

Council, 20 September 2019

Class Contact Time for N5 and Highers

Background

The 2018 AGM passed the following Resolution, which was assigned to the Education Committee for action:

"That this AGM call on Council to investigate and report on the delivery by Secondary schools and colleges, of the SQA's notional hours class contact time for National 5 and Higher subject courses and to highlight any discrepancies identified."

The Committee agreed to seek information from:

- Directors of Education
- College Principals
- Subject Specialists
- Local Association Secretaries
- EIS-FELA Branch Secretaries

Attached are the collated responses to our inquiry from the various sources listed. (Analysis to follow)

It was also agreed to raise concerns about insufficient allocation of time for N5 and Higher course delivery with Education Scotland, Scottish Government and the SQA through liaison meetings, and through meetings of the Curriculum and Assessment Board and Scottish Education Council. This was done as appropriate throughout the year.

The Committee also sought to ensure that the underlying issues were reflected in any associated press comment and/ or consultation responses. The issue was subsequently raised in the written evidence provided on behalf of the EIS to the Education and Skills Committee Inquiry into senior phase subject choice.

Aberdeen City

Aberdeenshire

Angus **(DOE)**

All 8 Angus secondary schools work to the SQA guidance in respect of class time for N5 and Higher.

DHT Webster's High School

Request for the number of hours Webster's High School have allocated to National 5 and Higher courses

This session 2018/19

National 5 courses - 160 hours

Higher Courses - 175 hours

Next session 2019/20

National 5 courses - 160 hours

Higher Courses - 175 hours

Argyll & Bute **(DOE)**

Almost all secondary schools in Argyll and Bute currently operate Senior Phase timetables such that young people undertaking N5 and Higher courses in S5/6 are receiving the minimum 160 of classroom-based learning and teaching as recommended by the SQA. One school's timetable falls short of the 160 hours and is currently reviewing its senior phase timetable for implementation in 2019/20 to meet this provision.

Clackmannanshire

Dumfries & Galloway **(DOE)**

There is currently no authority wide direction re senior phase timetabling structure. Schools are empowered to shape their curricular offer and timetable design to best suit the needs of their young people and the needs of the local context. Some schools have a merged curricular offer for S4 – 6, whilst others provide an S4 curricular offer and then a joint S5 and 6.

I can confirm the following, which is current but does not necessarily reflect the offer in 2019 / 20 as schools across Dumfries and Galloway to reshape their senior phase offer and design:

88% (14/16) of our schools offer the notional 160 hrs at Higher (SCQF level 6)

25% (4/16) of our schools offer the notional 160 hrs at Nat 5 (SCQF level 5) in S4 and 75% offer Nat 5 between 147 and 160 hrs. This offer builds on an S3 experience which supports this.

Dundee (**DOE**)

Having talked to senior staff about this, we are confident with a six subject choice in S4 and a 5 subject choice in S5 that young people are receiving the 160 hours per course recommended for the national qualifications.

East Ayrshire (**Norman Watt – Subject Specialist**)

I can confirm that the following arrangements pertain:

S5/6 - all SQA levels & subjects - 6 periods per week equating to 160 hours
S4 - N5 in all subjects - 4 periods per week equating to 120 hours - a legacy from Standard Grade

East Dunbartonshire

East Lothian (**DOE**)

I can confirm that I am satisfied that all East Lothian Secondary Schools are meeting or exceeding the national 160 hours of programmed learning, as described on the SQA website.

East Lothian schools have autonomy to use a mix of learning activities which vary according to the requirements of the subject qualification or learning programme and may opt form some coverage of course content in prior learning, for example S4 pupils may have covered some N5 content in their S3 courses, which is in line with the SCQF flexibility.

Senior Phase Timetabling needs to take into account the learning pathways for all pupils, to be responsive and not prescriptive to local variations and the resources available.

East Renfrewshire

Edinburgh

Falkirk (**DOE**)

National 5 and Higher

Course guidelines for National 5 and Higher state that 'the notional length of time for a candidate to complete the course is 160 hours.' With a curriculum that is planned and progressive across all curriculum areas through the BGE, young people will have the opportunity to build their learning to Fourth level and beyond by the end of S3. An analysis of the Es and Os and content of National 5 courses shows cross over, suggesting that a young person starting a National 5 course will already have developed an understanding of some of the themes, content and skills required to be successful. Put simply, a young person who has progressed through the BGE has prior learning that is directly linked to the requirements of National 5 and he/she will not be starting the

course from scratch. The same principle applies to Higher as learning builds from the National 5 course.

This is an extract from the SQA Website, 2017 National Qualifications Results statement.

"The qualifications have been developed to ensure good progression from the Broad General Education (BGE) phase of Curriculum for Excellence. The National 5 qualification, for example, builds from curriculum level 4 within BGE and requires a notional 160 hours for learning, teaching and assessment from that level."

This is a summary of the period allocation for each of Falkirk secondary schools. Although S3 is still part of the BGE, pupils in each of our schools have started to personalise their curriculum and there will be learning that will directly related to the national qualifications.

	S3 Period Allocation	S4 Period Allocation	S5 Period Allocation
Bo'ness Academy	3	5	5
Braes High School	3	5	5
Denny High School	3	5	5
Falkirk High School	2	4	6
Graeme High School	3	3	6
Grangemouth High School	4	5	5
Larbert High School	3	5	5
St Mungo's High School	3	4	5

We believe that schools have developed their curriculum structures to suit their local context, we must have confidence that they have done so to suit the needs of the young people within that school.

The time allocation across the week must also be balanced with the breadth of education that a young person receives i.e. what is better – a young person who achieves 5 N5 Grade A passes or someone who achieves 7 N5 Grade B passes? It is a complex issue that I don't think can be viewed in complete isolation and without seeing the bigger picture.

Fife (Local Authority)

We have reviewed the situation across our schools and we are confident that learners are receiving an appropriate number of hours teaching for SQA Courses.

Glasgow

DOE

Most schools in the city would be offering 6 or 7 subjects, 4 periods a week. Allowing for 50 minute periods, starting in S4, with 40 weeks in the year gives 133 hours.

More schools are starting their new timetables at the start of May which potentially gives an additional notional 26 hours, or start of June which gives you a notional 13 hours.

There are variations of course, Hillhead currently 2 year course, some pupils bypass in St. Andrew's and in some other schools. One school states that national qualifications are taught in S3 so the 1 year course is taught over 2 years.

The question assumes that the class contact time for national qualifications begins at the start of S4. There was clear guidance from Education Scotland "Progression from the Broad, General Education to the Senior Phase":

"In many cases, key aspects of learning at third and fourth level will be directly relevant to learning which will need to be demonstrated to gain a national qualification."

"Learning in S3 can and should contribute to the "160 hours of directed study" associated with a national qualification."

"Concern is sometimes expressed that Curriculum for Excellence places tight constraints on the number of courses which can be studied by young people in S4. This relates in part to the fact that national courses are based on 160 hours of directed study and a mistaken assumption that no learning before S4 can contribute towards this notional time allocation.

Although formal qualifications will not begin before S4, learning which takes place in the BGE can and should contribute to learning for qualifications."

We would suggest that this is the situation in all of our schools is in line with this guidance. To take it further, if we have a progressive learner journey, you could argue that learning from S1 through to S4 contributes to the achievement of national Qualifications and the number of hours is irrelevant. That is the position that I took when I was the maths national specialist for HMIE. I would regularly talk to teachers about a pupil's continuum of learning from S1 to S5 and how important it was to plan learning and ensure that progression was built in with appropriate pace and challenge.

In addition, there is a difference between "notional hours class contact time" and "notional hours directed study". The latter is used by Education Scotland and therefore takes in all hours spent on homework etc.

There is also the issue of the word "notional" which is different from "actual". Notional hours are a proxy for the validity of a qualification level, not a statement that this is the number of actual hours which are required to deliver a course.

Glasgow Clyde College (Paula Dixon Branch Sec)

The students start the last week in August and have classes until mid May. They receive 5.5 hours of class contact for each subject per week.

Glasgow Kelvin College (Pam Currie Branch Sec)

The only external award delivered at Glasgow Kelvin College is National 5 Maths. This is delivered as part of the SWAP Access to Humanities programme and we still deliver the units as well (as these are a requirement for the SWAP programme – they don't have to sit the external award, although most do as it very much restricts their progression options if they do not).

We nominally have 6 hours per week for 36 weeks, although as the exam is in the first week in May and classes don't start until the last week in August, this year we had 30 teaching weeks between the start of the course and the exam. I do still teach in the remaining weeks although those weeks tend mainly to be for learners who have dropped the external exam and need the additional time to achieve the units.

Highland

NESCOL (S Porter Branch Sec)

I teach higher psychology

We still do all the three units and unit assessments and brings down credits for colleges....

We get 3 hours a week in schools and lose many classes due to public holidays half term inset days etc.....

Approx 27 weeks teaching.....

Inverclyde (Local Authority)

1. Secondary Headteachers review and monitor SQA arrangements at regular sector meetings
2. The joint LNCT forum have been regularly reviewing and discussing this issue
3. Colleagues across Inverclyde Secondary schools are given the opportunity to share best practice and develop consortium arrangements with respect to school timetabling and senior phase options.
4. School timetables operate from a changeover date of May giving approximately 40 weeks of Senior Phase Education.
5. The S4 Senior Phase option choice is 6 with 5 periods per week allocated; result that time allocated exceeds the notional SQA time.
6. In S5/S6 students follow a 5 course option with 6 periods allocated again this exceeds the notional SQA time.

7. Finally careful consideration is given to the transition from Broad General Education into the Senior Phase and ensuring follow appropriate pathways with the recommended times.

Midlothian

Moray (Local Authority)

Following our restructure to the secondary school week and using a 33 period week model and ongoing strategic improvements to our senior phase curricular offer, all schools in Moray are providing at least 160 hours of classroom based learning and teaching as recommended by the SQA.

North Ayrshire (Local Authority)

We have consulted our secondary Head Teachers in relation to class contact time for National 5 and Higher courses. From our consultation it is clear that our establishments are meeting the 160 hours for National 5 and Higher courses and in some cases are exceeding the notional time. Some of our schools "borrow" time from one year to the next to ensure that our young people are fully prepared for their Senior Phase courses. In some schools learners in S4 completing National 5 courses will be expected to start Higher coursework during the same academic session. Within the BGE, some learners will start level 5 work I preparation for National 5, this being in line with the updated guidance from Education Scotland on progression from BGE to the Senior Phase.

North Lanarkshire

Appendix – PT's Clyde Valley High

Orkney

Perth & Kinross (Local Authority)

Across Perth and Kinross secondary schools, Higher courses receive the 160 hours of classroom-based learning and teaching, with 5 options available to S5/6 pupils. In S4, the maximum number of courses available to young people are as follows:

Nat 5	2018/2019	2019/2020
Auchterarder High School	7	7
Blairgowrie High School	7	7
Breadalbane Academy	7	7
Crieff High School	8	8
Kinross High School	7	7
Perth Academy	7	7
Perth Grammar School	6	6
Perth High School	7	7
Pitlochry High School	7	7
St John's Academy	7	7

It should be noted that this is the maximum number of N5 courses a pupil may take and that in many cases, pupils take 6 courses. I do not have the exact breakdown of hours for each school subject at this time.

Renfrewshire (**Local Authority**)

We have consulted with our Secondary Head Teachers and can confirm that in all schools, timetables are such that young people undertaking National 5 and Higher courses are receiving 160 hours of classroom based learning as recommended by the SQA.

Scottish Borders

Shetland (**Local Authority**)

from 5 out of 7 schools, as follows:-

Reply 1.

Class Contact Time for N5

S4 classes (effectively from June-April) receive 4 x 50 minute periods for **around** 38 weeks per week (reduced by wider achievement activities which are difficult to quantify but take time away from study) = 130 hours for each National subject they study.

Reply 2.

We do not have S5 classes.

In S4 pupils have 4 periods per week. This affords them 130 hours.

Like other schools, we spend some of the time in S3 completing the Broad General Education and some of the time working towards N5 courses. The balance between these varies from subject to subject but would easily include the 30 extra hours they require.

Reply 3.

There are 4 50 minute periods allocated in S4, which lasts for 39 weeks. This works out at 130hours in S4.

However, we believe that learning in S3 can and should contribute to the '160 hours of directed study' associated with a national qualification.

Reply 4.

With the inclusion of study leave where pupils can come in to school and work with their teachers, but depending on when the final exam falls:

National 5 – 120 Hours

Higher – 162 Hours

Actual class contact is less than this outwith study leave:

National 5 = 117 Hours

Higher – 146 Hours

Reply 5.

- N5 in S4 = 127 hours
- N5, Higher and Advanced Higher in S5/6 = 158 hours

South Ayrshire (**Local Authority**)

At South Ayrshire Council all of our eight secondary schools provide a unified senior phase with S4 to S6 being taught as a single cohort. Within this arrangement young people can opt for a mixture of subjects and levels and learn in mixed-stage groups. We are clear that there is no ceiling to the level at which young people can learn in the BGE. Our teachers plan learning which appropriately enables many to stretch their learning beyond third and fourth CfE levels. By providing learning in S3 which concludes the BGE and, at the same time, provides learning required for qualifications, coupled with our young people at S3 starting the senior phase in May/June, we are confident that our young people are receiving the notional 160 hours of classroom-based learning for undertaking each of their N5 courses in S4.

At the senior phase all of our secondary schools provide a curriculum which enables, if appropriate, young people to study for six qualifications in each of the three years of the senior phase. However, there is flexibility within this framework and schools are empowered to plan bespoke learning pathways, with various numbers of qualifications/courses taken, various period allocations for each of these, and two year route maps to achieve a qualification if appropriate, all planned in agreement with young people and parents to best meets the needs of learners. The various learning pathways planned across the local authority to meet young people's needs makes it impossible to give a definitive answer to your enquiry as to whether all learners receive the 160 hours of classroom-based learning at S5 and S6. Our senior phase is constantly under review and is modified as necessary to meet the needs of different cohorts.

South Lanarkshire

Jennifer Gaffney (subject specialist)

In my school, all N5 and Higher courses have 160 hours of contact time (just). From that time, class teachers must include teaching and class assessments. However, often we are finding that time is being taken from class teachers to facilitate monthly assemblies with year groups.

It is a different story for Advanced Higher – most subjects have been limited to 5 periods (of 50 mins) per week. Assuming Advanced Higher teaching begins in the last few weeks of the June continuing until the end of April, this gives only 137.5 hours of contact time with Advanced Higher pupils.

DOE

As a local authority we empower our school leaders to develop their school timetables based on their individual context. In collaboration with our SQA Liaison Manager we work on an ongoing basis with key school personnel to fully understand the National Qualifications as part of a wider qualifications and curriculum landscape. Our schools plan for the learning, teaching and assessment of National Qualifications in a range of timetabling 'models' and schools are fully aware of recommendations from the SQA regarding notional learning hours.

For appropriate young people, learning up to and including CfE level 4, with aspects of SCQF level 5 will be undertaken as the BGE phase progresses, this

will 'blend' in to the schools senior phase programme in most cases. Learners will have experienced at least the required notional 160 hours worth of learning on their pathway to their National 5 or Higher exam.

Stirling

DOE

SQA's guidance on the Design of National Courses and Units

(https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/Design_of_National_Courses_and_Units.pdf) specifies that the 160 hours allowed for courses of National 4 and above are to be used for "programmed learning, such as class contact and assessment."

In addition, Education Scotland's "Progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase: Updated Guidance" (<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/progression-from-bge-to-the-senior-phase.pdf>) states that "Learning in S3 can and should contribute to the '160 hours of directed study' associated with a national qualification". Individual subject areas within schools have a good deal of freedom to design their S3 courses according to the needs of their learners. While all of our schools continue the Broad General Education into S3, they provide experiences during S3 which align and articulate with the curriculum requirements of N4 and 5.

Given this flexible approach during the BGE, and the time allocated in S4, Stirling schools allocate more than the suggested number of hours to delivery of National courses.

Stirling's secondary schools operate on a timetable that allows for 6 periods in S5/6. Even leaving aside SQA exam time, this permits in excess of 160 hours in class each session for the completion of Higher courses.

LA Secretary

Of the schools which replied, 2 advised they had no concerns and were of the opinion sufficient time had been allocated.

1 school believed chemistry was 'tight' and additional time would be helpful – but nothing more specific than that.

In another school, English reported they had only 130 hrs for S4s, but 190 for S5/6s – the former is too short and the latter too long. The science faculty in that school confirmed this was the same situation across the school.

Hope that's useful and certainly we'll be working from this end to achieve a greater equilibrium in the 2 schools which replied citing a time issue.

Another school has just come back to me with figures of 124 hrs for S4 and 170 hrs for S5/6. The rep has already begun discussions with the timetable there to seek a better distribution of time.

West Dunbartonshire

West Lothian (DOE)

No change has been made by West Lothian Council to the number of class contact hours as a result of the removal of mandatory unit assessments in national qualifications. As a result of the removal, and the consequent removal of the requirement to prepare for assessments, time for teaching has increased.

West Lothian Council acknowledges that the notional length of time required for candidates to complete each of the courses will remain at 160 hours. Our expectation is that the length of time spent by candidates to complete each of the courses across all schools and subjects is 160 hours for Level 4 , 5 and 6 courses.

Individual Schools and West Lothian Council monitor attainment rigorously, and the Council is confident that the arrangements in place are those which best meet the needs of learners, and which contribute to maximising the attainment of individual young people.

Western Isles (Local Authority)

I can confirm that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's pupils get the SQA notional number of hours (160) at National 5 and Higher.

Appendix

Clyde Valley High Responses

Class Contact time for N5 and Higher, 2018-19

Course 160 hrs	N5	Periods per week	Annual hours allocated (if known)	Higher	Periods per week	Annual hours allocated (if known)	Comment
Art & Design	✓	4	152	✓	6	228	Calculated on average of 38 wks. Does not include bank holidays, in-service days etc so will be considerably lower.
Business Management	✓	4	160	✓	6	160	<p>There is never enough time to cover all of the course content as well as complete the Assignment in N5 and Higher courses which means that the last of the topics covered are usually rushed and we don't have enough time for proper revision and exam practice.</p> <p>It is especially tight for Higher as much of the time the pupils are crashing and as N5 is assumed knowledge I am cramming in the content of both N5 and Higher into the allocated time.</p> <p>Deducting holidays, Bank Holidays, and Prelims (which take them out of class for another two weeks), I calculate that we really only get around 33/34 weeks teaching time. Then take away a week for work experience, plus more for random events such as the school show and trips, visits, etc. Then you are even less. It falls well short of the supposed 160 hours. More like roughly 114 hours.</p>

							For Higher we have 5 hours per week but again most of the same events mentioned above also affect teaching time.
(Business) Administration & IT	✓	4	160	✓	6	160	Same as above.
Design Manufacture	✓	4	133.33	✓	6	200	We do not deliver Design & Manufacture at Higher level within CVHS but have pupils travelling to consortium schools and I am of the opinion the difference in hours does not seem fair between pupils in S4 and the pupils in S5. Ultimately the S4 pupils need to 'bank' some of the work they do in S3. The 'grey area' is the idea that S1 - S3 should be BGE and S4-6 should be Senior phase.
Drama	✓	4	152	✓	6	228	
Geography	✓	4		✓	6		Coverage of the Nat 5 Geography course effectively begins in S3 in order that the course can be covered as 4 periods in S4 does not provide enough time to cover the whole course. Nat 5 Assignments are timed for 60 minutes and our period lengths are 50 minutes. This causes problems with pupils being late to next period classes or having to give up breaks to complete them. Previously the time allocated to Higher Geography was sufficient but the changes made by the SQA have added an additional unit which now has to be squeezed in to the same timescale.

Graphic Communication	✓	4	133.33	✓	6	200	The difference in hours does not seem fair between pupils in S4 and the pupils in S5. Ultimately the S4 pupils need to 'bank' some of the work they do in S3. The 'grey area' is the idea that S1 – S3 should be BGE and S4-6 should be Senior phase.
History	✓	4		✓	6		<p>In Nat 5 History we have to begin the course effectively in S3 (3 periods) because of the huge amount of content to be covered. It does fit with Level 4 Es and Os so it can be called 'BGE'. We have proved that it can be delivered in a single academic year, as it is designed to be, if we are allocated 6 periods, but this has never happened.</p> <p>Nat 5 Assignments are timed for 60 minutes and our period lengths are 50 minutes. This causes problems with pupils being late to next period classes or having to give up breaks to complete them.</p> <p>Higher History can be delivered in time available providing we only cover 4 out of the 6 units of the course. It would be impossible in the time allocated to cover the whole course.</p>

Modern Studies	✓	4		✓	6		<p>In Nat 5 Modern Studies the time allocated is sufficient for course coverage. Nat 5 Assignments are timed for 60 minutes and our period lengths are 50 minutes. This causes problems with pupils being late to next period classes or having to give up breaks to complete them.</p> <p>However, the changes that have been made to Higher Modern Studies where one of the units has effectively almost doubled in content means time is extremely tight. Unlike History, Modern Studies is not topic based i.e. thematic, bringing forward the assignment pick up date this year on top of the changes has meant spending more time on this when course content and essays should have been being completed.</p>
Music	✓	4	152	✓	6	228	
Photography				✓	6	228	