

New qualifications — new opportunities



Our new **National 1 to National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher** qualifications reward a wide range of achievement and are designed to help learners develop the knowledge, understanding and skills they will need to succeed.

Young people in secondary schools and colleges across Scotland are now studying for our new National Qualifications. The new qualifications have been developed to support Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) – the 3 to 18 curriculum in Scotland that is transforming the way young people learn.

The new qualifications have been compared against the previous National Qualifications you will already be familiar with, and it is our responsibility to make sure that the new qualifications continue to meet national standards.

The higher education (HE) sector has made a significant contribution to the development of the new qualifications, by serving on the strategic Curriculum Area Review Groups (CARGs) and on many of the individual subject development teams. This has been fundamental in helping us to develop qualifications that are challenging and relevant and which encourage the higher-order thinking skills that learners need when moving on to university.

You will now start to receive applications from learners who have achieved the new Highers and we will continue to work with you to help you prepare for receiving these learners.

Dr Janet Brown
Chief Executive
Scottish Qualifications Authority
(SQA)



What has changed?

This table shows how the new National Qualifications replace the previous National Qualifications.

SCQF level	Previous National Qualifications	Replaced by	New National Qualifications
7	Advanced Higher	▶	Advanced Higher (new)
6	Higher	▶	Higher (new)
5	Standard Grade (Credit level) Intermediate 2	▶	National 5
4	Standard Grade (General level) Intermediate 1	▶	National 4
3	Access 3 Standard Grade (Foundation level)	▶	National 3
1 and 2	Access 1 and Access 2	▶	National 1 and National 2

To find out more about how the new qualifications compare with other SQA qualifications on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), visit www.sqa.org.uk/readyreckoner

You can also find more information at www.scqf.org.uk



What is different about the new qualifications?

The new qualifications have the same level of demand and difficulty as the previous National Qualifications. They are designed to extend the quality of learning that learners experience in the Senior Phase at school (S4 to S6) or at college, and to help them to use what they have learned beyond the classroom.

The new qualifications continue to focus on developing learners' knowledge and understanding. However, they also focus on developing the skills that learners will need when they move on to further education, higher education, training or employment.

How will they prepare learners for university?

As well as developing learners' knowledge and understanding of key concepts, the new qualifications aim to help learners interpret, critically analyse, evaluate and reflect on this knowledge.

There is also greater emphasis on encouraging creativity and innovation, developing higher-order (critical) thinking skills, and skills in research and investigation, extended essay-writing and independent study.

This will provide a solid basis for progression into higher education and aims to develop a new type of learner with a more mature approach and a wider range of higher-order skills.



Scottish Baccalaureates

Many of the new Highers and Advanced Highers will continue to contribute to Scottish Baccalaureates. Find out more at www.sqa.org.uk/baccalaureates

How are the new qualifications assessed?



All new National Courses are made up of Units which are assessed internally by the teacher or lecturer, and externally quality assured by us. At National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, learners also complete a Course assessment that consists of a question paper, coursework (assignments, projects, performances and so on) or both, most of which we will mark externally.

You can find more information on assessment at www.sqa.org.uk/cfeassessment

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Courses are graded A to D or 'no award'. Learners will be awarded 24 SCQF credit points for achieving National 5 and Higher Courses, and 32 SCQF credit points for achieving Advanced Higher Courses.

Core Skills and Skills for Learning, Life and Work

Core Skills continue to be an important part of our qualifications system and a number of new National Units, Courses and Awards have Core Skills or Core Skill components that will automatically be recognised on learners' qualifications certificates. Find out more at www.sqa.org.uk/coreskills

We also support the development of other essential skills through the Skills for Learning, Life and Work (SfLLW) Framework. Find out more at www.sqa.org.uk/sfllw

How are the new qualifications being delivered?



Schools and local authorities decide how to organise their curriculum and each school develops its own curriculum model that best suits the needs of its learners in the Senior Phase (S4 to S6). You can view sample curriculum models on Education Scotland’s website at www.educationscotland.gov.uk

As part of this curriculum planning, schools and local authorities decide how to deliver the new Higher at a local level, so it is possible that some schools may deliver the new Higher differently from others. The table shows some examples of different routes that schools may take.

	S4	S5	S6
Example 1	National 5	Higher	Higher or Advanced Higher (or both)
Example 2	National 5	Higher Courses taken over two years	
Example 3	Two-year programme leading to Higher Courses (bypassing National 5 qualifications — see note below)		Higher or Advanced Higher (or both)
Example 4	National 4	National 5	Higher

Note: Where National 5 qualifications are bypassed, the content of the National 5 Courses will usually still be covered, however learners will not do any of the National 5 assessments. This involves learners starting Higher Courses at some point during S4.

Please note that this is not a full list of examples, and patterns of qualifications will vary by local authority, by school, and for individual learners. How colleges choose to deliver the new qualifications will vary between colleges.

Support for you

Curriculum for Excellence Support Team

Our Curriculum for Excellence Support Team has been working with schools, colleges, universities, local authorities and the independent sector for the last five years to help prepare them for the new qualifications.

The team is available to attend staff meetings and meet with other members of your community.

For contact details, visit www.sqa.org.uk/cfeteam

National Qualification Support Teams

Our National Qualification Support Teams (NQSTs) continually help to maintain and improve our National Qualifications portfolio, and include representatives from the higher education sector.

Find out more at www.sqa.org.uk/nqst

Information for universities across the rest of the UK

Universities Scotland has published a paper regarding reforms in Scottish school education, including the new National Qualifications. The paper is aimed at universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that receive applications from young people in Scotland, and will help with their admissions policies.

A copy of this paper is available from www.sqa.org.uk/cfeforuniversities

Our dedicated Higher Education Institution (HEI) Liaison Manager, John Lewis, works primarily with higher education admissions staff, UCAS and other higher education sector bodies. His contact details are:

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More information

To download a copy of this guide, visit www.sqa.org.uk/cfeformuniversities; our dedicated web page for higher education staff.

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