

ENGAGEMENT TITLE: Meeting with a subset grouping of the Teachers Panel, SQA and ES.

Date and Time of Engagement	Tuesday 7 November 2017 3.00 pm – 4.00 pm
Where	Committee Room 6, Scottish Parliament
Who	Subset of the Teachers panel, Janet Brown, Chief Executive SQA, David Middleton, Chairman SQA and Graeme Logan, Chief Inspector of Education.
Key Purpose	At the last meeting of the Teacher Panel, you agreed that a meeting should be held with a subset of the Panel to discuss various issues which were raised in relation to SQA. These issues included concerns mainly about the removal of unit assessment and SQA's engagement with schools. However, issues around curriculum delivery have also been raised; therefore Graeme Logan will also attend. Further information at Annex A
Official Support	<i>Fiona Robertson, Director of Learning</i> Tel: [REDACTED] <i>Andy Bruce, Deputy Director Learning</i> Tel: [REDACTED] BB: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] National Qualifications Team Tel: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Tel: [REDACTED]

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Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. You are invited to explain the purpose of the meeting:
 - Teacher panel meeting on 6 September you asked that SQA meet with a subset of the teacher's panel to hear their feedback and concerns on the removal of the mandatory unit assessments and other issues.
 - Concerns have also been raised around delivery of the curriculum in schools. For that reason, Graeme Logan has agreed to attend to address the wider issues.
3. You are invited to open up the discussion.

Summary of issues/queries:

- Questions surrounding SQA understands of how unit assessments were contributing to workload issues. Several members of the panel have made statements around the removal of units not being the change teachers requested; rather they wanted to see a re-design of the units and the removal of mandatory assessments.
- Questions around the adverse effects the removal of units will have on teachers' ability to conduct on-going assessment of a learner' skills/abilities.
- Questions around the lack of parity in how the removal of units impacts on particular subjects (with one subject facing changes to assignments and others facing changes to exams).
- Queries regarding the justification for extending the length of exams; how Scottish exams will compare to rest of UK and with universities; and the impact a longer exam period will have on University Week.
- A desire amongst some for recognising positive achievement to remain.
- A strong sense that SQA's communications and engagement with schools/teachers isn't working as effectively as it could, and a desire to see more collegiate working.
- Lack of understanding as to how SQA is funded and perceptions that its 'making money' from the charges applied to local authorities.
- Concerns over the Understanding Standards website and the absence of up-to-date examples (and in some cases no examples) leading to a lack of clarity over standards.
- Clarification being needed on the SQA's processes for marking reviews and appeals.
- A concern within some subject areas that the requirements for internal unit verification don't seem to match the national standards being exemplified for the external assessment components.
- Some concerns around National 4 – the lack of an external exam; the disparity between National 4 and National 5 qualifications; and other issues similar to those raised in our N4 discussions to date.

These have been passed to SQA and Education Scotland in advance.

Attendees

- Andrew Travis, Headteacher, Meldrum Academy, Inverurie
- Stephen Ross, Headteacher, Craigmoynton Community High School, Edinburgh
- Pauline Walker, Headteacher, Royal High School, Edinburgh
- Gareth Surgey, Technologies Teacher, Queen Anne High School, Dunfermline
- Scott Duncan, Acting PTC Social Subjects, The Waid Academy, Anstruther
- Gerry Lyons, Headteacher, St Andrew's Secondary School, Glasgow
- Catriona Chaimbeul, Depute Headteacher, Glasgow Gaelic School, Glasgow
- Sabrina McCready, Depute Headteacher, Inverclyde Academy, Greenock
- John Reilly, Headteacher, Holy Cross High School, Hamilton

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY (SQA) AND CHANGES TO THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

ISSUE:

- 20/10 - SQA published their 2017 course reports providing advice on how teachers can prepare future cohorts for their qualifications. Figures on Recognising Positive Achievement, the process by which N5 candidates who fail the exam can achieve an N4 as fallback, were also published. These figures have risen this year prompting Liz Smith to comment that "fundamental issues remain about National 4s and National 5s." Daniel Johnston acknowledges "a significant proportion of young people are being presented for the wrong qualification".
- 29/09 - TESS article on FOI request to SQA alleges that the cost of redesigning national qualifications has increased by £1M. EIS are quoted: "SQA had used the removal of the unit assessments to do a full revamp", however admit that scrapping of unit assessments was essential.
- 20/09 TESS report that DFM "partly to blame for workload woes" due to speed at which reforms to the national qualifications were pushed through in response to teachers concerns.
- 18/9 - Mark Wilson's open letter to FM whilst critical of Curriculum for Excellence in secondary schools, also highlights his perceived deficiencies in the new qualifications (specifically National 4 and National 5) introduced as part of the wider CfE reforms. Press coverage of Mr Wilson's letter also references Seamus Searson (SSTA) stating that "the real problem was the way the current qualifications system has been bolted on to CfE".
- 15/09 TESS article on SQA's fieldwork claims there is 'no clear view' on the future of National 4 and also cites a recent NPFS survey suggesting a 50-50 split on the merits of an exam at National 4.
- Sept 2016, DFM announced that mandatory unit assessments would be removed from National Qualifications (NQ) and guidance issued in March 2017 on the detail of these plans including fallback to National 4.

Top Lines

- There is clearly a debate to be had about National 4 qualifications, as it is vital that young people obtain qualifications that fully reflect their achievements.
- That is exactly the process we are taking forward through our review which will include the views of education bodies and other stakeholders.
- We have yet to reach agreement on specific changes and on the timetable for introducing them.
- Yesterday (25/10), the Scottish Government met with ADES, SLS, EIS, SSTA and NASUWT to discuss the review of National 4.
- Any changes must take into account the timetable for changes to other National Qualifications – including the removal of unit assessments in N5 - requested by stakeholders.
- The Assessment and National Qualifications Group's guidance (March 2017) conveys the importance of accurate presentation decisions to ensure learners are entered for the right level of qualification.

- The removal of mandatory unit assessments represents a considerable reduction in workload for teachers and young people, and has been welcomed by teachers unions.
- Course structures remain unchanged providing continuity for teachers and young people moving through Scotland's education system.
- The changes to National Qualifications were made in response to demands from the education system to reduce workload, and were welcomed when announced last year.
- It is very important that the changes are properly implemented.
- We will continue to review SQA's funding requirements to ensure they can deliver on this programme of work successfully and efficiently.
- The new qualifications were not bolted on to CfE and were developed to complement the way young people learn and support the curriculum.
- There were unprecedented levels of support for CfE including £11m additional funding, 3 extra in-service days, and full course material for all subjects.
- CfE is about personalisation and choice, with teachers being free to design their own materials and assessment approaches to make learning and teaching more relevant for their learners.

We are reviewing the National 4 qualification to address concerns, and the work of the Assessment and National Qualifications (ANQ) Group will proceed as planned

- We are aware that a number of teacher associations have raised concerns about the National 4 qualification and many teachers believe it should include an exam.
- Whilst there is consensus on the need to review National 4, there is little agreement on the specifics of neither any changes nor the timetable for introducing these.
- While the SSTA has called for N4 to be scrapped, EIS General Secretary Larry Flanagan said: "For many pupils gaining a National 4 award is a significant step and this achievement should be celebrated"
- The Education Governance: Next Steps document sets out a commitment to establish a Scottish Education Council, which will meet for the first time in November 2017.
- As part of that process, we are reviewing the existing governance structures, including the Management Board and Assessment and National Qualifications Group.
- Regardless of any future changes to these governance groups, we are committed to reviewing National 4 and the work of the Assessment and National Qualifications Group will proceed as planned.

The decision not to have an exam at National 4 was made following discussions at the Qualifications Governing Group, and accepted by the CfE Management Board

- It aims to ensure more time is spent on learning rather than assessment, while still providing assurance that the level has been attained.
- There were strong educational reasons for this with teachers and educational experts advising that this approach would provide more flexibility for young people.

The decision to allow some pupils to continue to achieve a National 4 where they don't pass a National 5 is a sensible step to reflect achievement while the system is reviewed.

- It is important that pupils' achievements are accurately reflected in their qualifications.
- It is therefore a sensible, pragmatic decision to continue to allow some pupils who get no award at National 5 to be awarded a National 4 where their achievements merit it.

The changes to National Qualification will free teachers to teach

- Teachers will not have to undertake formal unit assessments at, in most cases, three points during the year.
- This is what teachers and others told us was significantly contributing to unnecessary workload. The change was welcomed by teacher unions last year.
- The duration of exams has been extended to ensure that content, previously assessed by the units, is being covered appropriately.
- This was made clear when we announced the changes to the National Qualifications in September 2016.
- The increases are a reasonable and proportionate measure to compensate for the removal of a much greater level burden of assessment represented by the units.
- SQA has provided assurance that teachers should not see significant change or increase in course content to the revised N5 qualifications for 2017/18.

The changes to National Qualifications are part of a range of activity designed to address teacher workload and free up time for teachers to teach.

- SQA and Education Scotland are reducing and clarifying the guidance they provide to teachers.
- Last year, Education Scotland published clear, practical advice on what teachers and practitioners should/should not do when planning learning, teaching and assessment.
- Definitive benchmark guidance on literacy and numeracy has been published to support teachers' judgement when assessing learner progress from pre-school through to S3.
- Benchmarks for all the curriculum areas have now been published, replacing a much larger volume of existing material.

Subset group of the teachers panel, SQA and ES meeting – 7 November 2017

Main issues

Issues raised

- Lack of clarity on the relationship/communication between SQA and Schools.
- Concern around articulation between levels specifically in Computing and Sciences, causing huge issues re multi-level teaching. Confusion as to why multi-level teaching is possible in some subjects (e.g. history) but not in others.
- Not enough focus, attention and energy on the BGE, seem to be all focussed on the Senior Phase.
- Too many revised versions of National 5 documents, following teachers feedback.
- Too many changes to national qualification courses year on year. This reduces stability and does not help teachers to gain confidence teaching courses.
- Unintended consequences in removing unit assessments e.g. lengthened exam – fear it will limit aspirations of young people. If the profession had been told that the impact of the removal of unit assessments would be a longer exam, many would not have wanted these removed.
- Lack of understanding of qualifications at parent level, e.g wider awards etc.
- Lack of coherence in the system as a whole, and the role of SQA in it. Acknowledgement that the system hasn't embraced the concept of the learner journey to exit point or defined what success looks like for learners.

Actions

- DFM wants a further discussion to take place with SQA, ES and a few of the teachers from the meeting to discuss issues around: curriculum models, assessment, recognition of achievement and the wider narrative of Scottish education. DFM has requested the smaller group prepare a paper on these issues and how we take these forward.
- Suggestion from a teacher that SQA should meet the regional collaboratives regularly, which Janet happily embraced.