

Scotland's

National Qualifications

A Quick Guide

This guide gives you the basic facts about National Qualifications (NQs) in Scotland and tells you about the range of qualifications available.

The guide complements more detailed information which schools and colleges can provide.

What are National Qualifications?

NQs are qualifications for students in secondary schools and are also offered in colleges of further education. NQs are Standard Grades, National Courses and National Units and cover hundreds of subjects to suit everyone's interests and skills.

Standard Grades	National Courses/Units
	Advanced Higher
	Higher
Standard Grade — Credit	Intermediate 2
Standard Grade — General	Intermediate 1
Standard Grade — Foundation	Access 3
	Access 2
	Access 1

Standard Grade

Standard Grades are generally taken over the third and fourth years at secondary school, with an exam at the end of the fourth year. Students often take seven or eight subjects including Maths and English. There are three levels of study: Credit, General, and Foundation. Students usually take exams at two levels — Credit and General, or General and Foundation. This makes sure that students have the best chance of achieving as high a grade as possible. This table shows the levels and grades that can be achieved.

Level	Grade
Credit	1 or 2
General	3 or 4
Foundation	5 or 6
Course completed	7

National Courses

Access 1, 2 and 3

Access 1 is designed for students who require considerable support with their learning while Access 2 is designed for students with more moderate support needs. Access 3 is comparable with Standard Grade Foundation level. Learning at Access levels 1, 2 and 3 is assessed by the school or college — it does not involve sitting an exam.

Intermediate 1 and 2

Intermediate 1 and 2 are qualifications for students who have completed Standard Grades, Access 3 or those who wish to take up a new subject at school or college. For some students, Intermediate 2 is a stepping stone to taking a Higher, as completing a Higher in just one year can be very demanding. Some schools now offer Intermediate Units and Courses as alternatives to Standard Grades in third and fourth year.

Higher

Highers are aimed particularly at students who have passed subjects at Standard Grade Credit level, or who have successfully completed a subject at Intermediate 2. Adults wishing to study for Highers at college may not need previous qualifications. Highers are normally needed for entry into university or college to study for degrees and Higher National Certificate or Diploma courses (HNCs and HNDs).

Advanced Higher

Advanced Highers are aimed at students who have passed Highers, and they are usually taken in sixth year at school or at college. They extend the skills and knowledge gained at Higher and are additional qualifications that are useful for entry into higher education or the workplace.

National Units

National Units are qualifications in their own right and usually take around 40 hours to cover. National Courses usually consist of three National Units which are assessed by the student's teacher or lecturer.

How are Units and Courses assessed?

Unit assessments are tasks set and marked by teachers and lecturers. Students are told in advance when they will take place to ensure there is plenty of time for revision. National Courses from Intermediate 1 to Advanced Higher include an external assessment. This can be an exam, project work or folios completed during the course which are marked by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Performance in the external assessment determines the grade given for the course.

Grades and Course awards

Grades are awarded on the basis of how well a student does in the external assessment. However, to get a full course award a student must pass all three National Units as well as achieve a grade in the external assessment. Pass grades are awarded at A, B, and C, and a grade D is awarded to a student who just fails to get a grade C.

Core Skills

Core Skills are the essential skills that help people through their education, training, work and lives. They are built into National Units and National Courses, so students are not required to sit additional assessments, but Core Skills can also be studied as Units in their own right. The development of Core Skills has always been part of school and college learning and the

National Qualifications system encourages this. There are currently five certificated Core Skills:

- ◆ Problem solving
- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Numeracy
- ◆ Information technology (often referred to as ICT — information and communications technology)
- ◆ Working with others

How do NQs relate to Scotland's other qualifications?

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has been developed to help students, employers and the general public understand the full range of Scottish qualifications. The SCQF can be seen below:

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

SCQF level	Schools	Schools and colleges	Colleges and Universities	Workplace (Scottish Vocational Qualifications)
12			Doctorate	
11			Masters degree	SVQ 5
10			Honours degree	
9			Ordinary degree	
8			HND/Diploma of Higher Education	SVQ 4
7		Advanced Higher	HNC/Certificate of Higher Education	
6		Higher		SVQ 3
5	Standard Grade — Credit	Intermediate 2		SVQ 2
4	Standard Grade — General	Intermediate 1		SVQ 1
3	Standard Grade — Foundation	Access 3		
2		Access 2		
1		Access 1		

Frequently asked questions about National Qualifications

1. Are the Unit assessments important or should the student concentrate only on the exams?

Students have to pass all the Unit assessments as well as the exam to be awarded the Course.

2. If a student fails one of the Unit assessments does that mean they can't sit the exam or get the Course award?

They get one other chance in the session to re-sit the Unit assessment. They may still sit the exam but they will not be awarded the full Course until they have passed all the Unit assessments and the exam.

3. What happens if a student passes all the Unit assessments but fails the exam?

They will get a Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) listing the Units passed. The student can then re-take the Course exam in a later year, without the need to re-take the Units. In some instances the school or college may decide to appeal — see question 6.

4. If a student starts off at one level but struggles, or finds it too easy, can they move to a different level?

This should be discussed with the subject teacher or lecturer; it will depend on the subject and how far into the session it is. It may be harder to move up a level because the student might find it difficult to catch up.

5. What is a NAB?

This is the term often used by teachers/students to refer to the Unit assessments drawn from the national assessment bank.

6. If a student or parent disagrees with exam results, can they appeal?

No. Only the school or college can appeal to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and will normally do so only if its estimate of the student's exam performance varies greatly from the actual results. The estimate is based on evidence of performance throughout the course.

Where can I find more information?

A more detailed version of this guide is available online at any of the websites below. Your local school or college can provide more information about National Qualifications and the organisations listed below can also provide advice, booklets and fact-sheets.

More copies

For further copies of this guide call 0845 279 1000 and quote reference number BD2072. It can also be made available in community languages and alternative formats. For a more detailed version of this Guide, quote reference BD2088.

Scottish Qualifications Authority

Tel: Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000

E-mail: customer@sqa.org.uk

Web: www.sqa.org.uk

Learning and Teaching Scotland

Tel: Customer Enquiries on 08700 100297

E-mail: enquiries@LTScotland.org.uk

Web: www.LTScotland.org.uk/NQ

Scottish Further Education Unit

Tel: 01786 892000

E-mail: sfeu@sfeu.ac.uk

Web: www.sfeu.ac.uk

Scottish Executive Education Department

Tel: 0131-556 8400 or 0845 774 1741

E-mail: ceu@scotland.gov.uk

Web: www.scotland.gov.uk

BD2072 March 2004