

SPICe Briefing

Curriculum for Excellence

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The Curriculum for Excellence covers ages 3 to 18 and was officially implemented from August 2010. New qualifications will be introduced in school year 2013/14. This paper provides an overview of the new curriculum and qualifications and outlines some of the debate surrounding these changes.

This updates SPICe Briefing 10/10. SPICe Briefings 08/08 and 07/18 give information on the previous curriculum.

Correction: on p.3 it states that Intermediates will run for a further year. They will actually run for a further two years.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August this year, school pupils will be able to study for new qualifications – National 1 to 5. These replace Standard Grade, Intermediates and Access qualifications and are part of the process of curriculum reform that has been in development since 2002.

Starting with the National Debate on Education in 2002, a new curriculum covering pre-school, school and other learning from ages 3 to 18 was developed over the next 8 years and implemented in 2010. From pre-school to S3, pupils are entitled to a 'broad general education' organised around 'experiences and outcomes' in eight curriculum areas but with an emphasis on inter-disciplinary learning. Literacy and numeracy, health and well-being are to be embedded across all curriculum areas. With the assistance of their teachers, pupils will sum up their achievements at the end of primary school in P7 and at the end of the broad general education in S3. These profiles will include formal learning and achievements outside the classroom such as Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

Reflecting the idea that assessment should follow rather than lead the curriculum, new qualifications were developed after the main architecture of the curriculum was in place. Young people will take qualifications during the 'Senior Phase' (S4 to S6 or college up to age 18). New qualifications, National 1 to 5, will be available in August 2013. A new Higher and revised Advanced Higher will be introduced in 2014/15 and 2015/16 respectively. Standard Grades are running for the last time this year (2012/13) but Intermediates will continue for a further two years before being withdrawn.

Only qualifications at National 5 and above will have an element of external assessment, but all qualifications will be subject to moderation activity by the SQA through sampling coursework and units. In addition, teacher judgements at all levels of CfE will be assisted by a National Assessment Resource – an online depository of examples which will enable individual teachers to compare their approach with others.

Education Scotland and the SQA have provided a large amount of documentation and briefing and held hundreds of events on CfE. However, throughout its development there have been concerns, particularly amongst teaching unions, that there has not been enough time for preparation and that the materials provided are too vague. More recently, there has been concern about the number of subjects that can be studied in S4. There is a variety of practice emerging across Scotland with most local authorities offering between 6 and 8 subjects. It is for schools and education authorities to show how their different curricular structures meet the requirements of the national CfE guidance.

While qualifications ought not to lead the curriculum, it is the introduction of National 4 and 5 this August that will be the measure of success for this 10 year reform programme.

BACKGROUND

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) has been a process of education reform lasting around ten years. It has introduced a new framework for the school curriculum from ages 3 to 18 along with new qualifications. This has all been done in terms of policy and guidance for schools as there is almost no statutory curriculum in Scotland. The exceptions are a duty to make provision for teaching Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas¹ (Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (c44) (s1(5) (a) iii) and that religious instruction is normally expected to be provided (Education (Scotland) Act 1980 s8(i)). In addition, secondary legislation ([SSI 2000/443](#)) sets out five statutory national priorities for education which are: achievement and attainment (particularly in literacy and numeracy), framework for learning, inclusion and equality, values and citizenship and learning for life. Curriculum for Excellence has made no changes to this statutory framework.

Delivery of the curriculum is the responsibility of education authorities and individual schools under guidance from the Scottish Government and Education Scotland. Education authorities are expected to issue clear policy statements to individual schools on how the curriculum is to be delivered. Head teachers are responsible for the day to day implementation, management and organisation of the curriculum.

The then Scottish Executive set up a “National Debate on Education” in 2002 to develop its long term education policy, followed by a review of the 3-18 curriculum in 2003. The review group’s report, “A Curriculum for Excellence” (Scottish Executive 2004a) set out the aims of education and the principles that should underpin the modern curriculum.

Publications on the new curriculum are available on the Education Scotland website at: <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/>

THE 3-18 CURRICULUM REVIEW

The 2002 “National Debate on Education” suggested the need to:

- reduce overcrowding in the curriculum
- make learning more active, challenging and enjoyable
- make better connections between the stages in the curriculum from 3 to 18
- achieve a better balance between “academic” and “vocational” subjects
- broaden the range of learning experiences for young people
- equip young people with core skills
- make sure that approaches to assessment and certification support learning
- offer more choices to meet the needs of individual young people

In response, a curriculum review group (established November 2003) developed proposals for the purposes of education and key principles for curriculum design (Scottish Executive 2004a) which were fully accepted by Ministers (Scottish Executive, 2004b).

DEVELOPMENT OF PROPOSALS

CfE aims to focus classroom practice upon the child and around the [four capacities](#) of education which provide opportunities for children and young people to develop as: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors.

¹ Reading the duty to make adequate provision for school education with the definition of school education as including the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic speaking areas. s. 1 Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

These four capacities reflected many of the concepts in the previous curriculum but set them out more explicitly. They are also picked up in one of the Government's 15 national outcomes which is that: "our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens".²

The curriculum review group also established clear [principles for curriculum design](#). Four were new: challenge and enjoyment, depth, personalisation and choice, and relevance. Three were the same as the existing principles: breadth, progression and coherence. There were two existing principles which are not repeated - balance and continuity.

[Progress and Proposals](#) (Scottish Executive 2006a) set out the features of the new curriculum which are:

- the whole school has responsibility for developing the four capacities in every pupil
- at all stages from the early years to S6 learning will be through:
 - the ethos and life of the school as a community
 - curriculum areas and subjects
 - interdisciplinary projects and studies
 - opportunities for personal achievement
- schools will be given greater scope in designing their own curriculum which should provide opportunities for broader achievements, interdisciplinary activities and personal choices
- there is more emphasis on active learning³ – particularly in the early primary stages
- greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy with all teachers having responsibility for this
- an emphasis on interdisciplinary learning

This was followed by five sets of guidance published between 2006 and 2010 in the series 'Building the Curriculum' (BTC). BTC1 (Scottish Executive, 2006b) explains how the different curriculum areas contribute to developing the four capacities and [BTC2](#) (Scottish Executive 2007) covered active learning in the early years. [BTC 3](#) (Scottish Government, 2008a) replaced previous guidance on curriculum design setting out that all children and young people are entitled to experience:

- a coherent curriculum from 3 to 18
- a broad general education
- a senior phase when qualifications are taken
- opportunities for developing skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work (with a continuous focus on literacy, numeracy and health and well-being)
- opportunities for pupils to achieve to the highest levels they can through appropriate personal support and challenge
- opportunities to move into positive and sustained destinations beyond school

[BTC4](#) (Scottish Government, 2009a) provides guidance for all those who support children and young people to develop skills in all learning settings such as pre-school, school and college. As well as literacy, numeracy and health and well-being, it covers personal learning planning, career management, working with others, leadership, physical co-ordination, enterprise and employability. BTC4 also references the Skills Strategy (Scottish Government 2007b) which

² The 15 national outcomes sit with five strategic objectives and a number of national indicators to form the national performance framework agreed with COSLA (Scottish Government, 2007a).

³ That is, pupils are actively engaged in the learning process and take more responsibility for their own learning rather than sitting "passively" having information presented to them. For further discussion see [LTS online](#)

refers to five 'core skills' of communication, numeracy, problem solving, information technology and working with others. BTC5 (Scottish Government, 2010) provides guidance on how teachers and local authorities are to develop their approach to assessment (see below p.9).

The content of the curriculum is to be designed with reference to the 'Building the Curriculum' guidance and statements of 'experiences and outcomes' in different curricular areas (see below p.9). Assessment is largely based on the principles developed through the 'Assessment is for Learning' programme and qualifications are being replaced or revised to reflect the new curriculum (see below p.12).

IMPLEMENTATION

CfE was officially implemented in August 2010 when the pupils who would be the first to sit the new exams in 2014 started secondary school. Primary schools had however been using CfE approaches in their work for a number of years.

There is a national CfE Management Board which has overall strategic management, supplemented since October 2011 by an Implementation Group chaired by Education Scotland. The SQA is developing the new qualifications and will have responsibility for the operation of the first exam diet under CfE in summer 2014. Education Scotland is providing curriculum guidance and advice. As well as the formal guidance, they publish briefings summarising particular aspects of the curriculum and have offered tailored support to any school that asks for it.

It is not possible to identify the total amount of funding provided for developing and implementing Curriculum for Excellence because it is integral to the activity of local authorities and schools. During the years of its development, there have been regular calls for extra resources of money, time and information. In 2009 it was reported that specific CfE spend to date had been £17.8m (BBC 2009). Since then, £14m of extra resources have been provided:

- £6.7m in 2010-12 and £3.76m in 2012-15 for quality assurance and moderation of assessment (Scottish Government personal communication)
- £3.5m in 2012/13 for a support package for delivery of CfE in secondary schools (Education Scotland 2012a)

Among other things, this has supported 6 extra CPD days (3 up to 2009, 1 in 2010 and 2 in 12/13 for secondary schools only) and large scale programmes of events. From September 2010 to March 2011 Education Scotland held around 400 events, suspending its inspection activity to do so. In 2012 Education Scotland offered a range of CPD events and opportunities. SQA have also run a large number of support events initially focused on curriculum areas. From October 2012 to March 2013, SQA is running around 150 subject specific events "to give subject practitioners an overview of the assessment support materials that will be produced" (SQA 2012)

The actual spend on developing and implementing CfE will be far higher than the above estimate, comprising significant resources in Education Scotland and SQA as well as extensive development time required in local authorities and schools. This has, however, generally been undertaken within existing resources.

The table below outlines the key developments on CfE since 2003 and planned dates for implementation of the new qualifications.

Table 1: Development of A Curriculum for Excellence

Date	Development
2003	Curriculum Review Group is established
2004	The Review Group publish A Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive 2004a) setting out proposed aims for education and principles of the curriculum A Curriculum for Excellence: Ministerial Response (Scottish Executive 2004b) is published and Ministers establish a Programme Board.
2005	Groups established to review existing guidance.
2006	<i>Progress and Proposals</i> (Scottish Executive 2006a) made more detailed proposals. Building the Curriculum 1 published (Scottish Executive 2006b)
2007	<i>Building the Curriculum 2 Active Learning in the Early Years</i> (Scottish Executive, 2007) September: Draft experiences and outcomes start to be published
2008	Continuing release of and engagement on draft experiences and outcomes including trying them in a range of schools. Consultation on qualifications on the next generation of national qualifications between June and October (Scottish Government, 2008b) Building the Curriculum 3: A Framework for Learning and Teaching published. This replaced the existing guidance on the 3-5 curriculum, 5-14 curriculum and curriculum design in the secondary sector
2009	April: Publication of full experiences and outcomes June: Announcement of new qualifications framework September: Assessment in Curriculum for Excellence: Strategic vision, key principles , (Scottish Government, 2009c) Building the Curriculum 4: skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work
2010	January: <i>Building the Curriculum 5 - Assessment Framework</i> (Scottish Government, 2010) August: Schools begin to deliver Curriculum for Excellence August: Certification of first Scottish Baccalaureates Autumn term: material starts being added to the National Assessment Resource
2011	January to December: Draft documents for the new qualifications from National 2 to 5. March: Excellence group reports published, reviewing the way forward for the main subject groups.
2012	January: Revised Access 1, 2 and 3 to be renamed National 1, 2 and 3 from 2013/14. March to December: Draft documents for new Advanced Higher published April: final unit and course specifications for new qualifications from National 2 to 5 and Higher. June: All P7 pupils will have developed a 'pupil profile' Oct – Dec: first batch of course materials, unit assessment support materials and professional focus papers
2013	February: specimen question papers for National 5 January to April: further batches of course materials, unit assessment support materials and professional focus papers. April: Final unit and course specifications for Advanced Higher June: all S3 pupils to have an S3 profile August: final certification of qualifications at Standard Grade
2014	August: first certification of new qualifications National 1 to 5
2015	August: Final certification of qualifications at Access 1 to 3, Intermediate 1 and 2 and existing Higher and Advanced Higher. August: First certification of new Higher
2016	August: first certification of new Advanced Higher.

Source: Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2009a. Russell, M. 2010, Scottish Government on-line, Education Scotland 2010b, SQA online.

PROGRESSION AND THE LEVELS OF THE CURRICULUM

The Curriculum for Excellence provides a broad general education to the end of S3 divided into five levels from 'early' to 'fourth.' Learners will progress through the levels at different rates. This is followed by a 'senior phase' when qualifications are taken. Table 2 below, relates the curricular levels to stages of education.

Table 2: Curriculum levels and stage of education

Level	Experiences and outcomes for most children and young people
early	in pre-school and primary 1
first	by the end of P4 but earlier for some
second	by the end of P7, but earlier for some
third	in S1 to S3, but earlier for some. Fourth level broadly equates to SCQF level 4
fourth	
Senior phase	S4-S6, or college and work-based training up to age 18.

(Source: [Education Scotland, online](#))

It is expected that most young people will achieve at least 'level 3' by the end of S3.

"it is our ambition that all young people will be secure in their learning through to third level outcomes in all curricular areas by the end of S3 and some young people up to fourth level in some curricular areas." (Scottish Government, 2009b).

Pupils should be able to progress through the curriculum in different ways. In order to progress within a level, "learners should be able to demonstrate confidence, proficiency and security" in their breadth of learning, in tackling challenging material and in applying learning to new contexts. Although in general, learning in S3 will be at the third and fourth levels of the curriculum, it may extend beyond this:

"There is no ceiling to the level at which young people can learn in S3. Many will want to stretch their learning beyond third and fourth levels and be very capable of doing so." (Education Scotland 2012b)

By the end of P7 and S3, pupils will have developed a 'profile' recognising their progress across the curriculum and summarising their achievements within and outwith school.

The senior phase runs from S4 to S6 where a young person can take a qualification at whatever level is appropriate. Young people can also complete the senior phase in college. When pupils move into S4, most will be expected to work at SCQF levels 4 or 5 (National 4 and 5 qualifications), although some might take awards at National 1 to 3 (SCQF levels 1 to 3) and others might be ready to start studying for Higher (SCQF level 6). The qualifications available through the senior phase are outlined below at p.13.

BROAD GENERAL EDUCATION

EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES

For education from pre-school to S3 (age 3 to 15) the standards against which performance is measured are set out in statements about Experiences and Outcomes that pupils will have achieved (Scottish Government, 2010). Experiences and Outcomes cover the following areas:

1. [Numeracy and Mathematics](#)
2. [Sciences](#)
3. [Expressive Arts](#)
4. [Social studies](#)
5. [Languages](#)
6. [Religious and moral education](#)
7. [Technologies](#)
8. [Health and Wellbeing](#)

In addition, the following three areas are to be taught across the whole curriculum, with an emphasis on inter-disciplinary study:

9. [Health and Wellbeing across learning](#)
10. [Literacy across learning](#)
11. [Numeracy across learning](#)

The table below uses experiences and outcomes in reading to illustrate the levels from ‘early’ to ‘fourth’.

Table 3: Experiences and Outcomes for literacy; tools for reading

Level	Experience and Outcome
Early	I explore sounds, letters and words, discovering how they work together, and I can use what I learn to help me as I read and write
First	I am learning to select and use strategies and resources before I read, and as I read, to help make the meaning of texts clear
Second	I can select and use a range of strategies and resources before I read, and as I read, to make meaning clear and give reasons for my selection
Third	I can select and use the strategies and resources I find most useful before I read, and as I read, to monitor and check my understanding
Fourth	Before and as I read, I can apply strategies and use resources independently to help me read a wide variety of texts and/or find the information I need

(Source: Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2009b)

ASSESSMENT AND PROFILING IN THE BROAD GENERAL EDUCATION

What is assessed

Pupils from pre-school to S3 are assessed against the ‘Experiences and Outcomes’ discussed above. ‘Principles for Practice’ papers for each of the curriculum areas describe the broad approach to assessment. The main guidance on assessment from Education Scotland is Building the Curriculum 5 – a framework for assessment (2010), [quality assurance and moderation](#) (2011) and recognising achievement, profiling and reporting (2011). (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010a, 2010b, 2011)

Rather than considering only whether minimum standards have been achieved, assessment should identify how well pupils have achieved, how they have responded to challenging material and how they apply learning to new situations. Progress in terms of the four capacities will also be considered, in order to discuss ‘overall development’ (Scottish Government, 2010).

Method

Assessment should use a broad range of evidence from day to day learning and include written and oral work as well as tests and examinations. The Curriculum for Excellence approach is based on recognised good practice such as Assessment is for Learning. This emphasises the importance of achieving the appropriate balance between using assessment to sum up

attainment (summative assessment) and to develop learning (formative assessment). This is intended to provide a fuller picture of a pupil's learning than would be obtained by using only formal tests (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2009c).

Staff should discuss with pupils what they are expected to learn and engage them by using self and peer assessment. Pupils should agree learning goals and record them, for example in diaries, learning logs and progress files. Assessment is part of day to day learning and is also conducted from time to time to take stock of progress.

Teachers are encouraged to use a wide range of evidence and use their professional judgement to decide when a pupil has a firm grasp of the learning described by various 'experiences and outcomes.' Therefore, deciding that a pupil has achieved a 'level' is not based on a single piece of work. Guidance refers to breadth, depth, challenge and application. That is, covering a wide range of experiences and outcomes, at an appropriate level of complexity and being able to use learning in unfamiliar contexts.

Quality Assurance and Moderation

Assessment in Curriculum for Excellence is through teacher judgements and national qualifications (see below p.12 for qualifications). Consistency is achieved by a process of quality assurance and moderation. That is: "the range of approaches used for arriving at a shared understanding of standards and expectations. This involves teachers working together, drawing on guidance and exemplifications" (Scottish Government, 2010). This is supported by:

- National Assessment Resource
- participation in networks
- participation in a range of CPD activity

The National Assessment Resource was launched in Autumn 2010. It contains exemplification material developed by local authorities and schools supported by Education Scotland and SQA. Over time, it is expected that teachers themselves will contribute material which has been quality assured locally.

In addition to developing consistency through moderation, quality assurance will also be developed through:

- HMIE inspections
- school self evaluation process
- Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy, (results for numeracy were published in 2012, results for literacy are expected April 2013)
- SQA attainment analysis, showing results by local authority
- a revision of '[standard tables and charts](#)⁴' to be known as the "Senior phase benchmarking tool.'
- [PISA results](#) (an international survey of 15 year olds conducted every 3 years)

For qualifications, where individual teachers mark assessments, there should be school systems in place to ensure consistency. There will also be a degree of external verification by the SQA.

⁴ attainment statistics comparing performance in individual schools with comparator schools.

Reporting and Profiling

Pupils' progress and achievements are reported through annual reports to parents and this is not changing. BTC5 states that reports: "should note particular strengths, areas for development and achievements in challenging aspects and in the application of learning." In addition, CfE introduces 'pupil profiles' at the transition from primary to secondary school and at the transition from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase. Unlike school reports, the profiles are written by the pupil with support from the teacher. It will summarise a pupil's achievements and include a pupil statement. It should provide a profile of achievement in literacy, numeracy, health and well-being as well as personal achievements outwith school (Education Scotland, 2012c). By June 2012 all pupils in P7 were expected to have a P7 profile and by June 2013 all S3 pupils should have an S3 profile.

S3: TRANSITION TO THE SENIOR PHASE

S3 is the culmination of the 'Broad General Education' where pupils sum up their achievements in the S3 profile. It is also the transition to the senior phase and qualifications. Exactly how this transition will operate has been a matter of considerable controversy with many teachers and timetablers concerned about how to fit in eight subjects for qualification in S4 without stretching courses back into S3. In response, Education Scotland has emphasised that there will be considerable overlap in content between the experiences and outcomes at the 'fourth level' and requirements for the new qualifications. A recent Education Scotland briefing (2012b) stated that: "In many cases, learning at the third and fourth levels of the BGE will be directly relevant to that which will need to be demonstrated to gain a qualification."

The table below shows the 'Experiences and Outcomes' and National 4 requirements for one unit in geography in order to illustrate the relationship between the two.

Table 3: Matching the Broad General Education to National 4 Requirements

Experiences and Outcomes	National 4 Global Issues Unit
<p>Having researched the globalisation of trade, I can explain the interdependence of different parts of the world and assess the impacts for providers, consumers and the environment. SOC 4-11a</p> <p>Having studied an economic activity, I can explain its development and assess the impact of change within its locality and beyond. SOC 4-10c</p> <p>I can explain how the distribution and control of important natural resources affects the international power and influences of states. SOC 4-11b</p> <p>I can identify threats facing the main climate zones, including climate change, and analyse how these threats impact on the way of life. SOC 4-12a</p> <p>can carry out a geographical enquiry to assess the impact and possible outcomes of climate change on a selected region and can propose strategies to slow or reverse the impact. SOC 4-12b</p>	<p>Global Issues</p> <p>Key topics include climate change and sustainability; the impact of world climates; environmental hazards; trade and globalisation; and development and health.</p> <p>Learners will study major global issues and the strategies adopted to manage these.</p> <p>The learner will be required to provide evidence of: ability to use a limited range of numerical and graphical sources of information in familiar contexts about global issues straightforward descriptions and brief explanations demonstrating knowledge and understanding, which is mainly factual, of global issues</p>

(Source: SQA course assessment Geography National 4, Education Scotland: Experiences and Outcomes, social studies. SQA online).

Pupils in S3 may collect 'evidence' that matches that required for the National 4 and 5 qualifications. In this way, some S3 learning can be counted towards the notional 160 hours required for these courses. An Education Scotland briefing states: "there is no ceiling to the level of learning in S3" and "by the start of the Senior Phase, young people are well on their way to their first tranche of qualifications." However, while enabling some study aimed at qualifications, Education Scotland also state that: "The S3 experience needs to keep options open and avoid reducing young people's choices" (Education Scotland 2012b).

THE SENIOR PHASE: QUALIFICATIONS

The senior phase comprises learning from S4 to S6 and also includes learning in colleges. Table 4 below summarises the main school and college qualifications available, highlighting the new qualifications introduced through CfE. The main new elements are:

- Standard Grade will run for the last time in year 2012/13
- Intermediates and existing Access qualifications will run for the last time in year 2014/15
- new 'National' qualifications at national 1 to 5 from 2013/14
- new Highers from 2014/15 and Advanced Highers from 2015/16

The SQA have also developed 'Awards' and 'skills for work' courses. Courses have been developed for over 230 qualifications covering levels from National 2 to Higher (SQA 2012b). New subjects include lifeskills mathematics and environmental science. It will be for schools to decide which of these subjects to offer, in which years and how many each pupil can take.

Table 4: Qualifications in a Curriculum for Excellence

Qualification	SCQF level ⁵	Where and when normally studied	Assessment	Date to start
National Units	1 to 7	S4-S6 or college. Possibly also S3.	Typically 40 hours of learning. Building blocks of many other qualifications. Internal assessment	current
National 1	1	S4-S6	Internal assessment	2013/14
National 2	2	S4-S6	Internal assessment	2013/14
National 3	3	S4-S6	Internal assessment	2013/14
Skills for Work	3 to 6 (mostly 4 & 5)	S3-S4, college and workplace	Internal assessment.	current
National 4	4	S4-S6	internal assessment, not graded	In schools 2013/14. 1 st certification Aug 2014
National 5	5	S4-S6	some external assessment, graded A to D	As above
New Higher	6	S4-S6, normally S5	some external assessment, graded A to D,	In schools 2014/15. 1 st certification Aug 2015
New Advanced Higher	7	normally S6	some external assessment, graded A to D	In schools 2015/16. 1 st certification Aug 2016
Baccalaureate in languages or science	Elements at 6&7	S5-S6	combines courses in Higher and Advanced Higher with interdisciplinary project, awarded at pass and distinction	current
National Qualification group awards : (national certificate and national progression awards)	2 to 7	mainly college	focused on occupational area, internal assessment, not graded	current
Higher National Units	5 to 9	college	internal assessment	current
Modern Apprenticeships	2 or above	workplace	workplace based, might include SVQ or HN qualifications	current
SVQ	4 to 11	college and workplace		current
HNC	7	college		current
HND	8	college		current

(Source: SQA online).

⁵ The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework aligns qualifications to levels from 1 to 12 to enable easier comparison. See: [SCQF website](#).

NATIONAL 4 AND 5 QUALIFICATIONS AVAILABLE

Table 5 shows the National 4 and 5 qualifications in each of the eight subject areas.

Table 5: National 4 and 5 qualifications

Subject area	National 4	National 5
Expressive Arts	Art and Design, Music Technologies, Music and Drama	As N4 plus Dance
Health & Wellbeing	Care, Health and Food Technology, PE	As N4 plus Philosophy /Psychology/ Sociology
Sciences	As N5 plus 'science'.	Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Environmental Science.
Social studies	Geography, History, Modern Studies, Classical Studies, People and society, Administration and IT, Practical Cookery, Business.	As N4 minus 'Business', plus Accounting, Business Management, Economics, Practical cakecraft.
Languages	English, ESOL, Gaelic learners, Gaidhlig, Latin, Media, Modern languages (Cantonese, French, German, Italian, Mandarin, Spanish and Urdu)	
Mathematics	Mathematics	
Religious & Moral Education	Religious, moral and philosophical studies	
Technologies	Computing Science, Graphic Communication, Design and Manufacture, Engineering Science, Practical Woodworking, Practical Metalworking, Practical Electronics.	

(Source: SQA online [subjects](#))

COURSE STRUCTURE

Courses are typically made up of three units which are internally assessed on a pass/fail basis (they are however subject to external verification by the SQA). Pupils have to pass each unit to pass a course. At National 4, in addition to the three main units, there is an 'added value' unit. This is generally a project or assignment which forms the main assessment for the course. Because they are made up of units, National 4s are not graded but awarded as a pass or fail. Unit assessments are less prescribed than previously:

“They include a new type of Unit which is less prescriptive and more flexible, with fewer and broader outcomes, in order to encourage a more flexible approach to assessment” (Education Scotland 2012d).

There is a focus on ensuring a variety of types of evidence and assessment. For example,

“For Unit assessment purposes, a variety of methods of assessment could be used to gather evidence such as extended writing, source evaluation, pupil presentations, role play, research activities and creation of various media that will allow learners and teachers to establish their next steps.” (Geog N5 course and unit support notes)

For qualifications at National 5 and above, in addition to the three main units, there is also an externally marked assessment, generally including both coursework and an exam. To pass the course a pupil must pass the units and also pass the course assessment. The overall qualification is graded A to D. If a pupil fails the course assessment they will get credits for any of the units they have passed, but they will not get a 'compensatory' award at the next level down. i.e if they fail National 5 they won't be awarded a National 4 automatically. However, if a National 5 candidate has met the requirements of the added value unit at National 4 and there is

an appropriate link between the content of the National 4 and 5 courses (known as a hierarchy) the candidate may get a National 4 (SQA online – FAQs).

COURSE DOCUMENTATION

There is a very large amount of documentation for the new qualifications setting out the structure, learning requirements, assessment requirements and teaching suggestions. The main types of document are described below using an example from one qualification, Geography National 5 (SQA online).

The course and unit specifications are very general eg: for the Global Issues unit in Geography National 5, the unit specification requires:

- Describing, in detail, key features of a significant global geographical issue
- Giving detailed explanations of causes and effects of a global geographical issue
- Giving detailed descriptions and detailed explanations of strategies adopted in response to a significant global geographical issue

More specific content is available in the course assessment documents. For example, the environmental hazards topic will cover:

- main features of earthquakes, volcanoes and tropical storms
- causes of each hazard
- impact on the landscape and population of each hazard
- management — methods of prediction and planning

This specific content is given in further detail in the unit support notes. For example, the topic on environmental hazards includes:

Learners will appreciate that environmental hazards affect people in different ways and happen at contrasting locations. Learners should show an appreciation of the concept of hazards as a risk and know that the greater the exposure to risk (how vulnerable they are and how this level of vulnerability will affect their capacity to cope) the more likely people are to experience an environmental hazard. Learners will give detailed explanations of the causes of one environmental hazard event that happens in the developed world and one environmental hazard event that happens in the developing world. For each named event the learner should explain in detail the natural causes of the environmental hazard and, where appropriate, investigate how human activity could contribute to these causes.

The content is again covered in the course materials which give specific suggestions for activities in lessons. Further, confidential, information about assessment standards and requirements is being provided to schools between October 2012 and April 2013. This includes specimen papers (February 2013) and specimen coursework (April 2013). Further guidance on how to approach assessing the units will also be published over the same period.

In addition, 'professional focus' papers are being published between November and February 2013. These set out important features of the approach to learning rather than discussing actual content. The extent to which explicit examples are given of differences between new and old courses varies between the papers. Education Scotland and local authorities are also producing examples of course materials for all National 4 and 5 courses.

The table below illustrates the different type of documentation available for National qualifications, using the example of Geography National 5 starting with the most general information and progressing to the more specific.

Table 6: course documentation for new qualifications

Document type	Example: Geography N5	Release date
Course specification (SQA) outlines <u>mandatory</u> structure and brief information on skills, knowledge, understanding and assessment.	3 units (physical environments, human environments and global issues) and a course assessment. Units can be assessed individually or through combined assessment.	April 2012 for National 2 to Higher final documents (drafts released earlier)
Unit Specification (SQA) outlines the <u>mandatory</u> structure of the individual units that make up a course	Each unit has outcome statements. Eg: Global Issues Unit has 2 outcomes, The teacher collects evidence which might include posters, talks, group work etc. Evidence can cover one or more units.	As above
Course Assessment Specifications (SQA) outlines the <u>mandatory</u> content and structure of assessment. Only courses at N5 and above have a course assessment.	1 ½ hr exam covering each of the 3 units (60 marks) A 1hr assignment (20 marks) in a topic of the pupil's choosing. More detail on content. Eg, For Global Issues pupils will answer on 2 of 6 topics such as 'climate change' or 'tourism'.	As above
Course and Unit Support Notes (SQA) suggestions for gathering evidence	Sets out difference in responses for learners at different levels. Gives detailed information on the content of each unit.	As above
Unit assessment support materials (SQA) Examples of tasks that could generate evidence of passing a Unit.	confidential	SQA secure site. National 2 – 5: Oct 2012 to April 2013. Support Pack for the Added Value Unit: April 2013 for N4 and April 14 for Higher.
Specimen coursework and marking instructions (SQA)	confidential	SQA secure site. by end April 2013 for National 5
Specimen question paper and marking instructions (SQA)	confidential	SQA secure site. End Feb 2013 for National 5
Advice and Guidance (Education Scotland)	Focused on National 4 and 5, where there are significant changes.	Education Scotland site. April 2012.
Exemplar Course Materials (Education Scotland, SQA and local authorities) Teaching suggestions	Initial draft. Provides a 'mind map' of each unit and gives teaching suggestions for one topic under each unit. Eg of the 6 topics under 'Global Issues' suggestions given for teaching 'environmental hazards' topic.	All documentation for N4 and 5 between Dec 2012 and April 2013.
Professional focus papers (Education Scotland) "to stimulate professional reflection and dialogue about learning"	Repeats some of the approaches to learning to be used. Eg: wider range of evidence for assessment, greater emphasis on choice and fewer teacher-led activities.	First batch Nov 2012.

CONCERNS OVER IMPLEMENTATION

While a principle of CfE is less prescription there have been concerns from the start about the lack of detail in guidance. As the start of the new qualifications gets closer, it has been issues of school timetabling and qualifications which have dominated the debate. In February 2013, the EIS found that 45% of secondary school teachers were confident that their department would be able to deliver the new qualifications (EIS 2013). There have also been concerns about how the new, more flexible, approach to qualifications will be treated by universities.

READINESS

Throughout the development of CfE there have been concerns about schools' readiness to deliver it. For example, in 2011, research in one local authority found that only 40% were confident about implementing CfE and only 30% agreed that national guidance was helpful in planning the curriculum (Priestly and Minty 2012). While official bodies such as SQA and Education Scotland and the CfE management board have consistently said that they are on track, there has been equally consistent worry, particularly from teacher unions, that teachers are not prepared and there have been calls for delay. A year's delay was granted in 2008, taking the initial implementation date to August 2010. From 2010 to early 2012 the EIS and other unions campaigned for a further year's delay. In early 2012, East Renfrewshire announced that it would delay implementation for a year in all of its schools. This option was only open to East Renfrewshire because it had replaced all its Standard Grade courses with Intermediates in 2005 and the SQA will still be running Intermediates in 2013/14.

The CfE management board, the Government, the SQA and Education Scotland have been clear that the reform programme is on schedule. Janet Brown (Chief Executive of the SQA) told the Parliament's Education Committee on 28th February 2012:

"We are and continue to be on track. We have a detailed plan, to ensure that we not only develop the qualifications but communicate what is in them openly and widely, and to ensure that we are ready to deliver the qualifications through the structure that is in place. We foresee no change to the schedule" (Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee 2012b, col 786).

In contrast, at the same meeting the EIS said there were problems in both primary and secondary schools. A survey by EIS in early 2012 found that 70% of respondents said they lacked confidence in their department's ability to deliver National 4 and 5 and 80% found government support unsatisfactory. In a survey issued to the Glasgow branch of the EIS in November 2012, 90% of the 258 respondents thought there wasn't enough time to implement National 4 and 5 and 77% said their department was not ready for the Senior Phase which will be starting in August 2013 (TESS, 2012a).

In March 2012, the Cabinet Secretary had told the Parliament's Education Committee that:

"There is still a small group of teachers in Scotland who do not like curriculum for excellence. They are entitled to feel that way. Some of them are quite vocal. I must say to them that that argument is over. [...] There is also a small group whose members genuinely regard themselves as not being ready. I think that my job is to offer them as much support as I can through Education Scotland [...] I hope that that will allow them to join the group of teachers who, with a greater or lesser degree of confidence, believe that they are ready." [...] If, at the end of the day, that cannot be done and there are sufficient numbers of teachers in a department or in a school who believe that they are not ready, it

will be possible to delay implementation" (Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee 2012c, col 830).

The Cabinet Secretary asked for an audit of whether local authorities were ready to implement the new exams. Published in May 2012 this concluded that all local authorities were ready and that schools were 'on track' to implement the new qualifications without delay. However, the audit found 'a small number of departments' that had made only limited progress:

"Overall, secondary schools are making good progress in their preparation for the new NQs, and are on track to implement them within the national timescale without invoking exceptional circumstances. With the exception of East Renfrewshire, no EA identified any whole school that would be seeking a delay in the introduction of new NQs. It was also the case that the audit did not identify any individual departments which had requested delay through the exceptional circumstances arrangements. However, a few EAs identified a small number of individual departments where there had been limited progress on implementation to date. In these cases, further dialogue is ongoing between the departments, the school and the EA" (Education Scotland 2012e).

The report was heavily criticised by unions as being superficial and for not consulting classroom teachers. (See for example the comments of the SSTA and EIS at the Parliament's Education Committee on 26th June 2012). Whereas some unions were sceptical of the likelihood of schools admitting that they need support, Bill Maxwell told the education committee in March 2012 that: "I think that part of the reason why we have not already seen much demand for the use of the exceptional circumstances arrangement is that there is constant support" (Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee 2012c, col 838).

The most recent survey of secondary school teachers, by the EIS (2013) found that:

- over 50% found the quality of information on CfE to be unsatisfactory (whether from the school, local authority, SQA or Education Scotland)
- over 60% found the quality and level of support to be unsatisfactory
- 43.4% were 'barely confident' in their department's ability to deliver National 4 and 5

At time of writing (February 2013) the proportion of the teaching profession which is ready to implement the new exams remains a contentious issue. The Audit gave the impression of good progress overall with a small number of departments needing to catch up. In contrast, surveys conducted by unions give the impression of a far more widespread lack of confidence in the ability of schools to implement CfE.

CURRICULUM STRUCTURE AND SUBJECT CHOICE

There has been considerable debate over the number of subjects that pupils can study in S4. There is no national guidance specifying a particular number that must be studied. Rather it is for the school and local authority to demonstrate how their curriculum structure meets the requirements of CfE. An EIS survey found that the most commonly reported plan was to offer six or eight subjects. However, some schools and local authorities have yet to finalise their arrangements.

Table 7: Variation in number of subjects likely to be taken in S4

Number of subjects	% teachers responding
5	7.7%
6	27.5%
7	18.1%
8	25.5%
Not applicable	21.1%

EIS, 2013.

The expectation of some teachers and parents is that pupils ought to be able to study eight subjects in S4. Under Standard Grades, subject choices were made at the end of S2, and in general, eight subjects were studied in S3 and S4. Under CfE pupils should follow a Broad General Education in S1 to 3, taking qualifications in S4-6. As National qualifications comprise a notional 160 hours learning, this appeared to leave only one year to study the new 'Nationals' compared with two years for the old Standard Grades. This led many schools to either reduce the number of subjects they were offering in S4 or to continue the practice of making subject choices at the end of S2 (sometimes referred to as the 2+2+2 model). In a recent EIS survey (EIS 2013) 44% of respondents said their school was sticking to pupils making their main subject choices in S2.

Guidance and various statements from Education Scotland have shown that while pupils should not have their options 'closed off' before the end of S3, they can still work towards qualifications during that time.

Education Scotland have been clear that they do not dictate curriculum models:

"We are not dictating any particular curriculum model to deliver curriculum for excellence" (Ken Muir, Education Scotland at Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee 2012a, col 1250)

However, guidance and statements do not support formal subject choice in S2:

"[in S1-S3] avoid closing off options for the choice of qualifications [...] in S4. This includes [requiring] specific subject choices at the end of S2 (or even earlier). [...] Models such as these would deny young people the important benefits of a broad general education up to the end of S3, a key feature of Curriculum for Excellence" (Education Scotland 2012f).

"It is at the end of S3 that young people should make their choices for qualifications in the senior phase" (Education Scotland 2012g).

"arrangements for choices in S1-3 should not narrow options for the senior phase, and should not involve traditional subject choice for all young people in a cohort at or before the end of S2" (Alasdair Allan, MSP in TESS 2012b).

That said, learning in S3 can contribute to qualifications.

"there is not a ceiling on the level of learning that can be undertaken in S3. Many will want to stretch their learning beyond third and fourth levels and be very capable of doing so, and some will go higher still." (Education Scotland 2012b)

"since the National Qualifications have been designed to build on the experiences and outcomes, learning in S3 can contribute to qualifications in the senior phase. However, the S3 curriculum should not be designed only around qualifications." [...] "it would be the

responsibility of the school to match up the assessment evidence from the broad general education into the assessment standards of the relevant qualification” (Education Scotland 2012g)

More advanced learners might bypass the National qualifications and move straight to studying for Highers in S4. The Chief Executive of the SQA, Janet Brown told the Education Committee in February 2012 that:

“it is really important that we think of this not as a rigid two plus two plus two system or a three plus three system, but as a continuum of learning that should be validated and certificated at the right point in time” (Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee 2012b, col 795).

Course materials

While a principle of CfE is that teachers have more flexibility to develop their own courses, concern about qualification requirements and the level of work involved have led to some to ask for more detail. For example, SSTA told the Parliament’s Education Committee that:

“For any previous major change that we have had, a big pack of materials would arrive, which we would sift through, sort out the best bits and adapt them for our own use—or ignore them if we wished. However, we have largely had nothing in the way of teaching materials up to this point” (Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee 2012a, col 1254).

For this reason, in March 2012 the Scottish Government and EIS had agreed that various organisations would work together to develop course materials. In June 2012, the Cabinet Secretary told the Education Committee:

“This is aimed primarily at reducing the workload implications of schools having to prepare new course materials” (Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee 2012a, col 1266).

These materials are being prepared by Education Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education (ADEs). They are working with schools and local authorities to create a ‘pool’ of National 4 and 5 course materials. Larry Flanagan of the EIS explained:

“A key aspect of the agreement is the production of the national 4 and 5 course materials. We have a clear commitment from Education Scotland that it will take the lead role in co-ordinating and disseminating those course materials. There was some expectation that Education Scotland would produce all the materials, but that is beyond its capacity. We are looking for a collegiate approach to producing the materials. The key issue for us is that they are produced for schools to allow the national 4 and 5 courses to happen in 2013-14” (Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee 2012a, col 1253).

UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

The flexibility inherent in the Senior Phase has created an issue for university entrance arrangements and uncertainty for pupils who would want to be sure that their choices of school qualifications will not disadvantage their choice of university course. In particular, some courses ask for Highers to be passed in a single sitting which led to concern that a pupil studying Highers over two years might be disadvantaged.

Pupils who are currently in S3 could be starting university in Autumn 2015 and universities will be setting their entrance requirements for Autumn 2015 in November 2013. However, most pupils tend to stay at school for sixth year and so will be starting university in autumn 2016.

A working group was established and their report in May 2012 included the following recommendations for Universities (Universities Scotland 2012)

- Re-examine any specific or unusual admission requirements, particularly the arguments for, and practice of, any expectation of four or five Highers all-at-one-sitting, to ensure that they are consistent with a commitment to fair admissions policies that allow equal consideration of candidates who possess the necessary knowledge and skills base irrespective of what routes they may have taken through the senior phase.
- As specifications of the new qualifications being developed by SQA become available and internal discussions proceed, Scottish universities will publish guidance for schools and prospective students as a matter of urgency

POLICY CHANGES

Some changes have been made to the programme in reaction to the debate. In particular:

- in November 2008, the implementation date was delayed by year to August 2010.
- in March 2010, separate literacy and numeracy qualifications were dropped. Instead, literacy and numeracy will be certificated as mandatory elements in English and Mathematics at National 3 and 4. At National 5, literacy and numeracy are embedded across the English and Mathematics courses although a separate unit is available.
- changes were made to the draft Experiences and Outcomes following the engagement process. There were substantial changes made to those for science.
- concerns about CPD and resources for implementation led to the provision of £4m for 100 teachers to work on the Curriculum for Excellence and 3 extra in-service days between 2008 and 2009. A further extra day was announced January 2010.
- In January 2012, the revised Access qualifications were renamed National 1, 2 and 3.
- In September 2011 it was announced that in very exceptional circumstances where a department is not ready to introduce the new national qualifications for certifications in 2013-14, contingency arrangements would be allowed
- In March 2012, the Cabinet Secretary and the EIS teachers' union agreed on the provision of extra course materials.
- In June 2012 it was agreed to bring forward the planned publication date of SQA assessment support materials from February 2013 to October 2012. "That is a direct response to requests from teachers for more information as soon as possible, and is a further indication of the level of support that is provided." (Michael Russell, MSP, Scottish Parliament Education Committee 2012a)

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