

TEACHER PANEL

CHANGES TO HIGHERS

Purpose

1. This paper provides background information on recent and forthcoming changes to both National 5 and Highers. The Teacher Panel is invited to consider the content of this paper and offer views on the forthcoming Higher changes.

Background

2. The changes to National Qualifications via the removal of mandatory unit assessments will free teachers to teach.
3. The changes came into effect for National 5 in academic year 2017/18, and come into effect for Higher in 2018/19.
4. Under the revised arrangements, teachers will not now 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 when they were announced.
5. 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.
6. SQA has assured the Scottish Government that teachers have all key information required to deliver Higher courses for the year ahead and updated assessment support materials were being made available between May and September 2018. The SQA has shared information earlier and has proactively engaged with teachers on the nature of these changes.
7. A significant question in respect of this year's results is the extent to which the changes to Higher will play out in attainment terms in 2018/19. If learners are being appropriately presented there should, in theory, be no impact on attainment. The standards at Higher will not change and what was previously assessed in the units will now be assessed through coursework and/or an extended exam by SQA, rather than by centres. However, we have seen lower performance for the new/existing element at National 5 which is now being externally assessed by SQA.
8. The four technology subjects – Computing Science, Graphic Communication, Engineering Science and Design & Manufacture – have similar changes at Higher to those at National 5. Coursework has been redesigned in these subjects

and has moved from being wholly internally assessed to either all of it being marked by SQA or, in the case of Design & Manufacture, a combination of internal and external assessment.

Conclusion

9. The Teacher Panel is invited to consider the content of this paper and offer views on both the forthcoming changes to the Highers and their preparedness.

Learning Directorate
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