

## SQA NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS – QUESTIONS FROM PARENTS

### INTRODUCTION

This short paper has been produced in response to a number of frequently asked questions from parents concerning the new SQA National Qualifications. In addition to the following specific questions and answers, parents are advised to consult the wealth of information held within the Education Scotland and SQA web sites. The SQA publication *'What you need to know: A guide to the new National Qualifications for parents/carers - Spring/Summer 2012'*, is a particularly good reference source.

All Dundee secondary schools are actively engaging with parents/carers around the new SQA National Qualifications and senior phase (S4 – S6) curriculum developments. Parents/carers are therefore advised, in the first instance, to consult their child's secondary school with any initial enquiries on such matters.

### QUESTIONS

1. Will pupils from different secondary schools in Dundee sit the same number of new SQA qualifications in their S4 year?

**All DCC Education Department pupils will study a maximum of 6 subjects at National 4 and 5 levels in S4 and up to 5 Highers/AHs in S5/6. Given the importance of English and Mathematics, it is expected that all pupils continue to study these subjects up to the highest level of which they are capable. In most, but not all cases, this will be up to and including National 5 level. It is recognised, however, that some pupils may not be able to progress beyond National 3 or National 4 level.**

2. What are the entry qualifications/expectations of students in terms of the new SQA exams from Colleges/Universities/Employers?

**For entry to Higher Education institutions, SQA Higher qualifications will continue, as at present, to guide Higher Education Institutions' decisions regarding entry requirements for degree courses. Importantly, all DCC Education Department pupils, commensurate with their ability/aptitude, will have the opportunity to study up to 5 subjects in S5 and S6.**

**For Further Education Colleges, entry qualifications/expectations will continue, as at present, to be determined by individual establishments in accordance with existing practice e.g. an FE course currently requiring 5 credit passes at Standard Grade is expected to require 5 passes at National 5.**

**Employers will continue to set their own entry qualifications/expectations within the changing landscape of Curriculum for Excellence and related senior phase SQA qualifications. SQA are investing a considerable amount of time and effort in engagement activity with employers to promote knowledge, understanding and awareness of the new qualifications.**

3. How can parents support their children's learning and preparation for exams when they do not yet know what the exams will look like?

**In addition to continuing to provide a home environment conducive to home learning/study, parents can support their child's learning and preparation through the provision of appropriate resources. SQA will be publishing three main resources: core classroom texts or student books; revision resources or success guides; and exam practice papers reflecting the content and format of the new National Qualifications. Specimen question papers and other assessment resources will be available before the new qualifications are introduced to help learners revise and prepare. The following subject areas will be covered by one or more of the above resource types:**

**English, Maths, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Modern Studies, Geography, History, Graphic Communication, Design and Manufacture, Health & Food Technology, Hospitality, PE, Business Management, Administration and IT, Computing Science and French. Although not endorsed by SQA, Leckie and Leckie will also be producing a range of study guides.**

4. The new Curriculum for Excellence aims to offer a 'broader general education' S1-S3. How can education be 'broader' between S4 and S6 when examinable subjects are reduced?

**One of the primary objectives of the new Curriculum for Excellence is to improve learners' attainment and achievement, leading to positive and sustained destinations, by providing a broader and deeper platform of learning throughout the broad general education, age 3 to age 15. The senior phase between S4 and S6 will provide learners with the opportunity to study a reduced number of subjects (as outlined in 1 above) in accordance with their individual interests, capabilities, needs and vocational aspirations.**

5. What happens now for S3 pupils?

**Secondary schools are already in the process of preparing S3 pupils and their parents/carers for S3 pupils' move into the senior phase. Final course choices for current S3 pupils will take place between January and March 2013.**

6. Are all schools now doing Curriculum for Excellence course work?

**Yes, from ages 3 to 15. All Dundee secondary schools have for some time been delivering the new Curriculum for Excellence in line with national and local curriculum design principles and values. All Dundee secondary schools are continuing to bring 'learning to life' and 'life to learning' in realising our shared aspiration with parents and carers to enable all children and young people to fully realise their potential.**

7. When do the first set of children sitting exams in 2014 get assessed and monitored?

**Final assessments in the form of the SQA examinations will take place in May 2014. In addition, teachers will assess the new SQA Courses and Units at National 1 to National 4 levels. SQA will check the assessments to make sure they meet national standards.**

**Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher levels will still include work that is assessed by teachers, but learners will also have to pass a course**

**assessment for these levels. This will usually involve a question paper and/or coursework.**

**Building on assessment approaches deployed in early years and primary school settings, a range of assessment methods including assignments, practical performances, case studies, portfolios and question papers appropriate to the subject will be used.**

**Monitoring and tracking of pupils' learning, progress and attainment will continue, as at present, throughout pupils' courses of study in all subjects.**

8. Will there still be prelim equivalents at the beginning of 4th year? How will these work? Are there still going to be NAB tests for pupils to sit?

**Prelims will not take place at the beginning of S4 as this is the point in time that pupils will commence their study of new National Qualifications.**

**It is likely that schools, in their own way, will continue to offer pupils an experience of simulated exam conditions at an appropriate time in advance of the actual exams. Such preliminary exams will provide an additional source of assessment evidence to help teachers meet pupils' learning needs and, in addition, add to the rich bulk of assessment evidence gathered throughout the year 4 course of study.**

**NAB tests will no longer exist. See response 7.**

9. Are all secondary schools going to do an update parents evening and give out more information, such as what children will be learning in S4 and what they will need to study for the exams?

**All secondary schools are currently continuing to engage in a range of ways - letters, information evenings etc. - with parents and carers to support the smooth transition of current S3 pupils into the first year of what will be a new senior phase. DCC Education Department will continue, where possible, to facilitate the attendance of SQA Curriculum for Excellence Liaison Officers at such events.**

10. What expectations should parents have in relation to their children's learning? **See response 3.**

**Parents and carers, as at present, should continue to communicate and work in partnership with schools to ensure that their children achieve to the best of their ability.**

Where, following contact with schools, parents/carers require additional information and guidance/support, contact should be made with the Education Department's Advice, Information and Support Manager on 01382 433477.