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Parent/Carer of pupils in S4/5/6

Date: 7 September 2017

Dear Parent / Carer

Changes to SQA National Qualifications

In September 2016 the Scottish Government announced that there would be significant changes in how national qualifications would be delivered over the next three years. This session 2017-18 would see changes to National 5, followed in 2018-19 by Higher and then 2019-20 to Advanced Higher. A flow chart at the end of this letter illustrates this.

Changes to National 5

Previously to gain a National 5 qualification a pupil had to sit and pass several internally assessed units (or blocks of work), a prelim exam, a course assessment and a final exam. Teachers and pupils said that this led to considerable work load and over assessment, particularly if a candidate was sitting a number of National 5 subjects. Consequently the decision has been taken by the Scottish Government to remove the units as a mandatory element of the course and rely on course assessment and the final exam to evaluate performance, which as a result has been strengthened. This means for each National 5 course, one or more of the following changes has been made:

- Extension of the existing examination paper
- Extension or modification of the existing item of coursework
- Addition of a new examination paper
- Addition of a new item of coursework

What does this mean in practice?

The vast majority of National 5 pupils will now complete the course and sit the final exam without having to pass the course units. However, as the units will be retained as free standing units, for some pupils they will be able to study units only, with the possibility of working towards the exam the following year. This would be dependent on pupil progress and course choice. It is therefore important that pupils are entered at the correct level, National 4, or National 5 and this decision will have to be taken by November or even earlier.

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Recognising positive achievement

Previously if a candidate failed the National 5 exam there was a fall-back position, where if they completed the National 5 units and the National 4 added value unit they could be awarded a National 4 qualification. This option will now only be available for an interim period and should only be used in exceptional circumstances. Instead to recognise positive achievement the Grade D award has been extended. Previously Grade D was given only to those with 45% or above. It will now be awarded to a candidate who achieves 40%-49% thus ensuring that there is a greater opportunity for success.

What are the options available to my child?

A teacher's professional judgment will ensure that a pupil is entered at the correct SQA level for the subjects they are currently studying. Most pupils will sit either the National 5 course or the National 4 course for all their subjects. However, for some pupils who are 'borderline' candidates there are now other choices to consider:

- The National 4 course of study (no exam)
- The National 5 course (including exam)
- The National 5 units only (recognition given on the SQA certificate - with the possibility of completing the whole course with exam the following year. This will usually only be available to S4 pupils who are staying on to S5.
- Both The National 5 units and exam (for an interim period and only for exceptional circumstances). This option needs to be used with caution as it significantly adds to the assessment burden of pupils. In some subjects this option may not be available.

Every effort will be made to ensure that the teacher's professional judgment will result in your child being entered at the correct level. You will be notified of this decision in the tracking and monitoring report your child receives in October. If the decision has been taken that your child should study National 5 units only you will receive an accompanying letter explaining this to you.

The structure of National 4 is currently being considered nationally but no changes will be made to National 4 during this session 2017/18.

Yours sincerely

Dr RG Staines
Depute Headteacher

TIMELINE OF REVISIONS TO NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

