



# 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.

# National Qualifications — a quick guide



National Qualifications (NQs) are one of the most important types of qualification in Scotland. Almost everyone leaving school or college today has one or more NQ. This leaflet will give you an idea of what the NQs that a young person might achieve at school or college actually mean.

NQs are awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) — Scotland's national body for qualifications.

## What are National Qualifications?

National Qualifications are one of the three main groups of qualifications awarded by SQA. The other two groups are Higher National qualifications (usually taken at college) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (work-based qualifications).

NQs are taken by students in secondary schools and colleges (and some training centres). They cover subjects to suit everyone's interests and skills, from Chemistry to Construction, History to Hospitality, and Computing to Care.

The types of NQ that you will come across are:

- Standard Grades
- National Units
- National Courses
- Group Awards

### Standard Grades

Standard Grades are generally taken over the third and fourth year at secondary schools. Students often take seven or eight subjects including Mathematics 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

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

chance of achieving as high a grade as possible. The table shows the levels and grades that can be achieved.

## National Units

National Units are the building blocks of National Courses and Group Awards. They are also qualifications in their own right, and are normally designed to take 40 hours of teaching to complete. Over 3,500 National Units are available.

## National Courses

National Courses are usually made up of three National Units and an external assessment (which could be an exam or a piece of work that is assessed by examiners). There are National Courses at various levels.

## Levels

### Access 1, 2 and 3

Access 1 is designed for students who require considerable support with their learning, while Access 2 is designed for those with more moderate support needs. Access 3 is comparable with Standard Grade Foundation level.

Learning at Access 1, 2 and 3 is assessed by the school — it does not involve an exam.

### Intermediate 1 and 2

Intermediate 1 and 2 are qualifications for students who have completed Standard Grades, or Courses at Access 3. For some students Intermediate 2 is a stepping stone to Higher. They are also suitable for those wishing to take up a new subject at school or college. Some schools now offer Intermediate Units and Courses as alternatives to Standard Grade in second, 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 Course at Intermediate 2. (Adults wishing to study Highers at college may not need previous qualifications.)

Highers are normally needed for entry into university or college to study for degree or Higher National Certificate or Diploma courses (HNCs or HNDs).



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## Advanced Higher

Advanced Highers are aimed at students who have passed Highers, and are usually taken in sixth year of school or at college. These Courses extend the skills and knowledge gained at Higher and are useful for entry to university or employment.

## Skills for Work Courses

Skills for Work National Courses have been introduced on a pilot basis to encourage school students to become familiar with the world of work. They involve a strong element of learning through involvement in practical activities which are directly related to a particular vocational area, and they develop knowledge and skills that are important to employment. They are available at a range of levels and are normally delivered by a school and college working in partnership.

Skills for Work Courses are assessed by the school or college — they do not involve a Course assessment, such as an exam (though the assessments are quality assured by SQA).

## Group Awards

National Qualifications Group Awards are built up from National Units.

## National Progression Awards (NPAs)

NPAs are designed to develop and assess a defined set of skills and knowledge in specialist vocational areas. They are linked to National Occupational Standards — the basis of Scottish Vocational Qualifications.

NPAs range from Access 2 to Higher, and are mainly used by colleges for short programmes of study, such as part-time programmes for those already in work or return-to-work programmes for the unemployed.

NPAs are available from summer 2006.

## National Certificates

National Certificates are primarily aimed at 16–18 year olds and adults in full-time education, normally at a college. They prepare students for more advanced study or employment. National Certificates are available from summer 2006.



## How are NQs assessed?

Unit assessments are tasks that are set and marked against national standards by teachers and lecturers in schools and colleges. This is known as an internal assessment.

Most National Courses from Intermediate 1 to Advanced Higher include an external assessment. This can be an exam, project work or folio, which is completed during the Course and then marked by SQA. How well the candidate does in the external assessment determines the grade for the Course.

Access 2 and 3 and Skills for Work Courses are assessed by teachers or lecturers and have no final exam. Marking is checked by SQA.

### Achieving Grades

#### For Intermediate 1 to Advanced Higher Courses

Grades are awarded on the basis of how well a student does in the external assessment. To pass a Course, a student has to pass all three National Units as well as achieve a grade in the external assessment (where there is one). Intermediate 1 to Advanced Higher Courses are awarded at Grades A–D.

There is a comprehensive appeals system for students who do not perform as well as expected.

Access 2 and 3 and Skills for Work National Courses are ungraded. Students pass the National Units that make up the Course to achieve the qualification.

### Core Skills

Core Skills are the essential skills that help people through their education, training, work and life. They are often built into National Units and National Courses, so students don't have to sit additional assessments, but they can also be studied as Units in their own right. The Core Skills are:

- Communication
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Information Technology
- Working with Others

Everyone who achieves SQA qualifications automatically gets a Core Skills Profile — a listing of all the Core Skills they've achieved — on their Scottish Qualifications Certificate.



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### The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

To understand how NQs and other qualifications relate to each other, you need to know a bit about the SCQF.

The SCQF is a way of comparing and understanding Scottish qualifications. It does this by giving qualifications level and credit points. These show how demanding the learning for a qualification is, and roughly how long it takes to achieve the qualification.

- The level of a qualification shows how difficult it is. There are 12 levels in the SCQF, level 1 being the least difficult and level 12 the most difficult.

- The number of SCQF credit points shows how much learning has to be done to achieve the qualification. One SCQF credit point equals about 10 hours of learning (including assessment). So a student achieving a qualification with 24 SCQF credit points will have done approximately 240 hours of learning.

Levels and credit points are shown on the certificates we issue to students.

The table below shows how SQA qualifications and those awarded by universities fit into the SCQF.

SCQF Levels	SQA National Units, Courses and Group Awards	Universities and colleges	SVQ
12		Doctorate	
11		Masters Degree	SVQ 5
10		Honours Degree	
9		Ordinary Degree	
8		Higher National Diploma	SVQ 4
7	Advanced Higher	Higher National Certificate	
6	Higher		SVQ 3
5	Intermediate 2/ Standard Grade Credit		SVQ 2
4	Intermediate 1/ Standard Grade General		SVQ 1
3	Access 3/ Standard Grade Foundation		
2	Access 2		
1	Access 1		

## More information

Our Customer Contact Centre can provide more information about any of our qualifications. There are also some other useful publications that you can request or download from our website:

- *Scottish Qualifications*  
FD2904                      March 2006
- *HN Qualifications of Choice*  
CC3141                      March 2006
- *SVQs: an introduction for employers*  
DD3133                      March 2006
- *Appeals: how the system works*  
BA1879                      March 2006
- *Introducing Advanced Higher*  
BD2803                      March 2006

## Useful web addresses

[www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)

[www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk](http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk)

[www.ltscotland.org.uk](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk)

[www.sfeu.ac.uk](http://www.sfeu.ac.uk)





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