



2014 National Qualifications Results

On 5th August 2014 the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) published the 'Attainment Statistics (August)' following the first certification of the new National Qualifications to support Curriculum for Excellence in schools and colleges.

The 'Attainment Statistics (August)' report contains attainment information across the current National Courses (Access, Intermediate, Higher, Advanced Higher and Scottish Baccalaureate) and the new National Courses (National 2 to National 5) as well as Awards, Skills for Work, National Progression Awards, and National Certificates.

The introduction of the approaches that form the basis of Curriculum for Excellence and the nature of the new qualifications must be taken into account when considering the 2014 results. There are a variety of factors which mean that direct comparisons between attainment in 2014 and previous years cannot validly be made.

What's different?

Whilst the standards of qualifications at SCQF levels 3 to 5 remain as high in 2014 as they have in previous years, there are several changes both in the qualifications and in the wider education system as a result of Curriculum for Excellence that mean that the results published in August look different. These new National Courses have been introduced on a phased basis, by level, as learners experiencing Curriculum for Excellence, move through the school.

In the 2014-15 session, National 2 to National 5 and the new Higher will be available for those in S4 and S5 ensuring good progression from their Broad General Education. This will be the final year that the existing Access, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2 and Higher qualifications will be available for those who have followed the previous 5-14 curriculum.

In the 2015-16 session, the new National 2 to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications will be available. The existing Access, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications will no longer be available.

During this transition period where there is a mixture of existing and new qualifications direct comparisons year on year will be extremely complex.

New National Qualifications

The new qualifications have been designed to reflect the purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence and involve the assessment of different skills and knowledge, for example, deeper learning and higher order thinking skills. Learners have undertaken different approaches to assessment of the new qualifications.

National 4 qualifications are internally assessed and verified by SQA. Almost all of the new National 5 courses include some sort of coursework assessment, to allow valid assessment of a wider range of skills and knowledge and most include a final examination.

As this is the first certification of the new National Qualifications, there will be no trend information in 2014; however, in subsequent years comparative information on the previous years will be reported.

Removal of Standard Grade Qualifications

2014 is the first year since the discontinuation of Standard Grade and the introduction of new National Courses. For the majority of schools this has seen S4 learners move from taking Standard Grade, Access or Intermediate qualifications to taking National 3 to National 5 qualifications.

One of the major differences between Standard Grade and new National Courses is that learners at Standard Grade typically sat two levels of assessment – Credit/General (SCQF levels 4 & 5) or General/Foundation (SCQF levels 3 & 4), whereas those for new Nationals will only sit one level.

Since Standard Grades were taken across two SCQF levels (3/4 and 4/5), it is not possible to directly compare learners by individual SCQF level between 2013 and 2014. Similarly, it is not possible to calculate Standard Grade attainment rates at each SCQF level as candidates were entered at two SCQF levels.

Candidates Entering for Intermediate Qualifications

In previous years, Intermediate qualifications were taken by a range of candidates from across school year groups. This year Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2 courses have continued but have been taken predominantly by candidates who have followed the previous 5-14 curriculum as they have moved through the school. The candidates for these qualifications are therefore not a similar group of candidates to previous years. S5 learners now make up the majority of this level, whereas previously it was dominated by learners in S4. There are also a smaller number of candidates that have entered for Intermediate qualifications than in previous years.

Flexibility of Curriculum Models

Curriculum for Excellence provides schools with the flexibility to develop curriculum models best suited to their local circumstances and individual candidates. Therefore, S4 learners will have experienced a variety of presentation patterns both in terms of the number of subjects and whether individuals are studying for a qualification over one or two years. Different curriculum models provide the opportunity

for learners to study a different mix of awards and qualifications at the most appropriate time for them during their senior phase, S4-S6. Overall, this has resulted in more local variation with candidates being presented for a different number of subjects at the end of S4.

Summary

The different types of qualifications and the removal of Standard Grade taken together with the different approaches to delivery mean that attainment patterns across SCQF levels will vary from those seen in previous years and will make direct comparisons of attainment between 2013 and 2014 extremely complex.

During this transition period where there is a mixture of existing and new qualifications direct comparisons year on year will be extremely complex.

The 2014 figures will be used as a benchmark for attainment in future years allowing fresh insight into emerging trends under the new system.