HIGHER NATIONAL

SQA

Next Generation of Higher National Qualifications (NextGen: HN)

Information supporting Application to Pilot

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Piloting of NextGen Higher National Qualifications

This document sets out the information required for an approved centre to pilot the NextGen awards currently being developed within this project. This pilot phase will cover only academic year 2024-2025, although SQA also welcomes applications from centres who would like to pilot using a different delivery timeline (eg Jan 2025 – July 2025).

Completed applications need to be authorised by a senior member of centre management, and completed in conjunction with the curriculum lead and delivery team before being submitted by the SQA coordinator using this [Microsoft online form](#).

The purpose of the pilot

The pilot is being undertaken to enable SQA to fully understand the effectiveness of the new qualification design principles and test out key aspects of the qualifications including the approach to meta-skills, learning for sustainability, and the application of a new grading approach. There are features of the new qualifications which will challenge both SQA and the pilot centres in delivery. Evaluation work is undertaken in partnership with the pilot centre to fully evaluate and learn lessons from the activity. This includes a focus on learner experience, staff impact, effectiveness of the design principles and use of new assessment and technology approaches in the delivery of the qualification. In addition, we have a Change Request Process through which centres, in partnership with their internal quality assurance processes, can request changes to the qualification for consideration by the qualification design team.

Minimum viable product

The qualifications made available for pilot in August 2024 will be delivered on a 'minimal viable product' basis. In this we include the qualification framework, units, educator guide and grading pack. These are or will be available on our digital publishing platform. This means that SQA guarantees to deliver a qualification that contains all the essential elements to enable a centre to successfully deliver the course to learners but will not come with Assessment Support Packs (ASPs), which would have been part of previous developments. We expect pilot centres to generate assessments and to work in partnership with SQA throughout the pilot year to collaborate on resources where required. For example, pilot centres can significantly influence our Educator Guide, which replaces the group award specification.

Support, communication, and collaboration

To assist with the successful piloting of the qualifications SQA has developed and continues to develop a range of support resources for pilot centres. This includes development and delivery of e-learning resources through our SQA Academy, website resources and a menu of webinars, with a focus on new elements within the NextGen qualifications including meta-skills, grading approaches and use of new technology and assessment approaches. In addition, we will provide on-going contact and support to each centre through regular 'Keep in Touch' (KIT) meetings so that both challenges and solutions can be shared. We also use Microsoft teams to communicate and share information with pilot centres: the subject teams site is also a space for pilot centre teams to collaborate. A key element of centre support is enabling pilot centres to support each other in delivery of these new awards, sharing development activity on learning, teaching and assessment resources.

Meaningful engagement with all centre support activity is vital and the importance of cross college engagement must be stressed. Pilot centres will benefit from establishing an internal oversight group to ensure functions such as senior management, the quality unit, and student support teams as well as the curriculum delivery team are fully engaged with their NextGen pilot. The Head of Quality or SQA Co-ordinator, as key contact, will be invited to a range of regular meetings and events including monthly KIT meetings and pilot centre themed conversations.

Registration and resulting

It is important that the pilot centres can register and result candidates for NextGen: HN qualifications and have the confidence that upon successful completion the learner will be certificated by SQA. SQA has implemented new temporary processes that allows the delivering centres to transfer their learners NextGen: HN group awards results securely to SQA. SQA guarantees that guidance and support is available to all centres delivering NextGen: HN, at each step of the process to ensure successful registration and certification of these qualifications. These are the main changes to certification: NextGen: HN group awards are now graded; NextGen: HN group award result is recorded on the commemorative certificate; NextGen: HN group award result has an accompanying statement that is recorded on the commemorative certificate.

Continuous evaluation and validation

SQA has developed an evaluation strategy for both learners and delivery teams which includes focus group meetings and surveys. This vital part of the collaborative work that will take place between SQA and pilot centres requires appropriate time-allocation. In this fast-changing environment the evaluation approach is designed to be iterative. Lessons learned will be implemented for those centres piloting in subsequent years. In addition, we are undertaking whole project evaluation, using a wide range of stakeholders and research-based activities to confirm our direction of travel.

As part of the NextGen development SQA is implementing a new qualification validation model that supports continuous quality assurance and update of the award. This allows the qualification and units to be updated and reviewed during pilot delivery, while ensuring that the qualification continues to meet the high standard required of all our awards. This means that pilot centres must be willing to work with SQA in adapting to changes and updates at unit and qualification level throughout the pilot year based on evaluation and feedback.

Pilot Centre Readiness Criteria

Involvement in this pilot is an opportunity for a centre to partner with SQA in the design and development of these new types of qualifications, co-creating how the qualifications will be finalised and delivered, and then sharing development and support through the pilot and evaluation phase for the benefit of the wider sector. Many key aspects of the qualification will only be confirmed during pilot delivery. SQA sees this a valuable aspect of this approach.

SQA will use the following criteria to inform the selection of the centres, which are best placed to successfully pilot these qualifications on behalf of the Scottish college, employer, and training provider sectors. SQA will use centre data on current uptake,

achievement, and track record within these subjects at HN level, to inform overall decision-making. The pilot phase is key to enabling the new NextGen qualification models to be fully tested, evaluated and updated as required. If a centre is intending to replace existing delivery of current HN with the pilot qualification, they need to fully appreciate the impact. Centres selected will represent a range of centre contexts in type, geography, and size.

- Evidence of knowledge and understanding of the NextGen: HN qualification products through active involvement in, for example qualification development or support teams, consultation activities and relevant staff development.
- Evidence that the centre is willing to fully engage with NextGen principles and practice, seeking to innovate, explore and find solutions at all stages of the pilot process.
- Evidence that the centre has an appropriate internal project oversight group.
- Evidence of commitment to share experiences and learning with other centres and centres, throughout and beyond the pilot phase.
- A positive track record in sector developments in this or a related qualification area.
- Evidence that the centre has sufficient staff and timetable capacity to run one viable pilot group. This may be done alongside current existing HN provision in the same qualification subject or instead of an existing cohort.
- Evidence that the centre has plans and capacity to recruit a cohort to the pilot, including a realistic forecast of student numbers. Please note that SQA welcomes applications for modest cohort sizes, for example one new pilot class. Applications for multiple groups or classes are less likely to be successful.

Process and timelines

Centres are asked to provide evidence against the above criteria in their submission using the Pilot Centre Application MS form. You should also supply as much additional information as you think relevant to allow SQA to make the best decision. If you are applying to pilot more than one qualification, you should indicate the priority order and complete one MS form per qualification.

Please note that applications to pilot NextGen: HN qualifications are positively encouraged from Employer and Training Provider centres. We recognise the distinct nature of this operating context and ask that you complete the application form as fully as possible, providing alternative evidence as appropriate.

Sector informed application open	8th January 2024
Sector submits application via MS form	24th January 2024
SQA review of applications	29th January 2024
SQA and applicant discussions where appropriate	Mid-February 2024
SQA notifies successful pilot centres	End February 2024

Appendix 1

NextGen: HN Prototype Design Principles

All the qualifications piloted have been developed in line with our NextGen Design Principles. These principles have come through wide ranging discussion and consultation, including evaluation with pilot centre delivery teams, and learners, as well as employers and education providers not currently involved in the project.

Structure and Size

HNC and HND are standalone qualifications of 120 SCQF credit points (15 SQA credits) each to support flexibility, increasing opportunities for learners in returning to education and training, while still supporting coherent progression between the level 7 (HNC) and level 8 (HND) qualifications.

Larger and fewer units of learning

To support increased integration and connection between topics and reduce the overall assessment load, the qualification is made of up of fewer and larger units/topics.

Significant reduction in assessment load for both learners and staff

The Educator Guide will make clear the assessment strategy, while minimising assessment load and taking account of expected learning and teaching approaches, to ensure confidence in the award of the qualification. Innovative approaches to assessment, including combined and integrated assessment, are encouraged where appropriate.

Grading

A new approach to grading is being tested as part of these prototype qualifications. This approach is intended to ensure that all or almost all the qualification content contributes to the learner's final grade. The model has been established as part of the initial phase of the pilot delivery but will remain subject to further change and refinement as development progresses. Subject development and NextGen project staff will consult widely, including with pilot centres, on how grading will work in practice when piloting these qualifications.

Meta-skills

NextGen: HN design principles support the holistic development of meta-skills, through their integration into context-specific learning, teaching and assessment strategy. The meta-skills model provides a framework for a shared understanding of transferable skills and supports learners to actively engage in personal development aligned to professional practices. There is a mandatory meta-skills outcome which assesses the learner's engagement with their own meta-skills development.

Self-management	Social intelligence	Innovation
Focusing	Communicating	Curiosity
Integrity	Feeling	Creativity
Adapting	Collaborating	Sense-making
Initiative	Leading	Critical thinking

The model is outlined in full here: *Skills 4.0: a skills model to drive Scotland's future* (Skills Development Scotland and the Centre for Work-based Learning in Scotland).

Learning for Sustainability (LfS)

A general understanding of sustainability and how it relates specifically to each HN subject area, now forms part of Next Gen: HN design principles. Sustainability related issues, such as social, economic and environmental challenges, can be integrated into learning and teaching and assessment in ways to suit the subject. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, (SDGs) provide a good reference framework for creating shared knowledge and understanding of sustainability and can support students to identify relevant subject-specific issues and gather evidence of how a product or process could be made more sustainable. This is assessed through a mandatory LfS outcome.

Use of technology to support implementation of assessment, learning and teaching approaches

As these are the Next Generation of qualifications, they champion the digital by design approach. This means that digital technologies can and should underpin all stages of the process – through development to delivery, assessment, and verification. In this pilot phase SQA will be looking to work with pilot centres to implement and evaluate appropriate technologies where it enhances the learning, teaching and assessment experience.

Improved and more collaborative QA approaches

SQA will be working in partnership with pilot centres and wider QA networks, to deliver our new and improved approach to QA, which takes account of and works alongside the new qualification designs and grading approaches.

Appendix 2

Scottish Qualifications Authority and Pilot Delivery Centre Ways of Working.

1. Communication:
- The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) commits to maintaining open and transparent communication with the Pilot Delivery Centre (PDC) through regular updates and timely responses to queries, for example through Keep in Touch meetings, Newsletters, our NextGen website and a dedicated MS Teams site.
- The PDC agrees to designate a primary contact person for communication purposes and to promptly disseminate relevant information to its internal stakeholders.
- Both parties commit to scheduling regular meetings to discuss ongoing initiatives, address concerns, and ensure effective collaboration.

2. Collaboration:
- SQA and PDC will collaborate on the iterative development and review of qualification materials, ensuring alignment with the NextGen: HN design principles and sharing as appropriate within the PDC and wider afield.
- The PDC agrees to provide timely feedback on materials provided by the SQA, including through our Change Request Process, in line with our iterative service-led design model and using agreed processes.
- SQA and PDC will work together to identify opportunities for professional development and training to enhance the capabilities of PDC staff.
- SQA will provide e-learning modules to the PDC to support staff development and ensure a comprehensive understanding of qualification delivery requirements.

3. Evaluation:
- SQA will conduct periodic project evaluations with both delivery teams and learners, as part of our iterative service-led design model.
- PDC commits to participating in evaluations, providing necessary support, and implementing recommended improvements in a timely manner.
- Both parties agree to engage in a constructive dialogue during evaluation processes to address any identified issues and optimise the overall quality of qualification delivery.

4. Quality Assurance Processes:
- SQA and PDC will jointly commit to a robust quality assurance framework, encompassing regular external quality assurance touchpoints, reviews, and continuous improvement initiatives.
- The PDC commits to implementing both external and internal quality assurance processes at various stages of qualification delivery, ensuring consistency and adherence to standards.

5. Monitoring of Articulation and Progression:
- SQA and PDC will collaboratively monitor the articulation and progression of learners within the qualification framework, identifying potential challenges and implementing solutions for seamless advancement.
- The PDC agrees to provide a named articulation and progression contact and regular reports on learner progression, enabling SQA to assess the effectiveness of the qualification model and make necessary adjustments.

6. Registration and resulting:
- The PDC agrees to register and result candidates for NextGen: HN qualification in line with the temporary processes that SQA has implemented to transfer their learners group award results securely to SQA.
- SQA guarantees that guidance and support is available to all centres delivering NextGen: HN, at each step of the process to ensure successful registration and certification of these qualifications.

7. Issue Escalation Process:
- Either party may escalate issues of concern by notifying the New Product Development Manager assigned to the centre and / or the SQA coordinator.
- The designated escalation contacts will engage in a prompt and collaborative resolution process, seeking to address concerns within an agreed-upon timeframe.
- If concerns persist after the initial escalation, the matter may be further escalated to senior management representatives from both SQA and PDC for resolution.

8. Learning and Development Responsibilities:
- PDC is responsible for undertaking learning and development activities, including the use of e-learning modules provided.
- SQA will provide support and resources to ensure PDC staff can effectively engage with the NextGen: HN project and qualification delivery.

9. Change Impact Assessment and Cross College Working:
- PDC is responsible for undertaking change impact assessments related to qualification delivery and acting on findings.
- Both parties commit to actively contributing to collaborative cross-college working groups, fostering a shared approach to addressing challenges and promoting best practices.

10. Review and Amendment:
- This Ways of Working will be reviewed annually, or as needed, to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness. We welcome feedback from our PDCs.
- This agreement covers the collaboration between SQA and the PDC with reference to the NextGen pilot project only, and excludes PDC operating and delivery responsibilities e.g., timetabling, staffing etc.

Appendix 3

We have a wide range of e-learning resources available on the SQA Academy – visit NextGen: HN SQA Academy Courses.

Our NextGen: HN webpage has a wide range of case-studies, blogs, webinar recordings and current information on key NextGen topics such as Grading, Quality Assurance, Meta-skills, Learning for Sustainability and Assessment Support. Visit www.sqa.org.uk/nextgen for more information.