

Course report 2026

National 5 Applications of Mathematics, SCQF level 5

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 27,706

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 30,078

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	9,609	31.9	31.9	65
B	5,043	16.8	48.7	56
C	4,307	14.3	63.0	48
D	4,152	13.8	76.8	39
No award	6,967	23.2	100	Not applicable

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

General commentary on grade boundaries

Our main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels, and to maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, we aim to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It's very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, we hold a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. We can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do

this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).

How the course assessment performed

The question papers were accessible to most candidates and gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

Question paper 1 (non-calculator)

Question paper 1 performed mostly as intended.

Question 4(a) was less demanding than intended. Questions 6, 7 and 9 were more demanding than intended. We took this into account when setting the grade boundaries.

Question paper 2 (calculator)

Question paper 2 was less demanding than intended.

Questions 3(a), 4(b), 5(b) and 7(d) were less demanding than intended. We took this into account when setting the grade boundaries.

How candidates performed

Most candidates attempted all questions.

In question paper 1, many candidates missed out on marks because they did not demonstrate the necessary basic number skills.

Question paper 1 (non-calculator)

Question 1: marking on a scale

Most candidates successfully marked at least one of the numbers on the diagram.
Some candidates only marked one number on the diagram.

Question 2: fractions

Most candidates used an appropriate strategy to begin answering this question.
Many candidates achieved full marks.

Question 4(a): precedence table

Most candidates achieved full marks.

Question 4(b): critical path

Many candidates did not answer this question correctly.

Some candidates simply added all the times. A few candidates did not attempt this question.

Question 6: gradient

Most candidates made no attempt to give the height and horizontal distance in consistent units.

Some candidates did not give their final answer as a fraction in its simplest form.

Question 7: commission

Many candidates did not achieve full marks.

Many candidates calculated the commission incorrectly, often finding 5% of the wrong value.

Question 9: using a formula

Many candidates did not convert 1.5 minutes into seconds. Only a few candidates achieved full marks.

Question 10: direct proportion

Most candidates did not use a valid strategy and did not gain any marks.

Question 12: perimeter involving a quarter circle

Many candidates did not gain any marks. Most candidates did not successfully calculate the arc length of the quarter circle. A few candidates did not attempt this question.

Question 13: extracting and comparing data

Many candidates did not gain any marks as they did not use a valid strategy.

Question paper 2

Question 1: calculating a compound percentage

Most candidates used an appropriate strategy to calculate the answer. Some candidates used a year-by-year approach rather than the multiplier and power strategy. Some candidates did not round their final answer.

Question 2: area involving a half circle

Most candidates did not calculate the correct area.

A few candidates did not half the area of a circle.

A few candidates attempted to calculate the circumference of a circle.

Question 3(a): calculating National Insurance

Many candidates achieved full marks. Some candidates did not calculate the National Insurance correctly, usually because they did not take the 0% band into account.

Question 3(b): calculating net pay

Many candidates did not correctly calculate the pension contribution, often because they subtracted the National Insurance payment first.

Question 4(b): time zones and calculations involving distance, speed and time

Most candidates calculated the journey time in hours.

Most candidates applied the change in time zones correctly.

Some candidates did not convert 2.8 hours into hours and minutes.

Questions 4(c)(i) and (ii): bearings and scale drawing

Many candidates correctly used the scale to calculate the lengths in centimetres.

Most candidates did not accurately construct a diagram of the entire course.

Most candidates did not successfully measure the bearing of the return journey.

Many candidates did not measure and convert the length of the return journey.

Question 5(b): best buy

Many candidates achieved full marks.

Some candidates did not calculate 'buy 2 get 1 free' correctly.

Question 5(d): percentage profit

Most candidates did not successfully calculate a percentage profit, with many candidates dividing by the wrong number.

Most candidates calculated the actual profit.

Question 6(c): comparing calculated statistics

Few candidates successfully compared the mean and standard deviation.

The comments comparing the standard deviation were less accurate than the comments comparing the mean.

Question 7(c): Pythagoras' theorem

Most candidates applied Pythagoras' theorem to calculate the distance between the ball and the flag.

Question 7(d): container packing

Many candidates used an appropriate strategy.

Some candidates only attempted to find the number of boxes for one orientation.

A few candidates used volume calculations instead of finding the number of boxes that would fit in each direction.

Preparing candidates for assessment

The comments in the previous sections and those below can help you prepare candidates for the National 5 Applications of Mathematics question papers.

- Give candidates opportunities to maintain and regularly practise their number skills to prepare for the non-calculator question paper.
- Encourage candidates to show all relevant working throughout the question papers.
- Encourage candidates to use the formulae list effectively.
- Encourage candidates to use correct units and notation throughout the question papers, for example:
 - give correct units for area and volume
 - write amounts of money to two decimal places
 - include am or pm in 12-hour times
- Encourage candidates to check that their answers are sensible in the context of the question. For example, increasing the number of workers should not increase the time taken to complete a job.
- Encourage candidates to use the most efficient strategy. For example, calculating a compound percentage using a multiplier and a power instead of a year-by-year approach.
- Practise questions that require candidates to compare data sets. Candidates should understand that they do not need to include a numerical comparison when making statements about data sets.
- Practise questions involving perimeter, area and volume. Spend time ensuring candidates are confident with prior learning in these topics, including area of a triangle and volume of a cuboid.
- Practise calculating gross pay, income tax, National Insurance and net pay.
- Practise probability questions in a range of contexts, not just those featured in past papers.
- Make sure candidates understand the difference between direct and inverse proportion.

- Encourage candidates to score out working or diagrams that do not form part of their final answer, including in the 'additional space for answers' section at the back of the answer booklet.

You can find detailed marking instructions for the 2026 question papers on our [website](#). Our website also contains the marking instructions from previous years.

The [Understanding Standards website](#) contains examples of candidate evidence with commentary.