



2017 National Qualifications Results

On 8 August 2017, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) published the *'Attainment Statistics Report (August)'* following the fourth year of certification of the new National Qualifications and the second year of the new Advanced Higher to support Curriculum for Excellence in schools and colleges.

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

National Qualifications

The new National Courses have been introduced on a phased basis, by level, as learners experiencing Curriculum for Excellence move through the senior phase. There is now a single suite of qualifications available — National 2 to National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher and the Scottish Baccalaureate. This is the second full year of the complete suite of new National Courses.

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 from that level.

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 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 small reductions in the numbers undertaking qualifications at SCQF levels 2, 3, 4, 5 and Higher, and a slight increase in numbers doing Advanced Higher.

Experience from session 2016–17

This is the fourth year of implementation of National 2 to National 5 levels, which continue to operate satisfactorily within centres. In May 2016, SQA published [Subject Review Reports](#) that outlined some actions that were implemented for National 5 units for the 2016/17 session. This is the third year of implementation of the Higher, however for many centres this was the second 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, in the second year of its implementation.

There has been a small reduction in the uptake of wider achievement and vocational qualifications at SCQF levels 2 to 6. This is the first year in which Foundation Apprenticeships were available, although as these are two year courses, no certifications have been made this session.

In order to share the experience gained during the session, each year SQA publishes information for teachers and lecturers about what is working appropriately and areas in which future candidates could improve. This information is published in a report for each course on the subject pages of SQA's website and provides important information from principal assessors as to how the candidates have performed in the assessments. This allows centres to reflect on the approaches being taken in delivering the courses.

SQA also provides subject-specific 'Understanding Standards' support through webinars and support materials as part of the Continuing Professional Development for teachers and lecturers delivering particular courses. These activities provide additional support and exemplification of standards.

With regard to candidate presentation for qualifications, it is important that centres review how their approaches have worked. It is useful for Departments to compare their estimates of attainment with the actual results achieved by candidates. It may also be helpful for centres to review the 'mean score' of their candidates with that of the national average for the different course assessments, as it may help identify areas of strength and areas where improvements could be made.

High quality teaching expertise remains an essential component for the successful delivery of courses to ensure good preparation by the candidates across all aspects of the course.

Assessments

National Courses are assessed through unit assessments and course assessment. The course assessment of 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. Candidates tend to perform slightly better in coursework than in their final examinations. In general the coursework performance is slightly better as this work is carried out through the school year and has a narrower focus. However it is important that the final course grade is a combination of both coursework and exam to give a true picture of the candidates' ability to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding.

The new examinations are working well. However, nationally we have seen in a small number of courses at Higher and Advanced Higher, where candidate performance in the exam is significantly poorer than their performance in coursework. SQA publishes the national mean course assessment component scores for each course in August, so that centres can make comparisons and take appropriate action in the following session.

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. There are also some centres where whole classes are doing exactly the same topic for their coursework.

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. SQA is undertaking analysis of coursework and examination performance and will be working with centres where there is variation which is markedly different from the national pattern. This is to ensure equity and fairness across candidates and centres.

The conditions of assessment are clearly set out in the Course specification documents and it is essential that teachers and lecturers comply with these requirements in order to ensure reliability of assessment decisions in centres across Scotland. In the revised National 5 course documents for session 2017/18, SQA has provided further clarity upon the conditions of assessment for coursework that must be applied.

In light of evidence, SQA will continue to make small adjustments to the coursework and how it is marked.

For those candidates who are unsuccessful at National 5 there is recognising positive achievement (RPA). This requires the candidate to have passed the units from National 5 and the added value unit at National 4. The attainment at National 4 reported in the statistical tables reflects both the candidates who are achieving National 4 through direct presentation and those through RPA. Levels are similar to last year.

Final Remarks

This year is the second full year of the complete suite of National Courses and performance is in the main fairly stable. Over the past five years, we have observed a drop in the numbers undertaking the lower levels of qualifications and a diversification of curriculum pathways, as well as a wider range of qualifications being used to meet learners' needs.

Next year will see the introduction of revisions to assessment with the [removal of units](#) from National 5 courses, and the [required enhancement of the courses' assessment](#).

This has resulted in the addition of a new piece of coursework or exam, or the modification of existing coursework or exam.

In several subjects this will result in a change in the ratio of coursework to examination in the overall assessment.

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