment. The National 4 Added Value Unit assessment will be set and marked by the learner’s school. To assist schools, SQA will set the National 4 Added Value Unit assessments in 2013-14 and 2014-15. The Added Value Unit assessment performs a similar function to the Course assessment at National 5 and above.

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Courses will also include Units that are assessed and marked by the school. In order to achieve a Course at National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher, learners must pass all Units plus a Course assessment. Course assessments will continue to be externally

marked by SQA or, where appropriate, internally assessed by the school or college, ensuring continuity with the current qualifications.

The Course assessment will normally be carried out using one or two assessment methods from seven possible types:

- assignment
- case study
- practical activity
- performance
- portfolio
- project
- question paper/test

Assessments will be appropriate to the subject and level of study.

New quality assurance arrangements are being introduced to ensure that the new qualifications are recognised as a valuable achievement for learners. The SQA is working with schools to ensure that all assessments are secure, valid and reliable. They will also make sure they are fair, consistent, in line with national standards, and can be trusted by colleges, universities and employers in the future.

#### **2.4 How will they be graded?**

All Courses will continue to contain Units that are marked throughout the year by teachers as they are at present. These Units will be assessed as 'pass' or 'fail' as is the case with current qualifications.

Courses at National 2, National 3 and National 4 will not be graded, but assessed as 'pass' or 'fail'.

Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher will be graded A to D, or 'No Award'.

If a learner does not achieve a Course assessment at National 4, National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher, they will still receive credit for any Units they have achieved at that level. So when the learner receives their qualification certificate, the Units they have passed within the Course will appear on the detailed record of attainment section of their qualifications certificate.

#### **2.5 Studying for the new qualifications**

SQA has published the following support materials for learners studying towards National 5 in Session 2013-14:

- Specimen Question Papers and Marking Instructions for subjects that include an examination question paper as part of the Course assessment
- General assessment information for parts of the Course assessment that involve Coursework, such as an assignment or practical activity

These materials can be used to help learners revise and prepare. They are available on the SQA website, going to the subject pages and then clicking on the relevant subject and selecting 'National 5'.

Support materials will also be made available for the new Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications before they are introduced.

## 2.6 **New Awards**

Wider Achievement Awards:

- Personal Achievement Awards
- Personal Development Awards
- Modern Languages for Life and Work Awards
- Wellbeing Awards
- Religion, Belief and Values Award
- Personal Finance Awards

The new Awards cover work from different subject areas and are shorter than traditional Courses. They recognise success across different levels of difficulty, meaning they are suitable for young people of all abilities. They will be marked and assessed internally and do not have any external assessments or exams

## 3. **Highland Implementation Strategy**

### 3.1 **Improvement Plans**

The development and implementation of the new qualifications has been at the heart of authority and school improvement plans for the last couple of years. Teaching staff have invested a huge amount of time in trying to ensure that learners will be well prepared for successfully completing their courses.

### 3.2 **Learning & Teaching**

Schools continue to invest a significant amount of teacher development time to ensure that lessons delivered in schools will provide learners with the key course content and also develop the key skills for learning, work and life.

### 3.3 **Assessment**

The key assessment tasks were:

- The development and implementation of an authority internal verification system to ensure the quality of internal assessment instruments
- The provision of development time for staff to share and discuss assessment information thereby ensuring consistent standards of assessment are in place
- The production of new assessment instruments
- A significant number of staff making the commitment to work with the SQA as external verifiers.

### 3.4 **Provision of Support Materials**

The authority has developed a strategy of recruiting Curriculum and Assessment Development Officers (CADO) to provide support materials for teachers. Some examples of work carried out by the CADOs:

- The production of prelim papers
- The production of assessment instruments
- The planning and delivery of training
- The production of course materials
- The sharing of good practice
- Providing advice and support for schools, particularly small schools
- Providing course planning advice.

### 3.5 **Supporting Learners**

Schools are using a variety of strategies to support pupils to achieve their potential in the new courses. Some examples of strategies being put in place by schools are:

- Personal learning planning
- Setting up study groups
- Homework clubs
- Drop in revision sessions
- Online support sessions
- Providing quiet areas

Some learners are entitled to tailored strategies. Plans and assessment arrangements will be put in place where there is evidence of an additional support need. These strategies used may include:

- Input from a range of professionals
- Photocopied or digital course notes
- Extra adult support with learning
- Use of ICT for typing or spellchecking
- Extra time for assessments
- Visual supports

### 3.6 **Developing the wider achievement awards**

A number of schools are already piloting these awards with their current S5 & S6 learners.

## 4. **Implications**

- 4.1 There are no Resource implications beyond those already committed to Curriculum for Excellence. There are no specific Legal, Equalities, Climate Change and Risk implications.

**5. Recommendation**

5.1 Members are asked to note the key qualification information and to comment on the implementation progress in Highland schools.

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Date: 11 February 2014

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