

Chapter 11: Entering the Home-stretch (1994-97)

As stated in Chapter 7, the SEB and SCOTVEC were not directly responsible for the Higher Still Development Programme, but each of them provided two senior officers on a part-time basis to form part of a Specialist Team whose initial task it was to write Starter Papers for the Higher Still Strategy Group and its three Task Groups. The contribution of the Specialist Officer Team did not end with these initial tasks. They continued to provide documentation for the Task Groups and, at a later stage in the Programme, to give assistance to the Subject Development Officers and the Subject Advisory Groups. Middle-ranking Board and Council officers also served on each of the Specialist Groups which were established, first of all to develop frameworks and courses in some 30 subjects, and later to develop National Certificate Group Awards. Although temporary replacements were supplied to cover their absence, the loss of senior staff inevitably disrupted the normal work of both organisations.

Despite this, the work of both bodies went on apace. SCOTVEC had to cope with an ever increasing number of FE candidates taking National Certificate modules; and the proportion of school pupils relative to FE candidates also kept growing:

Table 1: Scotvec Modules 1984-1997

	Total Enrolments	School Enrolments	School Enrolments as % of total	Total Modules	School Modules
1984-85	50,500	9,400	18.6%	381,300	22,000
1985-86	81,500	12,500	15.3%	657,000	29,000
1986-87	105,600	17,000	16.1%	826,000	40,000
1987-88	154,500	43,000	27.8%	900,000	93,000
1988-89	188,549	72,260	38.3%	1,005,529	187,644
1989-90	230,015	95,423	41.5%	1,154,957	261,648
1990-91	228,873	106,209	46.4%	1,104,111	295,120
1991-92	229,307	111,958	48.8%	1,206,370	330,713
1992-93	225,087	113,458	50.4%	1,191,421	355,887
1993-94	223,206	119,637	53.6%	1,149,001	388,061
1994-95	228,345	122,994	53.9%	1,165,670	408,546
1995-96	233,579	124,242	53.2%	1,170,242	420,456
1996-97	229,169	123,704	54.0%	1,161,329	427,980

The vast numbers indicated above, together with the fact that there were so many different modules spread over so many centres (**Note 28**), should be enough to show why SCOTVEC could not adopt the same procedures for assessment and moderation as the SEB; but, of course, in addition to the National Certificate, SCOTVEC was also responsible for Higher National Group Awards: in 1996-97, there were over 32,000 new enrolments for Higher National Group Awards, and 55,000 candidates were studying for some 380,000 units as part of the Group Awards. By 1996-97, a total of 1.33 million candidates had achieved one (or more) SCOTVEC module, unit or group award - representing roughly 25% of the Scottish population. In the National Certificate alone, 1.22 million candidates had achieved at least one module by 1996-97.

So many candidates were now taking National Certificate modules and other SCOTVEC qualifications that its Council decided in March 1994 that it should review existing approaches to external verification, placing greater emphasis on quality assurance than on quality control. As the date for the reorganisation of local government approached, the Council had to decide how to deal with the new unitary authorities which would come into existence in April 1996. Many of the existing Regional and District Councils had become approved SCOTVEC centres, usually through individual departments (such as Social Work and Roads) seeking to offer specific awards. In November 1995, SCOTVEC agreed to transfer approved centre status to any new centre where there had been no significant change in the conditions under which the original approval had taken place; otherwise, a new approval process would be required. External verification in schools (i.e. visits to schools by SCOTVEC-appointed verifiers to check assessment standards prior to candidates being submitted for certification) remained a concern, and a meeting was held with the Headteachers Association of Scotland to clarify the position.

Although SCOTVEC's main remit was to extend and develop vocational qualifications to suit the needs of industry and commerce, it did not neglect other developments that would help schools. A Schools Unit was established and a newsletter called "*InForm*" was issued regularly to all teachers in Scotland to keep them fully informed about SCOTVEC qualifications. The range of GSVQs was extended to give pupils a broad preparation for work in certain employment sectors, and 46 GSVQs were eventually provided. Early in 1994, SCOTVEC was taking a cautious approach towards proposals for recognising specified Standard Grade awards within GSVQs, and it had begun grouping GSVQs into "*families*":

Arts and Social Sciences	Business Administration
Built Environment	Communication and Media
Care	Creative and Technological Arts
Catering and Hospitality	Engineering and Manufacturing Technology
Leisure and Tourism	Information Technology
Management	Land-based Industries
Processing	Performing Arts
Public Services	Retail Distribution
Science and Mathematics.	

The impetus for introducing GSVQs had come largely from individual schools. TVEI gave substantial support through its regional units and through the production of materials. However, employers continued to show disappointing interest in both SVQs and GSVQs, and research carried out for the Scottish Office by the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) indicated that, although schools generally had a high level of commitment to the time-consuming task of preparing well-documented National Records of Achievement (NRA) for their pupils, fewer than a third of employers and less than a quarter of Higher Education Institutions used them in their selection processes. Some had not even heard of the NRA (**Note 29**).

The growing number of National Certificate modules taken by school pupils was particularly noticeable. By 1993, 48% of pupils in S3 were taking at least one module, as were 57% of S4, 85% of S5 and 65% of S6; and, from 1992 to 1997, school candidate enrolments made up more

than half of the total candidate enrolments. However, the schools' share of the total module enrolments was much smaller than that of FE, since schools used the modules to supplement the curriculum of pupils, whereas in FE colleges the modules provided the total curriculum of students. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note how the average number of modules taken by school pupils also grew as schools began to rely more and more on the National Certificate to provide a viable curriculum for non-academic pupils in S5 and S6:

Table 2: Average number of modules per candidate 1984-97

	School	FE	Other
1984-85	2.3	8.8	3.0
1985-86	2.3	9.2	2.7
1986-87	2.4	9.0	3.5
1987-88	2.2	7.3	3.6
1988-89	2.6	7.4	4.0
1989-90	2.7	7.1	3.5
1990-91	2.8	7.2	3.5
1991-92	3.0	8.2	3.5
1992-93	3.1	8.3	3.6
1993-94	3.2	8.2	3.6
1994-95	3.3	8.0	3.7
1995-96	3.4	7.6	3.6
1996-97	3.5	7.0	6.0

Amongst the most popular modules were Work Experience 1 and Communication 3. The former reflected a move in secondary schools to incorporate work experience in the curriculum of all pupils; the latter reflected both the importance of this core skill across all types of centre (workplace, college and school) and the recognition which had been negotiated for this module as an alternative to Standard Grade English for the general entry requirements of Scottish institutions of higher education.

The most important factor, however, was the considerable increase in the staying-on rates in Scottish schools. In 1985-86, 59% of the age cohort stayed on into S5 and 21% into S6; in 1996-97, the corresponding percentages were over 76% and over 42%. It was not only in S5 that the spread of ability changed a great deal; the composition of even S6 had changed. Finding a suitable curriculum for the "new S5 and new S6" was a tremendous challenge for schools. Although 29% of sixth formers attempted at least one CSYS subject in 1995-96, the vast majority used S6 to top up their Higher Grade qualifications or to take SCOTVEC modules (**Note 30**). Even then, however, almost a quarter of sixth formers left without achieving three Higher Grade awards, which was ample proof of the need for the Higher Still reforms. The changed composition of Higher Grade classes was also thought to be responsible for the balance in subject choice at Higher Grade showing a slight swing away from general subjects towards the technological, vocational and creative subjects. Whereas Standard Grade results continued to show some improvement year on year, overall pass rates at Higher Grade remained relatively constant; and, since the Highers were unsuitable for most of the new generation of stayers-on,

schools were turning more and more to SCOTVEC modules, particularly in English and Mathematics.

Before the introduction of Standard Grade, many pupils in S5 and S6 were happy to use "O" Grades to fill their timetables; indeed, the timetables of some were made up entirely of these. However, Standard Grades were not so attractive to pupils in S5 and S6, as can be seen from Table 3.

Table 3: Number of pupils (% of Year Group) presented only in Ordinary/Standard Grade

	S5	S6
1990	3,602 (9.9%)	906 (4.4%)
1991	2,845 (7.8%)	833 (4.1%)
1992	1,800 (4.9%)	511 (2.3%)
1993	883 (2.4%)	305 (1.3%)
1994	631 (1.6%)	169 (0.7%)
1995	560 (1.4%)	127 (0.5%)
1996	434 (1.0%)	121 (0.5%)
1997	421 (1.0%)	90 (0.3%)

SEB Short Courses were also being used increasingly by schools to diversify the curriculum of all pupils but, as can be seen from Table 4, they were more popular in S3 and S4 than in S5 and S6 (Note 31):

Table 4: Short Course Presentations 1990-1998

	S3	S4	S5	S6	FE	Total
1989	617	134	49	19	0	819
1990	4,213	720	563	156	19	5,671
1991	9,897	764	1,733	385	13	12,792
1992	14,232	10,263	2,824	712	42	28,073
1993	17,576	15,260	4,082	1,094	67	38,079
1994	17,870	19,026	4,589	1,366	70	42,921
1995	16,777	20,904	4,331	1,083	43	43,138
1996	18,003	23,477	4,309	1,016	46	46,851
1997	17,998	22,584	4,333	1,232	13	46,160
1998	17,447	21,063	4,498	1,158	35	44,201

Some interesting points emerge from the pattern of candidate and subject presentations for the SCE and CSYS examinations over the past ten years (Table 5). The total number of candidates from all sources peaked in 1988. After dropping in the next five years, it then staged a recovery, reflecting the increased staying-on rates in schools. The same five-year period saw a drop in the number of subject presentations, but these then began to rise again and reached an all-time high in 1996. Part of the explanation of this lies in the fact that, in S4, most candidates were now taking seven or even eight Standard Grades whereas candidates had previously tended to take on

average only five "O" Grades. On the other hand, whereas many pupils had taken "O" Grades in S5/6 (40,689 in 1990), relatively few S5/6 pupils took Standard Grades (only 3,371 in 1996) despite the larger year groups.

Table 5: SCE and CSYS Presentations 1988-97

	Total Candidates	Subject Presentations					
		Total	Ordinary Grade	Standard Grade	Unrevised Higher	Revised Higher	CSYS
1988	149,901	665,409	415,789	68,729	168,954	864	11,073
1989	144,113	639,486	334,607	126,415	161,750	5,095	11,619
1990	136,159	630,783	204,457	256,895	139,768	18,423	11,240
1991	130,957	626,798	84,647	375,719	105,470	50,324	10,638
1992	124,037	618,296	23,952	424,763	62,989	95,006	11,586
1993	120,679	618,449	5,740	441,679	37,410	122,138	11,482
1994	121,990	625,396	75	464,675	8,280	152,366	11,942
1995	124,302	663,129	-	490,112	513	160,412	12,092
1996	126,409	681,072	-	504,098	3	164,698	12,273
1997	126,783	677,121	-	496,820	-	167,257	13,044

The growing number of Higher Grade presentations has to be seen against a background of reducing age cohorts. In 1982, there had been around 96,000 pupils in S4 (**Note 32**); but, by 1988, the size of the cohort had dropped to 74,000, and numbers continued to fall until 1992 when there were only 59,000 in S4 (i.e. only 61% of the fourth year roll in 1982). In the next four years, however, there was a slight increase until the cohort reached 67,000 in 1996. The staying-on rates in S5 and S6 had more than compensated for the reduction in the size of year cohorts, but far more pupils were spreading their Higher presentations over S5 and S6. The number of Higher Grade candidates in S5/6 who achieved no passes remained at roughly 20%.

Table 6: Higher Grade Presentations from Schools

	Subject Presentations			Size of Year Group		No. of candidates presented (% of year group)		Percentage of candidates with no passes	
	S5	S6	Total	S5	S6	S5	S6	S5	S6
1990	99,193	43,436	142,629	36,363	20,382	30,660 (84.5%)	18,482 (90.6%)	21.9	17.2
1991	97,085	43,920	141,005	36,422	21,114	30,640 (84.2%)	18,695 (90.6%)	21.6	16.1
1992	94,726	48,615	143,341	37,101	22,216	30,305 (81.7%)	20,752 (93.5%)	22.3	16.8
1993	94,333	50,995	145,328	37,038	22,783	30,375 (82.1%)	21,665 (95.0%)	22.3	17.8
1994	95,866	52,986	148,852	39,035	24,749	30,479 (78.2%)	22,549 (91.3%)	21.9	18.7
1995	99,130	52,430	151,560	40,180	24,580	31,619 (78.7%)	22,338 (91.3%)	20.4	18.3
1996	104,440	52,214	156,654	42,993	25,562	33,070 (77.1%)	22,500 (87.9%)	20.5	18.8
1997	104,255	55,264	159,519	43,261	27,159	33,286 (76.9%)	24,068 (88.6%)	20.5	18.4

Although Higher Grade presentations from schools increased, the number of FE and External candidates dropped substantially (Table 7). This was due largely to the unwillingness of the

colleges to enrol students under the age of 18, because they could not charge fees for them. In order to generate income, colleges concentrated their recruiting efforts on more advanced courses.

Table 7: Further Education and External Candidates

	Ordinary Grade		Standard Grade		Higher Grade	
	FE	External	FE	External	FE	External
1990	10,858	1,180	171	-	14,362	1,200
1991	8,536	835	257	-	13,722	1,067
1992	2,842	383	440	41	13,622	1,032
1993	263	33	421	99	13,301	919
1994	1	3	467	68	11,119	675
1995	-	-	351	87	8,977	388
1996	-	-	315	83	7,898	449
1997	-	-	217	134	7,073	665

Almost all school candidates (95%) were having at least some success at Standard Grade, and teachers were becoming so expert in internal assessment that the SEB was able to relax its moderating procedures to some extent. At the same time, there was a growing concern among teachers over what they regarded as their ever-increasing workload, particularly with the prospect of even more internal assessment emerging from the *Higher Still* proposals. One of the most time-consuming aspects of Standard Grade was the assessing of Investigations and Practical Abilities, which sought to give credit for on-going classwork that could not easily be assessed in an external written examination. Although the inclusion of this type of work in the overall assessment had been regarded as an enlightened educational innovation, voices were now being raised against it. Strathclyde Region became so concerned over the growing number of complaints from teachers that it carried out a detailed survey and asked the Board to examine the results as a matter of urgency.

One article in the TESS (4 February 1994) even claimed that it was *"encouraging a dishonest sub-culture and [was] making the examination system increasingly biased in favour of the most privileged."* To back this allegation, the article claimed that pupils from less well-off areas were losing out to those in more affluent areas, particularly professional families, since parents of the latter group could enhance their children's prospects by such perfectly legitimate means as taking the pupil to different parts of the country to take photographs to enhance a geography project, by providing word processing facilities either at home or by using a trained secretary to type up an investigation or insert graphics (**Note 33**), or by using personal contacts to arrange interviews with important people who could provide first-hand information. The subjects which drew most criticism were History and Geography. It was also claimed that there were now so many copies of projects in circulation that candidates were taking short-cuts by plagiarising parts of projects submitted in earlier years by siblings or other relatives, and even that Reviews of Personal Reading in Higher English were being re-sold for £50 the following year to pupils in another school. There were also claims that, even when teachers suspected that work was not the pupil's own, they felt under pressure not to report this for fear of litigation by aggrieved parents. Other less alarmist claims centred on the inordinate demands on resources and teachers' time, on the

amount of time required to complete the investigations so that the rest of the syllabus became truncated, and on the simple fact that outside agencies were being inundated with so many requests for information that many were refusing to co-operate. To remove any possibility of social divisiveness, Tayside Region suggested that practical exercises should be shorter and should be based on materials prepared by the Board. The Headteachers Association of Scotland and the EIS both formally requested an official review.

The initial response of the Board's Directorate was that the SEB from the outset had been keeping a careful watch on the possible dangers. The person best placed to notice any such abuse was the teacher who could usually detect quite easily work which was uncharacteristic of individual pupils. The Board relied on the professionalism of teachers to report any suspicions. It did not leave matters there, however. Following a full discussion of the issue at its meeting on 2 November 1995, the Board concluded that, despite possible dangers of abuse, formal assessment of Investigating and Practical Skills should be retained because it encouraged the teaching of these skills; to remove it from the examinations would be a retrograde step. Cognisance would also have to be taken of a recent statement by the Secretary of State which placed an embargo on any major alterations to Standard Grade courses which might affect articulation with the Higher Still courses that were being developed or might increase the workload of teachers if the changes were implemented in parallel with the Higher Still Development Programme. Nevertheless, most of the Board agreed that it must respond to the representations received on the issue by seeking the views of interested bodies. For once, however, the issue would not be presented in a neutral way in that the Board's strong support for the *status quo* would be stated in the consultation paper. In so doing, the Board was adhering to a long-standing policy of trying to support educationally desirable ideas rather than simply examining work that was easily assessable.

There was a good response to this consultation. There was a general recognition that the coaching of candidates had increased and existing arrangements made it difficult to guarantee the authenticity of work submitted for assessment. However, the degree of consensus varied considerably across subjects and modes, and on 7 March 1996 the Board agreed that each Subject Panel should review its procedures in the light of comments received. In some subjects (notably Mathematics, Greek and Latin), teachers wished Investigating to continue. The Folio of Reading and Writing should continue in English and Gàidhlig, but the English Panel should seek ways of reducing the content. In the Social Subjects, where views were evenly divided, the Subject Panels would be asked to produce draft proposals which either replaced investigations with shorter practical exercises, possibly based on materials prepared by the SEB, or discontinued Investigating/Practical Abilities as a separate element and assessed the skills in an external paper. In the sciences, where some wished the *status quo* to continue while others wished practical abilities to be tested externally, the Subject Panels were asked to develop proposals along both of these lines and also to consider the possible use of shorter exercises supplied by the Board. Most importantly, the weighting of the practical element in the sciences would be reduced from 33% to 20%, since it was accepted that the higher percentage inflated the overall awards in Standard Grade sciences and led to over-confidence among candidates about their ability to tackle Higher Grade in the following year. After due consideration, most Subject Panels recommended the retention of existing arrangements. Only in the social subjects and the sciences were revised arrangements proposed, and the Board decided on 2 October 1996 to issue

these for further consultation, not only to teachers' organisations and education authorities, but also to individual presenting centres (**Note 34**).

Two other issues were put out for consultation by the Board around this time. The first of these dealt with the relatively simple issue of whether centres wished the SEB to continue with the existing practice of issuing results on the earliest possible date or whether they wished a definite date to be set. There was overwhelming support for the latter option, and centres were informed in March 1996 that the results for that year would be issued on 8 August. They were!

Much more contentious was the consultation over timetabling arrangements for the incoming Higher Still examinations (see Chapter 9). The SCE examination diet now extended to almost five weeks and affected S4, S5 and S6 simultaneously. An important proposal of *Higher Still* had been that Higher Grade courses should last 160 hours instead of the normal 120 hours, and that Advanced Highers should extend to 360 hours. In order to maximise and optimise the teaching and learning time available for these courses while still making it possible for pupils to study for five Higher Grade subjects, the Higher Still Strategy Group had concluded that the length of time devoted to the actual examinations would have to be cut. However, since several levels would have to be examined within the Higher Still proposals, as well as many more candidates, there was a serious danger that the examination diet would be considerably lengthened. In accordance with normal procedures regarding proposed changes in SCE examinations, the Secretary of State asked the SEB to carry out a consultation on two options suggested by the Higher Still Strategy Group. Both of these aimed at reducing the Standard Grade timetable to three weeks, followed by three weeks of Higher Still examinations. Under Option 1, Standard Grade would run from late April to mid-May, and Higher Still examinations from mid-May to the end of the first week in June. The six weeks under Option 2 would extend over the last three weeks of May and the first three weeks of June. Both of these options would allow for a full year of teaching between the Standard Grade examinations and the Higher Still examinations. The timescale for the issue of results would be tight but, with the use of teacher estimates (rather than orders of merit) and the help of improved computer technology, the Board was confident that results could still be ready for issue around 10 August, and that, because of the greater use of internal assessment in the new Higher courses, this could be achieved without loss of reliability.

When it issued the consultation document towards the end of April 1995, the SEB took the opportunity of including two suggestions of its own: firstly, that the time devoted to Standard Grade examinations could be reduced by producing combined Credit/General and General/Foundation papers (although three separate levels would be maintained for marking purposes) or by setting the Credit and Foundation papers concurrently, followed by the General paper; and, secondly, that candidates might be discouraged from sitting papers at two levels if a "near miss" Grade 3 were offered on the Credit paper and similarly a Grade 5 on the General paper.

Although the majority of respondents said they would welcome a reduction in the time devoted to examinations, there was no clear consensus as to how that could be achieved. On the one hand, it was recognised that the latter part of June was not a productive time for teaching; on the other, that period did allow time for important extra-curricular and induction activities. There

was also doubt over whether a sufficient number of teachers would be willing to forego a large part of their summer vacation to become examiners and markers. Some even suggested that there was no need to rush this sort of decision since the target session was now 1998-99, following the Secretary of State's announcement on 2 August 1995 that the implementation of Higher Still would be delayed by one year. There was a small majority in favour of the combined papers proposal, but all three teachers' organisations strongly opposed it on the grounds that the criterion-referenced nature of Standard Grade was valued in that it catered for all levels of ability; and there was a fear that the perception would arise that there were only two levels - Credit/General and General/Foundation. In some schools, the proposed changes would not increase teaching time since they had to give pupils study leave for most of the examination period because of accommodation difficulties. The Board sought to meet the majority of views expressed in the consultation process by recommending that no action should be taken on introducing near-miss Grades 3 and 5 at Standard Grade, but that further work should be carried out on the concurrent timetabling of Credit and Foundation papers and on modelling a timetable in which there was overlap of Standard Grade and Higher Grade examinations, so that the examination diet could be reduced to less than six weeks and finish by the end of the second week in June.

The Secretary of State (now Michael Forsyth) passed these recommendations to the Higher Still Strategy Group, which accepted them and set up a Steering Group under the Chairmanship of Dr. Hamish Long, Chief Executive of the SEB. The Steering Group completed its work in the early part of 1996 and recommended that:

- (a) the Standard Grade timetable should extend over no more than nineteen consecutive examination days;
- (b) Higher Still examinations should begin roughly a week after the start of the Standard Grade diet and last no more than fifteen consecutive examination days;
- (c) the last examinations for both Standard Grade and Higher Still should take place on the Friday falling in the period 10-16 June each year;
- (d) in Standard Grade, time should be saved either by timetabling papers in pairs (Credit/General and General/Foundation) and conducting them simultaneously, or by having a common starting time for Credit and Foundation papers, followed or preceded by papers at General Level.

The Strategy Group accepted proposals (a), (b) and (c), and chose the former model in (d). When this was reported back to the SEB, the Board decided to introduce the restructured Standard Grade timetable in the 1998 examinations in order to gain valuable experience of the new arrangements a year ahead of the first Higher Still examinations in 1999. An illustrative timetable was issued for information in December 1996.

Despite its heavy commitments in Higher Still developments and a very tight budget, the Board continued to monitor performance in existing examinations and to provide guidance for teachers on aspects of assessment where Subject Panels identified particular needs. Sometimes this would take the form of detailed marking instructions; sometimes worked solutions to specimen questions would be issued or guidance on how internal assessment should be carried out. Several important pieces of research were also carried out and the results widely disseminated

through Research Bulletins, which began to be issued following the Board's decision to make the Research Committee a sub-committee of the Examinations Committee instead of a major committee in its own right. In the space available here, there is room to mention only a few of the more far-reaching pieces of research.

Detailed statistical monitoring of the operation of Standard Grade examinations, which had begun with the 1990 examinations (the first year in which more candidates were presented for Standard Grade than for "O" Grade), continued annually thereafter. Its initial aim was to check not only the overall awarding standards in the various subjects, but also the correlations between the elements in each subject. In 1993, the research was extended to show the statistical relationship between candidates' results at Standard Grade in S4 and their subsequent results at Higher Grade in S5. The original aim of this investigation had been to examine the effectiveness of the articulation between Standard Grade and the Revised Highers. However, it was soon realised that this sort of information would be valuable to schools in advising pupils when they were choosing their subjects for Higher Grade, and results were reported in Research Bulletin No.1. An update of this research was issued in Research Bulletin No.5 which gave information about using Standard Grade results to predict likely success at Higher Grade.

Research Bulletin No 2 explained how moderation worked. It also gave the results of a review of moderation procedures, which showed that the system was generally working well and that there was a considerable degree of confidence in the judgements of both teachers and Moderators.

Since 1992, the SEB had used teachers' estimates to review the performance of individual Standard Grade candidates before the issue of results and to award derived grades to certain candidates whose performance was less good than teachers had estimated. This statistical procedure was based on the concordance between the examination results and teachers' estimates of the anticipated performance of individual candidates both overall and within the elements. Satisfied with the working of these procedures, the Board carried out a pilot exercise in 1994 to assess the feasibility and acceptability of using teachers' estimates at Higher Grade. The success of this pilot led to the decision that, from the 1995 examinations onwards, teachers should supply estimates for Higher Grade candidates rather than orders of merit, thus bringing Higher Grade into line with Standard Grade. Some schools were unhappy with this decision and, as a concession, the Board agreed that for the 1995 examinations teachers could submit orders of merit if they wished. If they did this, however, they had to realise that the Board would not be able to carry out a scrutiny of candidates' performance before the issue of results in order to identify those candidates who had under-performed. Appeals would still be possible after the issue of results, but candidates would have to wait until September to know whether the appeals had been successful. Besides making it possible for the first stage of the appeals procedure to be carried out much earlier, the Board regarded the use of estimates as yet another stage in the development of a robust and interactive relationship between internal and external assessment in public certification, which would be essential for the successful implementation of Higher Still.

This work was taken a stage further in 1996, when a qualitative study of teachers' estimates was carried out. This was based on semi-structured interviews with 76 Principal Teachers across a range of subjects with the aim of providing all teachers with guidance on good practice. Not

surprisingly, this research showed that concordant schools tended to be those which reviewed the accuracy of their estimates in the light of actual results. The findings were published in Research Bulletin 6 along with an explanation of concordance and the use made of estimates. A survey of the views of centres on the quality of the Board's examination question papers revealed a high degree of satisfaction, while the response from a range of interested bodies on the value of subject panels was that they served an important function.

One piece of research which caused general concern dealt with gender effects on uptake and attainment in SCE examinations. It came as no surprise that, despite sex discrimination legislation in 1975 and the consequent removal of traditional barriers which denied boys and girls access to certain subjects, considerable gender differences still remained in the choice of subjects. A great deal of research had gone into ascertaining the reasons for girls avoiding subjects normally favoured by boys, but there had been little or no research into why boys avoided subjects with a traditionally high female participation. What came as a shock to many was the finding that girls were not only attempting more subjects on average than boys but were outstripping them in attainment, even in Mathematics and Physics which were traditionally regarded as "boys' subjects". The difference was particularly marked at Standard Grade where girls' results were about a third of a grade better when averaged over all Standard Grade subjects. The research study also checked to see if the difference was due to gender bias in the wording and marking of questions, but it found no such bias. Although these findings were sensationalised in the media, they came as less of a surprise to most teachers who knew from experience that, generally speaking, girls matured more quickly and were more conscientious than boys, and so were better students in the primary school and early secondary, whereas, traditionally, boys came into their own in the upper secondary as they took a tumble to themselves. Nevertheless, the gap between the performances of girls and boys at Standard Grade was greater than might have been expected. The causes, however, are more likely to be found in the social attitudes of young people. Girls are clearly embracing the opportunities created by equal opportunity legislation and publicity. Many boys, however, possibly as a defence against the emergence of girl power, seem to have developed a peer culture which despises academic study as unbecoming their macho image. Another piece of research which related to maturity showed that the performance of older pupils was on average a fifth of a grade better at Standard Grade than that of younger pupils, although the difference was less marked at Higher Grade.

In addition to this sort of internally funded research designed to improve the Board's own procedures and to inform teachers on how to improve their assessment procedures, research staff continued to be involved in consultancy work for the Higher Still Development Unit and for the SOEID Audit Unit which produced the books of annual attainment statistics. The Board also had contracts in various parts of the world, notably Jordan, Oman, Egypt, Russia, Romania, the Baltic Republics, Eritrea, South Africa and Northern Ireland. At home, in 1996, a new contract was signed with the General Register Office (Scotland). Under it, the Board gave training in the setting, printing and marking of examination papers to Registrars who were responsible for the examinations in Law and Practice of Registration in Scotland. While 90% of the Board's income still came from presentation fees, consultancy was becoming such an important source of income (over £110,000 net in 1995) that it decided to seek COSLA approval to appoint an officer whose specific remit would be to seek consultancy work. In 1995, therefore, a business plan for

consultancy was prepared, which included possible joint consultancies with SCOTVEC. However, the project had to be dropped through lack of finance.

The high standing of the Board in assessment and certification was also reflected in the large number of visitors from all over the world who visited the Board offices, and in the fact that Dr Long, the Chief Executive, was asked to deliver the keynote speech to the annual conference of the International Association for Educational Assessment in New Zealand in 1994, and Peter Kimber, the Depute Chief Executive, to address that Association's annual conference in Montreal in 1995.

Both the SEB and SCOTVEC had taken seriously the problems faced by people with special educational needs. As stated in Chapter 4, from 1994 the SEB offered two new English Standard Grade courses ("*Alternative Communication*" and "*Spoken English*"). SCOTVEC also had a range of courses which were specially designed for this type of candidate. Wordstart and Numberstart were groupings of National Certificate modules in basic literacy and numeracy. Skillstart, Lifestart and Workstart were also group awards based on National Certificate modules. These qualifications were especially designed to help candidates with learning difficulties improve their employment prospects and/or prepare them for further education or training. The number of young people taking advantage of these opportunities was still small in the later 1990s, but it was growing.

Table 8: SEB Presentations 1994-97

	Alternative Communication		Spoken English	
	Entries	Awards Grades 1-4	Entries	Awards Grades 1-4
1994	12	8	19	17
1995	10	7	18	5
1996	11	5	28	24
1997	3	3	24	23

Table 9: SCOTVEC Presentations 1996-97

	Presentations	Awards
Wordstart (Level I)	107	54
Numberstart (Level I)	122	79
Skillstart (Level I)	523	239
Skillstart (Level II)	179	81
Lifestart	307	88
Workstart	218	46

All of the above was achieved in a period of growing financial constraints. SCOTVEC had achieved a remarkable turnaround in its finances in a very short time. In 1987, it raised only

20% of its income through its own activities, and for the remaining 80% it relied on a subvention from COSLA. In 1992-93, it became financially self-sufficient. This transformation was achieved through a combination of increased efficiency, business growth and diversifying into related areas. By its very nature, SCOTVEC had to respond rapidly to external demands for new qualifications, and this was a lucrative field. For example, SCOTVEC's financial statement for the first eight months of the financial year 1996-97 showed that it had received in that time over £2.75 million from externally funded activities, including £1.138 million from the SOEID for the development of GSVQs and over £1.322 million from the Department for Education and Employment for the development of SVQs. Because of the greater flexibility its constitution afforded, SCOTVEC was able to exploit commercial opportunities as they arose. Two examples were the winning of a contract from the Department of Transport for Training and Development for the whole of the UK and the handling of the Police Promotions Examinations.

A good illustration of SCOTVEC's financial power is provided by its handling of office accommodation. For the first year of its existence, SCOTVEC had operated from two sites - the former offices of SCOTBEC in Edinburgh and of SCOTEC in Queen Street in Glasgow. On 25 April 1986, the Board of the Council decided to close the Edinburgh office and operate from the one site in Queen Street. The Edinburgh offices were sold for £621,000 and closed on 31 August 1987. Additional accommodation was leased in Queen Street. In February 1987, however, the Council's architects reported that considerable capital expenditure would be required to create good working conditions in Queen Street, and it was agreed with the approval of the Scottish Office and COSLA to lease Hanover House, a newly constructed office block in Douglas Street, Glasgow.

Relocation to Hanover House was completed by the end of 1987, and the Secretary of State, Malcolm Rifkind, performed the official opening on 22 April 1988. It had originally been anticipated that the relocation costs would have to be met from the reserves but it was eventually possible to meet them from the Income and Expenditure Account, thanks partly to the sale of the Edinburgh office, but especially to the greatly increased income from entries for the National Certificate and Higher National courses. The decision by Strathclyde Region to reduce the local rates for Hanover House to zero for 1989-90 also helped, even though this reduction lasted for only two years because of the financial difficulties which Strathclyde itself faced in the early 1990s in common with all local authorities. By September 1989, the SCOTVEC Council was considering the option of buying the building instead of leasing it. The purchase price, if approved by the Secretary of State, the Treasury, the Public Works & Loan Board and COSLA would be £4.65 million. Because of property trends in Glasgow, however, it was decided to delay the purchase. Three months later, in December 1992, the building was purchased for £3.95 million. The Council borrowed £3.3 million from the Bank of Scotland and met the rest from reserves. Three years later, SCOTVEC's finances were such that it was decided in November 1995 to repay the loan in full.

The SEB, on the other hand, was so constrained by legislation and the rigorous oversight exercised by the Department and COSLA that it seldom had the financial or curricular freedom to promote new activities. For example, it had the desire but not the means or freedom to develop courses for the "new S5" population and, as a result, headteachers had to turn to SCOTVEC for these. Apart from the royalties it received from the publication of past

examination papers, it could not generate income through business arrangements with commercial and other bodies without losing its charitable status. The Secretary of State was asked in October 1994 to review the regulations but, at the beginning of November 1995, the Board was informed that, because the Scottish Qualifications Authority was to be set up, the Government had decided not to pursue a change in the regulations.

COSLA kept a watchful eye on the level of presentation fees and, although an increase was permitted in 1995 to pay for the release of teachers to work on a part-time basis as examiners, markers, etc., there was no financial gain for the Board since the £1.25 million which these payments actually cost was, of course, returned to the authorities. The one difference was that, whereas in the past the money had been distributed among the authorities without taking into account how much teaching time individual schools had lost through their teachers working for the Board, the money now went to those authorities and schools whose teachers had actually been released.

The Board continued its programme of office automation by gradually upgrading its networked PCs, and it was able in 1994 to establish an electronic link with SCOTVEC and Strathclyde Region, through which COSLA processed its funding for the Board. However, its main computer system was still essentially that which had been designed in the late 1960s. This considerably hindered the Board in its efforts to introduce speedier and more efficient procedures. For example, the SEB required a new computer system to implement the agreement that it had reached with SCOTVEC back in 1993 to adopt a common numbering system so that a candidate would have the same Scottish Candidate Number for all awards made by the two bodies. Tenders for replacing the old computer were received in October 1993, but the new system was not installed until 1995. Even then, the installation was not incident-free. The hope that some centres would be able to communicate with the Board using Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) did not materialise; and, as a result of other teething problems, the 1995 examination marks had to be processed on the old IBM mainframe system. Despite this, the results were still issued on time. Even after the installation of the new computer, much remained to be done before the Board could achieve its aim of having an open, integrated and single entry office-wide computing system. The provision of an integrated Examination Processing System (EPS) was completed in March 1996. This not only made it possible to reduce staffing and thus improve the value for money which the SEB offered; it also brought benefits in respect of time-saving and convenience to staff. These included providing 90 staff with immediate access to the Board's database, the electronic transmission of data on markers' fees and expenses, and the facility through the use of bar codes to distribute and track the packets of candidates' scripts which were issued to markers. Independent consultants, who had been commissioned by the SOEID to assist in the development of an IT strategy for the incoming Scottish Qualifications Authority, later recommended that it should adopt the combination of software systems built up by the SEB as the basis for its bespoke software development.

The SEB's lack of borrowing powers led to a particularly serious crisis in 1996. In February of that year, the Board Chairman wrote to the Secretary of State expressing concerns over the financing of capital purchases. A bill of around £250,000 in connection with the computer project was due to be paid in April, and it was likely that the Board would require to take out an overdraft, which was a more costly option than borrowing. With Scottish Office approval,

SCOTVEC agreed in November 1996 to approve a loan of £450,000 to finance the SEB's IT developments on which the SQA computer systems would later be based. At the same meeting, SCOTVEC decided to spend £111,000 from its reserves to fund the initial marketing and PR strategy of the SQA.

If proof was required of the close cooperation that was now commonplace between the two organisations, surely this was it, although one wonders why it took nine months to reach this solution. SCOTVEC's financial resources could not be used to subsidise its poor relation directly, but this sensible approach ensured that funds were not needlessly wasted through red tape. After all, the resources of both organisations would soon be pooled.

Note 28: The Catalogue of National Certificate modules, which contained 650 modules in 1984, had grown to over 2,500 by 1989-90. In March 1995, when the catalogue was issued as a CD-ROM, there were 3,700 modules; and, in the final days of SCOTVEC, the catalogue contained over 4,000 modules.

Note 29: *Manufacturing Matters*, published by the CBI in September 1994, reported that a UK survey conducted in 1994 revealed that employers generally were giving training very low priority and only 5% of them were using vocational qualifications. Take-up rates were lowest among smaller organisations; and half of the firms which employed fewer than 50 people were not even aware of the existence of SVQs. At the end of 1994, therefore, the Scottish Office took up SCORE's recommendation that the NRA should be given a higher national profile, and a decision was taken to appoint a Development Officer to promote the awareness and use of the NRA. This post was funded by the SOED. The experience in England was the same. In February 1997, the Department for Education in England decided to re-launch its National Record of Achievement since it had failed to catch on among employers and higher and further education institutions, even though it had been in existence for six years.

Note 30: The following statistics produced by SQA for the 1997 examinations illustrate this point clearly. Of the 48,330 Fifth Year candidates, by far the biggest number (22,484) took a mixture of Highers and NC modules. Other interesting figures are:

Higher Grades only	6,675	Short courses only	36
NC modules only	12,269	GSVQs/Clusters	7
Standard Grade only	39		

The corresponding statistics for S6 in 1997 were:

CSYS only	633
Highers only	6,037
CSYS and Highers only	9,513
CSYS, Highers and NC modules only	3,267
NC modules only	2,461
Standard Grades only	1,511
Short courses only	45
GSVQs/Clusters	14

Note 31: Some of these figures are different from those that appeared in SEB Annual Reports. Up to 1994, the figures given in the Annual Reports for S4 were for *certificates* issued; since S3 awards were not certificated until candidates completed S4, the S4 figures included awards which had been made to pupils in the previous year when they were in S3.

Note 32: Because of increased staying-on rates, it was now customary to measure presentations against the number of pupils in S4, rather than the age cohort as it had been in S1.

Note 33: At this time, PCs were only beginning to appear in pupils' homes and access to the recently created Internet was unheard of.

Note 34: One of the last decisions taken by the SEB (and subsequently announced by the SQA after taking over on 1 April 1997) was to accept the findings of a survey of social subjects teachers and scrap investigations in Standard Grade History, Geography, Modern Studies and Economics. From 1999 onwards, investigating skills would be tested through external examinations. The reduction of weighting of practical abilities in the sciences from 33% to 20% would also take effect in 1999.