
Report To: Education & Communities Committee **Date:** 05 September 2017

Report By: Corporate Director Education, Communities and Organisational Development **Report No:** EDUCOM/54/17/RB

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Subject: Changes to National Qualification Arrangements

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Education and Communities Committee on changes to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) arrangements for Recognising Positive Achievement.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 New National Qualifications were introduced in 2014. In March 2017, in order to tackle bureaucracy and over assessment of pupils, the Depute First Minister issued new guidance on behalf of the Assessment and National Qualifications Group.
- 2.2 A number of recommendations were made in the new guidance but the most significant change is the lack of a fallback from National 5 to National 4. Whilst the reduction in the amount of assessments pupils will sit has been welcomed, there has also been both local and national concern that pupils who sit National 5 qualifications but fail the final exam may leave school with no award.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Education and Communities Committee notes the changes to SQA arrangements and the interim position statement issued to Inverclyde Schools.

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4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The SQA introduced new National Qualifications with the first diet of National Qualifications, (National 1 – 5) being undertaken in 2014. The new Higher was introduced the following year in 2015 and Advanced Higher in 2016.

For students to be successful in gaining a course award at National 5 they have to pass three units which are internally assessed as either a pass or a fail and an externally assessed course assessment/exam which could be any two elements from the following:

- Assignment
- Case Study
- Practical Activity
- Performance
- Portfolio
- Project
- Question paper/test

If successful, students are graded from A to D or No Award.

National 4 also comprises three internally assessed units. Students also sit an Added Value Unit (AVU) which contains the same components as the National 5 external assessment. This AVU, which is set by the SQA, is carried out by schools in accordance with SQA guidelines, quality assurance procedures and requirements. National 4 awards are either a pass or fail and are not graded.

Up until, and including, the 2017 diet of SQA exams, if students pass the three internally assessed units for National 5 but fail the external assessment, there is a system of Recognising Positive Achievement (RPA) also called “fallback”.

If students have passed the three units at National 5 they are automatically credited with National 4 units. Students then only need to complete the Added Value Unit at National 4 to achieve a National 4 course award. Schools frequently would have used these assessments with pupils as a “safety net” so they could automatically be awarded National 4 if they failed the National 5 exam or external assessment.

5.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 In March 2017 the Depute First Minister issued new guidance on behalf of the Assessment and National Qualifications Group. This decision was set in the context of the Curriculum for Excellence Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy which highlighted a number of actions for all involved in education. Teaching Unions argued that that there was an excessive burden of assessment on pupils, where pupils could be asked to sit too many assessments throughout the year. The complex system for assessing pupils’ learning was bureaucratic and proved to be a workload issue for teachers and unnecessarily stressful for pupils.

The new guidance stressed that a learner’s achievements (including attainment in National Qualifications) by the end of the Senior Phase should become the main focus for all schools, rather than on individual year on year attainment.

The guidance issued by the Assessment and National Qualifications Group included the following:

- The removal of mandatory unit assessments, initially from National 5 qualifications and, subsequently, from Highers and Advanced Highers.

- The extension of Grade D from 45 – 49% to 40 – 49% as the mechanism for recognising positive achievement.
- Revise the National 5 external assessments to strengthen them by:
 - Extending the existing external assessment e.g. extending the amount of questions in the exam.
 - Extension/modification of the existing item of coursework.
 - A new question paper.
 - A new item of coursework.
- Review assessment of the National 4 qualification.

Advice was also given to ensure that schools, parents and young people were making informed and accurate presentation decisions so that students followed an appropriate progression pathway.

5.2 Whilst the reduction in the amount of assessments pupils sit and the reduction in unnecessary bureaucracy and workload for teachers are welcomed, a number of concerns have been raised both locally and nationally about the issues that may result because of these changes.

- There could be a number of young people who will not achieve an award at all due to failing the external assessment at National 5. With no fallback position to get an award at National 4, pupils who are predicted to be borderline passes at National 5 and happen to fail the final exam would achieve no award. This may encourage pupils, parents and teachers to opt for National 4 rather than National 5 because this would be preferable to no award at all. In the future, pupils who are on the borderline between National 4 and National 5 will need to collect additional evidence for assessment at both National 4 and National 5 levels.
- Pupils will not automatically achieve a literacy or numeracy award as there is no requirement to sit these units. Currently pupils are awarded literacy and numeracy units as a result of gaining English or Mathematics qualifications. In the future these pupils may have to sit additional units. Care must be taken that literacy and numeracy measures through Insight (the performance management tool used by schools for attainment) provide an accurate reflection of literacy and numeracy levels. In the future, a failure at National 5 with no fallback would result in no literacy or numeracy units being awarded at all, whilst previously the pupil may have passed individual National 5 units.

Staff will not know the format of the new extended National 5 external assessments until later in the term to assist preparing students for the new external assessments.

5.3 Secondary schools in Inverclyde have discussed these changes with staff, pupils and parent representatives and will continue to keep them updated on arrangements and any future local or national guidance.

5.4 To help schools plan for next session, the Local Authority, working in partnership with the senior management teams of schools, has prepared an interim position statement whilst the national guidance comes into effect. This interim position statement is attached as Appendix 1.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

Finance

6.1 Financial Implications

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Year	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (if applicable)	Other Comments

6.2 **Legal**

N/A.

6.3 **Human Resources**

N/A.

6.4 **Equalities**

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

Yes See attached appendix.

No This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

6.5 **Repopulation**

N/A.

7.0 **CONSULTATION**

7.1 N/A.

8.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

8.1 Appendix 1 National 5 Interim Position Statement 2017/18.

**National 5:
Interim Position Statement for 2017-18**

Our aim is to reduce the unit assessment burden for pupils where the department is confident they will meet the assessment standards of National 5.

An overall National 4 award would be useful for pupils who are leaving school or not progressing in a particular subject. Exceptional circumstance would be defined as where a pupil would be exiting school without a qualification. In these circumstances Recognising Positive Achievement arrangements would be used.

Schools should ensure they maintain accurate tracking and monitoring evidence to be able to gauge pupil progress and ensure they are presented at an appropriate level.

To reduce teacher and student workload and the burden of assessment, there would be no expectation that pupils who were on track to achieve National 5 would be required to sit units.

For borderline pupils:

Departments should collect appropriate assessment evidence to show completion of the National 5 units, including literacy and numeracy. Where there is no immediate hierarchy between National 5 and National 4 units, departments should make appropriate arrangements to collect assessment evidence,

If a change of presentation level is being considered pupil and parent views should be taken into account.

This interim position statement will be reviewed in August 2018.