

NextGen: HN Non-Pilot Practitioner Engagement Research: Summary

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) have proposed a number of adaptations to current Higher National (HN) qualifications to help achieve the aim of preparing learners for 21st century work and society. As part of the evaluation into the Next Generation: Higher National (NextGen: HN) qualification proposals, research was carried out to capture the views of non-pilot practitioners.

Methodology

Eighteen practitioners with no experience of delivering a NextGen: HN pilot course, from 8 colleges, across a range of subjects, were interviewed. The practitioners were given visual aids to introduce elements of NextGen: HN. Data was coded and analysed using NVivo.

Findings

Non-pilot practitioners varied in overall views of NextGen: HN pilots, with views ranging from enthusiasm about the rollout of NextGen: HN, to feelings that the rollout should be delayed or the pilot re-designed. Positive views tended to be more varied than negative views. Overall, the most prevalent attitude from non-pilot practitioners was neutrality towards the pilot, where practitioners felt they didn't know enough about the pilot to assess it, or they felt some positivity towards elements of the pilot but uncertainty that its aims will be met.

Practitioners were generally positive about some of the 8 design principles when they were presented individually. In particular, practitioners were very positive about plans to embed more digital technology, and to decrease assessment loads. Embedding digital technology was viewed as an important way of updating courses and future-proofing. Decreasing assessment loads was generally viewed as positive due to the pressure on learners under current assessment schemes.

Although no single design principle generated mostly negative views on its own, some design principles generated more concerns or questions. Meta-skills and Learning for Sustainability received more mixed views, where some practitioners were positive about the principles but felt that these were already elements that were a part of their subjects, or, that these were elements less suitable for their subjects.

Concerns and questions towards design principles tended to be about assessing NextGen: HN in the context of the current sector. Where there were concerns towards positive elements, sometimes this was about external problems to NextGen: HN, such as college funding and staffing. Other concerns were that rolling out the pilot could have an impact on already demanding workloads; that subject-specialists are not as involved in decision making processes; and to what extent NextGen: HN has a flexible enough design to accommodate different subjects, learners, pathways, and institutions.

Overall, the number of questions generated from the pilot were indicative of either a general lack of engagement with the pilot, and/or a need for more information sharing from SQA.