



# 2018 National Qualifications and Awards Results

On 7 August 2018, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) published the *'Attainment Statistics Report (August)'* of the National Courses and Awards, taken by candidates in schools and colleges across the country.

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.

## Revisions to assessment and introduction of non-unitised courses

In September 2016, a decision was made to remove units and unit assessments from National 5 to Advanced Higher courses on a phased basis, starting with National 5 in the 2017-18 session. These changes are intended to have a positive impact on both candidate and teacher workload associated with assessment.

As a result of the changes made to the assessment of National 5 courses, each course assessment was adjusted accordingly. The standard of the qualifications has not changed. Full details of changes to each National 5 course are available on the SQA website ([National 5 Assessment Changes](#)).

In addition, Grade D has been extended for all National 5 courses, from a notional 45–49% to a notional 40–49%. The extension of Grade D is intended to bring it in line with the range available at Grades B and C, and to recognise the achievement of a wider group of candidates at SCQF level 5.

Free standing units at SCQF level 5 remained available.

This revised assessment approach and the extension to Grade D, will be introduced for Higher in 2018-19 and Advanced Higher in 2019-20.

## Experience from Session 2017-18

Schools and colleges have the flexibility to deliver 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 courses at the most appropriate time for them during their senior phase.

This year, there has been a change in the volume of entries to qualifications, with small reductions in the numbers undertaking qualifications at SCQF levels 5 and 6, and a slight increase in numbers undertaking qualifications at SCQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 7.

The entries and attainment for National 4 reported in the statistical tables include those awarded through the Recognising Positive Achievement (RPA) process. SQA treat National 4 attainment arising through course completion and through RPA attainment as being equivalent.

There has been a small increase in National 4 course entries within schools and colleges (excluding entries arising through RPA) compared to those in 2017, by 3,298.

National 4 awards achieved through RPA have decreased by 13,297. As a result of the changes to National 5 courses, a higher number of candidates have obtained a Grade D result (19,104 in 2017 and 34,926 in 2018). These candidates are not eligible for the RPA National 4 course award.

There has been a small increase in the attainment of wider achievement and vocational qualifications at SCQF levels 2 to 6. Our qualifications are also being taken as part of Foundation Apprenticeships in a range of subjects, including engineering, financial services, information technology, and social services.

Throughout the awarding process, we did look out for indications of any impact that the extension of question papers might have had on candidates. There was no evidence of candidates being unable to finish the assessments or of missing out responses, and feedback from some principal assessors and teachers was that the time extension had given candidates the opportunity to fully answer a wider range of questions.

#### *Presentation patterns – National 5 courses and units at SCQF level 5*

Scottish Government guidance was issued to local authorities indicating that the dual presentation for both National 5 courses and free standing units at SCQF level 5 should only be used in exceptional circumstances. As agreed, SQA has passed this entry data to Scottish Government and Education Scotland, to review, so that there can be discussions with local authorities and schools to understand how learners are being presented across the country.

We required schools and colleges to submit their entries for units and courses by November 2017, with minor revisions being possible before the end of March 2018. These timings allow us to plan appropriate resources for quality assurance and for the delivery of the exam diet.

However, a significant number of unit entries were received from schools and colleges during March resulting in a doubling of the number of unit entries at SCQF level 5. This high volume of late entries had a major impact on SQA's ability to undertake quality assurance. Evidence of unit assessments has been collected from selected schools and colleges and will be subject to a post certification review.

To avoid this issue in future years, we advise schools and colleges to make all their entries as early as possible, and they can be removed at a later date, if they are not needed.

In order to ensure that there is sufficient time to carry out quality assurance of units, SQA will be reviewing the final entry date for units. Entries received after this date, will be certificated in November, rather than August.

We will also be reviewing our quality assurance approach. This review is required to ensure the credibility of certification for future years.

### *Assessments*

National 5 courses have been assessed through a mix of externally assessed coursework, question papers, and internally assessed course components, as appropriate to each subject. Highers and Advanced Highers were assessed through units and externally and internally assessed course assessments.

The course assessment of the majority of National Courses include both final exams 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 exams as this work is carried out through the school year and has a narrower focus. The final course grade is a combination of both coursework and exam, which gives a true picture of the candidates' ability to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding.

Coursework is carried out within schools and colleges, normally under controlled conditions. 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 across the country. In the revised National 5 course documents for session 2017-18 and for Higher in 2018-19, SQA provides further clarity upon the conditions of assessment for coursework that must be applied.

The ongoing credibility of the qualifications requires that the conditions of assessment are rigorously applied across all schools and colleges. We continue to analyse coursework and exam performance, and we work with schools and colleges where there is a variation which is markedly different from the national pattern. This is to ensure equity and fairness across all candidates and all schools and colleges, and to reduce the incidence of malpractice.

As a result of the changes to National 5 courses, a number of coursework components are now being externally assessed by SQA, having previously been assessed in schools and colleges. This change has ensured that the national standards are applied fairly across all assessments. Whilst standards have not changed, it has led to the attainment in the components, of some subjects, being lower than in previous years, when there was a potential of lenient assessment judgements being made in schools and colleges.

We have also seen an increase in potential malpractice this year, and work is continuing to investigate these cases.

All this evidence together with the evidence from the review of units that were submitted very late, indicate that SQA must enhance its quality assurance approach.

Internal assessment is still the most appropriate approach for many qualifications and for the learners that undertake them and they have high credibility in further and higher education and in the work environment. However it is imperative that a robust national quality assurance approach is applied.

### *Attainment*

Attainment across National Courses and Awards was broadly in line with previous years, with a slight increase in attainment at Advanced Higher and a decrease in attainment at National 5. Some variation of attainment is to be expected between subjects and over time.

This year, whilst the course content was not changed, National 5 '*Lifeskills Mathematics*' was re-titled to '*Applications of Mathematics*'. This change was made to better reflect the nature of the course and in response to feedback from teachers and lecturers. This course has been offered since 2014 and there has been significant improvement in attainment as schools and colleges have become familiar with the level of challenge and coverage of the course. The A-C attainment in 2018 has increased to 57.8% from 46.3% in 2017.

During the course of the marking of each subject, feedback on the performance of candidates is collated and each year SQA publishes a course report on its website, that provides commentary from the subject's principal assessor on how the candidates have performed in the assessments, what worked appropriately, and areas in which future candidates could improve. This allows teachers and lecturers to reflect on the approaches being taken in delivering the courses (see example of the 2017 course report of National 5 Mathematics – [Course Report 2017 Nat 5 Maths](#)).

### **Final Remarks**

Performance in National Courses and Awards has, in the main, been fairly stable. There has been a small increase in the numbers undertaking the lower levels of qualifications, a small reduction at National 5 and Higher, and a small increase at Advanced Higher. There has also

been a diversification of curriculum pathways, leading to a wider range of qualifications being used to meet learners' needs.

The new assessment approach for National 5 courses has worked well and continues to ensure that the credibility and standards of Scotland's qualifications remain high.

Professional teaching expertise remains a fundamental component for the successful delivery of qualifications, to ensure candidates are well prepared, across all aspects of every course they undertake.

Dr Janet Brown

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