

2016 National Qualifications results

On 9 August 2016 the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) published the 'Attainment Statistics (August)' following the third year of certification of the new National Qualifications and the first year of the new Advanced Higher to support Curriculum for Excellence in schools and colleges.

The 'Attainment Statistics (August)' report contains attainment information across the National Courses (National 2 to National 5 and Higher and Advanced Higher) and the Scottish Baccalaureate, together with Awards, Skills for Work, National Progression Awards, and National Certificates.

A variety of factors mean that direct comparisons between attainment in 2016 and previous years continues to be complex.

National Qualifications

The new National Courses have been introduced on a phased basis, by level, as learners experiencing Curriculum for Excellence move through the school. In session 2015–16, with the introduction of the new Advanced Higher, all National courses are now fully in place for all candidates. There is now a single suite of qualifications available — National 2 to National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher and the Scottish Baccalaureate.

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.

During session 2014–15, the new Higher qualification ran alongside the previous Higher. In 2015–16 all candidates from schools and colleges are now undertaking the new Higher. We continue to see a variety of progression pathways for candidates entering Higher qualifications.

The 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 and application of learning. Learners will have undertaken different approaches to assessment of the new qualifications. National 4 qualifications are internally assessed and quality assured by SQA. Almost all of the National 5 and Higher courses include some sort of coursework assessment. This allows valid assessment of a wider range of skills and knowledge. In the majority of courses, a learner's final grade is based on a combination of coursework assessment and a final examination.

All of the new National Courses, including the new Advanced Highers this year, have been benchmarked against the previous and current National Qualifications on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). This ensures that the new courses are set at the same level of demand and difficulty as their predecessors, and that national standards are maintained.

Candidate cohort

Curriculum for Excellence provides schools with the flexibility of curriculum models best suited to their local circumstances and the needs of individual candidates. These 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).

There has been a change in volume of entries to qualifications, with reduced numbers undertaking qualifications at SCQF levels 2, 3 and 4; an increase in numbers doing qualifications at SCQF level 5; a slight reduction in number doing Highers and a slight increase in the uptake of the new Advanced Higher.

In this the first year of Advanced Higher, learners may have progressed from the new Higher or the previous Higher.

Experience from session 2015–16

This is the third year of implementation of National 2 to National 5 levels, which are bedding in satisfactorily within centres. This is the second year of implementation of the Higher, however for many centres this was the first year that they presented candidates for this Higher. On the whole, centres have transitioned well to the new arrangements. Progression from National 5 to Higher is also working appropriately. Similarly, centres and candidates coped well with the new Advanced Higher.

There has been an increased uptake of wider achievement and vocational qualifications at SCQF levels 2 to 6.

SQA publishes information for teachers and lecturers about what is working appropriately and areas in which future candidates could improve. This allows them to reflect on the approaches they are taking.

SQA also provides them with understanding standards events and materials as part of their Continuing Professional Development. In session 2016–17, SQA will focus on Advanced Higher and aspects of other levels that would be helpful for teachers and lecturers to have additional exemplification of standards.

Assessments

The majority of National Qualifications include both final examinations and coursework in order to allow candidates to demonstrate a breadth, depth and application of skills and knowledge.

Examinations

The new examinations are working well. In light of evidence, SQA will continue to make small adjustments to these exams and how they are marked. In a small number of subjects more substantive change is required and where this is the case a review programme will be set up.

In May, SQA published [Subject Review Reports](#) that outline some of the actions that will be taken.

Coursework

Coursework enables candidates to show a depth of knowledge, understanding and creativity and allows for personalisation and choice. There is some evidence of this emerging across the system. This should continue to develop as centres gain more experience in delivering the new qualifications.

Coursework is carried out within the centres, normally under controlled conditions. The ongoing credibility of the qualifications requires that the conditions of assessment are rigorously applied across all centres.

The conditions of assessment are clearly set out in the Course specification documents and it is essential that teachers and lecturers comply in order to ensure reliability of assessment decisions across Scotland.

To ensure equity and fairness across candidates and centres, SQA will work with schools, local authorities and colleges to confirm appropriate measures are in place.

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Summary

This year there remains a degree of change from previous years in the make-up of candidates taking specific qualifications. This is the first year of the new Advanced Higher and the first year in which the full cohort of candidates have been presented for the new Higher.

For these reasons, detailed comparisons year-on-year whilst more appropriate than in the previous year, remain complex.