



SSTA SQA 2024 Survey – Members Comments

Art and Design

Pupils working MUCH more slowly - in all year groups.....not getting through nearly as much as we used to. Took the same amount of time to prepare for half a written paper as it used for the full paper.

All students have struggled with the amount of coursework for my subject and to increase the workload will effect mental health and wellbeing of the students and teachers.

If streamlining courses retained value of learning why add repetitive or unnecessary components? What is the reasoning and purpose of additional workload for all?

Pupils are struggling with the current workload. They are not prepared to take on pre-pandemic assessment arrangements. There is a lack of resilience, focus and motivation. This year has been the hardest yet.

Since the new course modifications, the work has been much more achievable within the timeframe, and the quality of work has not been compromised. To be honest, the thought of going back to the old way is making me want to leave the profession.

Biology

Bringing all assessments back before they potentially then get removed/alterd in light of the Hayward report seems foolhardy and an inappropriate use of staff and pupil time. We now have a number of staff in our department who have not taught pre-pandemic coursework.

Needs to be reintroduced gradually OR NOT AT ALL UNTIL the entire curriculum is changed again.

I believe that returning to a more balanced form of assessment (i.e. not all on the final exam) should be a goal, just not now.

Reintroducing to in S4 /N4 N5 is controversial enough but Higher and Advanced Higher 'thrown in' without prior attainment is chaotic and will undermine student mental health. Returning to full SQA arrangements would be detrimental to both pupils and teaching staff at the moment.

There is a dangerous assumption that everything in school is back to normal and the pupils have caught up in key skills and knowledge that they lost in the pandemic. This would put the vast majority of pupils at a disadvantage at all levels, not to mention the increase in workload and the impact on the pace of teaching.

Business Studies

We are still currently dealing with the backlash of the pandemic and pupils are still struggling. It would be unrealistic to think that pupils would be able to go back to pre-pandemic times when they are still struggling in all aspects of school as well as their own lives. The extra added stress and workload would be difficult for pupils as well as teachers.

We need to get back to full exams as we are not preparing pupils for the step up to University and College if they have gaps in courses.

There are subjects that have already had coursework reinstated (Business Management and Admin & IT) at both N5/H level and these were reinstated in 2022. The equity of what is being taught within the different subjects at each level as currently there is a huge disparity which is negatively affecting students choosing subjects where they already have had coursework reinstated and have a much larger course content to get through.

Pupils have missed vital teaching and learning during the pandemic. It is not fair for higher pupils to be exposed to course content that has not been covered at national 5 level. It is difficult enough getting pupils through units at National 4 without adding the AVU.

The mitigating circumstances for Admin and IT is unfairly penalising pupils as they do better in the practical element which has been reduced by 10 marks.

The inconsistency applied across subject's i.e. full return for some subjects and modifications remaining for other subjects is completely unfair.

Chemistry

Pupils in both Higher and Advanced Higher have no prior experience with coursework requirements and a return would be detrimental to their learning. Due to content of course already tight to get it finished in time for exams so with added coursework this task almost becomes impossible.

To expect pupils with no experience of the skill set that has been removed to do it at advanced higher or Higher level for the first time shows a complete lack of care for pupil and staff welfare.

A staggering return to pre-pandemic assessment would be better. Introducing it at n4/5 and allow pupils experience of assignments etc. before expected them to complete higher assignments or advanced higher projects.

Return to pre-pandemic arrangements is going to impact upon the students that were least engaged during the pandemic, and we have not completed the recovery for the majority of these students. They will not be able to cope with the increased pace of learning that will be required for staff to cover all coursework and also the additional assignments too.

The SQA clearly have no understanding of the impact of austerity on education services. In making this announcement it is evident that the SQA are not cognisant of the level of support that learners in secondary schools require or that staffing levels in schools have reached a critically low level. The insufficiency in resources, space and availability of staff in schools has been ignored.

Much of the loss of learning due to covid is with skills relating to assignments and coursework. These will most definitely take time from learning and teaching to develop and consolidate these skills.

Computing Science

When the Covid arrangements were introduced, they had a negative effect on Computing Science as they skewed the weighting of the different component parts in favour of 1 topic. This put pupils at a disadvantage. In the past, they were able to do well in the other parts and make up for their shortcomings elsewhere. This is no longer the case. It's time to go back to the way things were.

The SQA Computing Science team has taken the sensible approach to retain an optional unit. This is good as it allows for more teaching time in what was previously a very overcrowded course.

It's utterly crazy that the SQA expect pupils especially sitting Higher courses to be able to learn completely new content and at National 5 level as they will not have that foundation from the previous year. This puts an incredible amount of pressure on both staff and pupils. Staff are already dealing with very difficult situations in school with the behaviour of pupils worse than it has ever been. This would just be added stress to their already challenging job

We have had content removed and to expect pupils to then move on to higher or advanced higher without the required previous knowledge or skill set for this removed content is unacceptable. It will take pupils far longer to complete these units as they have no prior learning to aid them.

Drama

In my experience many of the young people I teach are becoming incapable of coping with pressure, with high expectations, and working for themselves without being given significant support.

I am well aware that some people have really struggled with the pandemic, with gaps in their learning, and will require further support. However, in the main I strongly believe pupils are now becoming incapable of being independent because they haven't had to be.

The changes to N5/H were/are minimal. For Higher, the biggest change made is being continued and is actually beneficial.

The pupils are still dealing with the fact that they have missed two years of schooling and resorting to full requirements will cause undue stress to pupils and to teachers who will have to give extra time and support to struggling candidates

English

The SQA announcement shows very clearly how out of touch the SQA and the Scottish Government have become. To introduce elements to the course that students have hitherto no experience puts a tremendous burden on pupils and staff.

My Higher class this year is nothing like a 'normal' Higher class. I will have to completely ditch my existing resources as they need extensive support and scaffolding (sentence starters, essay writing frames, detailed help sheets etc.) even at this very late stage. The SQA seems oblivious to the very obvious gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

The impact Covid-19 has had on the pupils is obvious. I do not think a full return to all units in NQs is fair for both the pupils and teachers. SQA should listen to teachers who are on "The Front Line", so to speak, as we know what is right for our pupils going forward.

The reinstatement of two folio pieces for N5, Higher and AH English would have a huge impact on teacher workload in terms of marking and planning. This would then negatively impact on attainment as teachers would not be able to support pupils to the same degree through two pieces.

Current pupils are in no way ready to handle the additional responsibilities that will be required. Staff are on their knees struggling to motivate themselves and pupils to reach the current standards never mind take on the emotional fallout from terrified pupils and the additional demands that will be made of staff to meet them.

Geography

Reinstating the Geography assignment requires field work and ICT. We have not been allowed to take our Higher pupils on our usual residential fieldwork trip and therefore it will be very difficult to complete their assignments.

Our current S3 pupils do not have the emotional maturity to cope with increased workload. This year I have had to spend a lot of time on study skills and exam technique to get my S4 up to speed and next year's class will need that too, but won't have the time if we have an assignment and an additional unit to do.

Post-pandemic schools are not the same as pre-pandemic schools. Pupil work rate is slower, with topics taking significantly longer to teach. Engagement in online learning was so varied that the building blocks from earlier years are not there.

I am not aware of a single teacher who supports this move by the SQA. The current S3, who are currently set to experience a full assessment course are among the most affected by covid and least ready to cope with assessment and time demands

It is the current S3 year group are most behind academically and socially in terms of the impacts of covid. From behavioural and social-emotional issues to literacy and numeracy. Staff have been and are at breaking point and this will send a lot of people 'over the edge' in workload and the impacts of stress and anxiety.

I'm actually okay with the assignments being resumed - but not at the same time as a return to full exam course content. It should be one or the other.

I am glad the SSTA is taking this seriously as pupils are not back to normal and still are experiencing a loss of learning which is having an impact on their abilities to cover coursework quickly. We barely finished the course this year with the adjustments

History

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The thought of the return to full assessment requirements has increased my already significant anxiety and work-related stress. The workload that this would entail on top of everything going on at the moment is unimaginable. If this goes ahead, I cannot see myself staying in teaching for much longer.

Pupils are in no way, shape or form ready to return to full coursework arrangements having never completed these in subjects previously. Therefore, having little awareness of the structure and rigour and the lasting impact on pupils mental health means that they simply will not cope. Pupils are struggling somewhat even with arrangements in place. To even contemplate a return to these arrangements is absurd, and shows the disconnect between classroom practitioners and those who make these decisions.

Home Economics

My subject has already returned 99% to pre-pandemic arrangements. It is only fair all other subjects do the same to increase equity across the board.

Pupils in S2 onwards have missed the prior learning to allow them to gain the skills necessary to achieve their best results in exams not to mention the pupil's lack of classroom routine particularly for practical subjects. The ability to maintain focus and self-determination have been significantly been impaired by loss of face to face teaching for 2+ years

It goes against everything detailed in the consultation within the Hayward Review - For my subject time is the biggest constraint re the reinstatement of the pre-pandemic, with massive pupil stress and workload requirement for staff, including cover for non-subject staff to conduct the additional assessments, as not able to be done in class time

Mathematics

The removal of some content has actually made teaching the N5, H and AH courses achievable in an academic year. If there is an insistence on reinstating all course content, it would make sense that this is done on a rolling 4 year basis from N4 up to AH rather than all in one go.

Support is needed to ensure pupils understand the nature of exams and work required. The work ethics of the majority of pupils has decreased. Many believe that they should only need to attend class for a pass. Some are unwilling to accept their responsibility in learning success.

A phased approach would make more sense, the current N5 cohort have not been taught some material that is built on in Higher, so they will have to catch up N5 knowledge before learning the Higher content and the Higher course is already very intense.

The National 5 Maths course is started in S3 and this means we have already had a year of this course. A year in, we are now being asked to also fit in vectors, similarity and the N4 added value unit. Hence it will be onerous on pupils and staff to now try to fit this in.

The automatic reintroduction of topics removed at all levels does not make sense. The topics should be phased in year-by-year, as not to burden the pupils with concepts or topics they have never encountered. It is vital that we support our pupils and students properly, and be the voice that they do not have or realise they need.

As much as I want to see a return to full normality, it's not yet the time for that. Pupils going into S4 are still among some of the worst impacted from the pandemic.

The National 4 qualification has virtually no rigour at the moment and the return of the AVU is required to bring value back to this level of qualification

The material returning in maths is hierarchical. It needs to be reinstated N5 then Higher then AH. SQA can't just put it back into H and AH if the students haven't done the intro work in N5. It needs to be reinstated year by year

Modern Foreign Languages

It would seem sensible to bring back the writing assignment in phases, just as it was initially introduced i.e. start with N5 next session and then Higher the following year so that Higher candidates would already be familiar with the format and the process in N5. It seems very unfair to reintroduce it at all levels simultaneously, especially when the jump from N5 to Higher is already huge and pupils still have pandemic-related gaps in their learning.

An already overfilled course which is hard to get through in the year and the fact that pupils are already assessed on writing in the final exam and now has to be assessed again in coursework. The realities of achieving this (usually in a mixed level setting) is that it takes away far too much teaching and learning time for assessment (on top of October exams, prelims and talking exams)

Adding these elements back in (at all levels) would be horrific for pupils and staff. Pupils are struggling currently to get to the necessary standard with the huge knock on effect on their mental health. I believe this would mean many more pupils opting out when the going gets tough, meaning that they would achieve less qualifications. Teachers workload would increase even more (if that can be imagined) trying to support their pupils. Just unnecessary when life is still very challenging for all concerned.

Pupils are not back to business as usual because restrictions have lifted. They are still impacted in terms of focus and behaviour, whether individually or due to others in the classroom. To reinstate assessments which were already too onerous pre-pandemic would penalise these pupils further.

Re-instating the pre-pandemic SQA arrangements will have a detrimental impact on both pupils and staff. Pupils have struggled with the workload this year and have struggled to engage with private study of any kind.

Staff are struggling each day with a cohort of young people who have struggled to take any responsibility for their learning. This combined with the overall poor behaviour in school has led to unprecedented levels of stress and anxiety among staff. Re-instating the AVU for Nat4 and the Modern Languages writing assignment would add to the workload dramatically.

If you listen to the SQA then assignments means little extra work for teachers. In reality there is extensive preparation in scaffolding how pupils should organise their assignment preparations.

Music

This cannot be reinstated in Higher and AH. It should be a gradual approach beginning with N4 and N5 to allow pupils to develop and build the necessary skills

Candidates have not had an opportunity to develop skills at each level. Bringing back coursework and pre-pandemic courses means that candidates have not covered the content or met the skills required at that level to then be expected to succeed at the next level. Attainment of pupils will be massively affected. Teacher workload will be huge!

Our candidates are not ready for a full reinstatement of the course. We have covered composition but pupils have not the ability to jump straight into Higher/ Adv Higher level work. The standard of work should be moderated/reduced significantly if a realistic standard of work is to be presented, otherwise staff will be burdened with unrealistic demands that students submit to an unachievable level.

I am happy to return to pre-covid requirements- however, it should be a level should be introduced each year. We are asking higher and advanced higher pupils to complete work up to the required level without the experience at national 5.

I think this decision is inexplicable. It is detrimental to both pupils and staff. SQA do not have a clue about the state schools are in following the pandemic. As a faculty head of 3 subjects, we do not have the resources to get our pupils through these extra requirements.

Pupils will not be able to cope with the composition element at higher and advanced. Although advice was given to still continue with this skill that was removed from the final assessment it is delusional for SQA to think that schools had the time to work on a part of the course that wasn't assessed.

Pupils required all the time to get their performance skills up after having had 2 interrupted years with the pandemic, with many not even having access to instruments to play. It will be impossible for staff to teach pupils at higher and advanced the skill level required. SQA had been advised by practitioners that a "rolling" programme of introduction to this element was the only fair way to progress, if a return to full assessment was being considered.

Physical Education

What are the SQA thinking? Do these people even have any experience of teaching and delivering NQs? It seems to be a completely bazaar decision to revert back to pre-covid assessment arrangements when as a whole the current arrangement are appropriate and working for pupils and teachers.

Teacher workload is already significantly high due to pressures still lurking due to the pandemic. Stress levels in schools are at an all-time high.

For my subject the returning assessments make for a more realistic grade for our pupils

The move to two activities for Higher and National 5 PE Performance is completely unfair for candidates. It offers no progression for this pupils who completed Nat 5 this year to and have to double their practical performance for Higher. It will be a huge disadvantage to pupils. This should have been phased back in at Nat 5 level first and then Higher

We require a clear answer asap. N5 courses for 23/34 start soon so clarity required as to what we are teaching them towards. The need to assess a 2nd activity will impact hugely on how courses taught.

Physics

Coursework assessment takes the form of a practical investigation and because of the pandemic pupils in the sciences have not had enough experience in practical work to make this a viable assessment tool. This would lead to an excessive amount of extra work for teachers to bring candidates up to the required level. The only level this would be appropriate would be in Advanced Higher as pupils have more time to gain the practical skills needed.

I feel that the assignments should be re-introduced one level at a time rather. Pupils in S5 & S6 would normally have the experience of completing assignments in S4 and would have learned many important skills which they would take forward with them. Asking S5 & S6 pupils to complete assignments with no prior experience is very harsh on them and it will take longer to prepare them than it did pre-pandemic.

I've never done the physics assignments as worked outside of Scotland prior to COVID. As the only physics teacher in the school, I am concerned about how well I'd do in running the assignments for all senior phase classes having never done it before

As a lone physics teacher in our school my workload would increase dramatically with return to previous assessment. Why do the SQA not consult properly before making these decisions? If there has been a consultation then I certainly knew nothing about it.

If the NQ courses were going to remain largely unaltered for a few years then I would support a phased return to previous arrangements. With Hayward still to complete we could be seeing yet another major change, so to me it makes sense to wait.

I am not in favour of this because I completed the consultative surveys from the SQA and it was a waste of time. I feel that there will could be a detrimental impact on pupil stress and teacher workload.

Pupils do not have the skills required to do these assignments building from the bottom of their schooling. To reinstate all levels as one is reckless and will adversely affect pupils greatly. Also, the relief of not having assignments at H especially has meant a much better experience for both teacher and pupil where the rush to finish this year was not as much as previously.

Religious and Moral Education

It is pointless to return to previous practice that is under review and has not been used for a number of years. Totally unnecessary until the review and new structure is confirmed.

At a time where pupils are beginning to make up lost ground post pandemic, there is a risk that gains will be lost with the reintroduction of full requirements. Also, this will considerably increase teacher workload which is already extreme. The return to full requirements feels regressive rather than progressive

My class is usually tri-level with pupils working at Nat 4, Nat 5 & Higher. With the reinstated assignments and added value unit this would be a massive struggle as so many require significant support and struggle to work independently. It is already difficult to teach the Nat 5 & Higher RMPS courses in the given time and that is with part of the course removed and no assignment. If these are reinstated then the quality of learning and teaching will decline due to time pressures.

We have to return to the pre pandemic arrangements. The current arrangements seriously disadvantage less able candidates who are able to use research skills to complete assignments that raise their attainment.

The Assignment in higher has always dragged the marks down. The only point of the assignment was to add a huge amount of stress upon the pupils and staff. We found they were doing these assignments at the same time for most subjects and in my subject it takes a huge amount of preparation, doesn't add value to the course and I was delighted when it was removed. My heart sank when I saw the statement that the assignment was to be brought back and I do not know how to fit this back in.

With the move since the pandemic to more tri-level classes I would be teaching N4 to AH in one class. I have spent the past 4 years building up my subject in my school to be in a position to offer certificated classes and not sure how I will do it. The SQA support is often very vague and they say that Education Scotland is responsible for learning and teaching they are also not forthcoming with help on how to teach the assignment.

Technological Education

Taking the example of AH coursework, many pupils will have to undertake these assessments with little or no practical experience during preceding years and therefore with a skills deficit compared to previous cohorts. I don't imagine SQA intend to mitigate for this lack of experience in prior learning though!!

We are still feeling the effects of the pandemic in our everyday experiences with our young people. They have not recovered emotionally and this pressure is just unacceptable

It's unbelievable that we will be asking those studying an AH to undertake a project assessment when they have no previous experience. Those studying Highers and AH will be disadvantaged again. Common sense should prevail.

I would compromise and accept a return at Nat 5 at a push, no way at higher. These pupils have zero experience of working to such a tough timescale

The sensible and intelligent approach would be a staged return to these assessments (ignoring the fact that the assessments were not fit for purpose in the first place), allowing the current S3 to develop the skills over the next few years to develop the skills necessary.