Introduction

This submission builds on the four earlier progress reports, which were presented to the Education and Culture Committee in February 2012, February 2014, September 2014 and February 2015.

In February 2015, SQA reported on the steps we have put in place to support the successful delivery of the new Higher; the continued delivery of the National 1–5; and preparation for Advanced Higher which was successfully introduced in session 2015/16.

SQA is keenly aware of its responsibility to maintain the credibility, quality and standards of Scottish Qualifications over time. We continue to work closely with all our stakeholders to ensure appropriate support is given and appropriate actions taken to maintain the robust Scottish standard in our National Qualifications.

In addition to the National Qualifications (N1 – N5, Higher and Advanced Higher), we have also developed broader qualifications to meet a wider range of learners’ needs, including new Awards in areas such as leadership, employability, personal finance and a number of Skills for Work Courses. Our extensive portfolio of qualifications also supports a range of recommendations from the recent report from the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce.

In developing the National Qualifications, the following assumptions were made:

- Candidates would have completed the experiences and outcomes of Broad General Education
- Candidates would be assessed by teachers and presented at the appropriate level for their knowledge and skills
- Candidates entering into National 5 courses would be ‘secure’ in their learning at Curriculum Level 4
- Teachers would be familiar with holistic assessment and the use of naturally occurring evidence
- Courses were designed to be delivered in notionally 160 hours over varying periods of time dependent on the individual learner

SQA continues to adapt and enhance our support, quality assurance, and communication around the new qualifications in response to feedback from schools, local authorities and parents.

Review of Implementation of National Qualifications

In its role as the National Awarding body for Scotland, SQA routinely monitors and evaluates all its qualifications. As part of SQA’s initial evaluation of the new National Qualifications, we carried out two pieces of research earlier this year:
Research and Evidence Report: Internal Unit Assessment in National Courses which reviewed the policy and guidance documents that shaped the new Courses, and was informed by internal SQA discussions, National Qualifications Support Teams focus groups, online SQA teacher survey, surveys undertaken by other stakeholders, and the approach being taken to Unit and Course assessment.

National Course Design and Assessment – An evaluation of the impact of the implementation of the new National Qualifications produced from fieldwork visits to over 40 schools to meet with separate focus groups of learners, teachers and senior managers.

SQA published these pieces of research in May [www.sqa.org.uk/ngresearch](http://www.sqa.org.uk/ngresearch) and has taken action to address the findings associated with qualifications and assessment design.

SQA has recognised that it is essential to re-balance the assessments associated with National Courses. As a result in May of this year SQA published Subject Review Reports, which outline actions to address workload concerns in unit assessment by accelerating changes into session 2016-17 with further changes to follow in the next two years. SQA is confident that these changes will alleviate workload concerns arising from assessment, re-assessment and the recording of evidence while, at the same time, maintaining the standards and credibility of the qualifications.

During the course of SQA’s evidence gathering, some broader areas were also identified that schools and teachers need to consider. The outcomes of this work were also fed into the Ministerial Group on Assessment and National Qualifications Group (ANQ). These issues include:

- Ensuring that the broad general education provides good preparation of candidates for progression into National Courses within each subject, taking account of the level and depth of skills and knowledge required.
- Ensuring that candidates are presented for Courses at the appropriate level, based on reliable and robust judgements of the curriculum level achieved. This, for example, means that pupils should be secure at Curriculum Level 4 prior to starting a National 5 Course; similarly, pupils should be secure at Curriculum Level 3 prior to embarking on a National 4 Course.
- Ensuring sufficient time is allocated for learning, teaching and assessment (160 hrs).

3 Summary

A key responsibility for SQA is to ensure the standard and credibility of Scotland’s qualifications for the benefit of all learners. SQA is committed to the continued implementation of the National Qualifications and to maintaining their integrity and credibility. SQA will continue to work with local authorities, schools, colleges, partners and teaching unions to deliver for our young people.

The Deputy First Minister has made clear his commitment to reviewing potential future models of assessment and qualifications and SQA will continue to work closely with him and the ANQ group to address possible options for redesign or modification over the longer term.