

Removal of Unit Assessments

Assessment and National Qualifications Changes

At a meeting of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Management Board on 29 September 2016, the Scottish Government presented a proposal to address assessment overload, previously discussed through a paper tabled at the Working Group on Assessment and National Qualifications and announced by the Cabinet Secretary at the Scottish Learning Festival on 21 September 2016.

The proposal

The proposal would see an end to compulsory Unit Assessment, albeit as part of a staged process: National 5 changes are to be made in the academic year 2017/18, Higher changes in 2018/19 and in response to concerns expressed by the NASUWT at the Working Group about the failure to include Advanced Higher this had been addressed. Changes to Advanced Higher will be made in 2019/20.

SQA is currently looking at how to implement these changes. This will involve looking at the nature of the material contained in existing Unit Assessments and how this might be transferred to coursework and/or the final examination. SQA will bring back more details on this to future meetings of the Working Group and the Management Board.

The NASUWT position

The NASUWT welcomes the proposals as a first step in reducing workload but suggests that they are not the whole answer. Workload remains a major concern for all teachers.

The NASUWT also welcomes the decision to include Advanced Higher as part of the process of change but has concerns about the staged timing of this process and the continuing failure to address concerns raised by the NASUWT about the credibility of National 4.

The proposal to remove Unit Assessments, whilst broadly welcomed, seems to ignore the view of some teachers (particularly in Sciences) that these are still useful. The NASUWT has had confirmation from SQA that continued use of verified Unit Assessments by some schools/teachers could carry SCQF-level points, but these points could not be 'double-counted': the new system will be designed to award SCQF-level points for the coursework and final examination and any centres taking a different approach will have to register this fact early in the school year. Any schools/subjects which do so would then become part of the quality assurance/verification process to ensure Unit Assessments can be certificated.

The NASUWT is pressing for detailed information on what the revised coursework and expanded final examinations will look like to reflect the SCQF-level points lost through the removal of mandatory Unit Assessment.

There are also continuing concerns at the lack of use of 'bypass' of National 5 in favour of a two-year Higher. More will need to be done to promote this option.

The next steps

Information on changes for 2017/18 will need to be with teachers by April 2017. The NASUWT will continue to engage fully in both the Working Group and the CfE Management Board to ensure that reduction in teacher workload remains a top priority.

The Scottish Government has recognised that there is broad agreement with the proposed changes but acknowledges the desire to look in more detail at National 4 and address the erosion of confidence in its value.

There are also changes proposed to the examination grading structure and this will be revisited at a future date.

The NASUWT has raised concerns about the fact that only two stakeholders were specifically consulted in the preparation of the original paper for the Working Group. In recognition of this limitation, the Scottish Government has agreed to meet separately with the Union to discuss fully the feedback from members in relation to the proposed changes.

The Union will continue to gather evidence to support the need for further change and to provide feedback on how successful the proposals are in reducing workload.

Should you wish to comment or seek advice on the impact of these proposals, please contact the NASUWT Scotland Centre at rc-scotland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk.

**Tel: 0131 226 8480. E-mail: rc-scotland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk or
go online: www.nasuwt.org.uk.**