



Design principles for National Courses

Introduction

A suite of National Courses was introduced progressively from August 2013 to support Curriculum for Excellence. National Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher have recently been updated as part of the Revised National Qualifications programme.

The Curriculum for Excellence values, purposes and principles underpin all National Courses. Learners have opportunities to acquire and develop the four capacities, as well as skills for learning, skills for life, and skills for work.

National Courses provide a statement of a learner's achievement against a defined standard, providing learners with the opportunity to demonstrate their acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding in a formal way. The broad objectives of National Courses are to provide high standards and breadth and depth of learning, which will help learners progress to further study, training and employment.

Each National Course has its own rationale and aims and has a set of design principles which outline the structure of the course and its assessment.

All National Courses conform to the design principles which are presented here.

Design Principles for National 2 to Advanced Higher Courses

1 National Course rationale

Every National Course must have a clear rationale that:

- ◆ justifies the need for the course and its uniqueness
- ◆ provides evidence of demand for it
- ◆ explains how the National Course fits with other qualifications
- ◆ identifies the progression opportunities into and from the course
- ◆ outlines the aims, purposes and intended learning outcomes of the course and explains how the award structure meets these purposes
- ◆ provides information about typical learners who might do the course

The content of every National Course must be determined through rigorous validation processes and will comply with the relevant requirements of SQA's Governing Principles.

2 National Course structure, SCQF level and credit

The level of a National Course will be consistent with the appropriate SCQF level descriptor. The extent of coverage of a National Course will be:

- ◆ comparable to appropriate existing or previous qualifications at the same level
- ◆ appropriate to the SCQF credits for the course consistent with the rationale and the aims, purposes and intended learning outcomes of the course

Where appropriate, a suite of courses with the same title at different levels will have a course structure which is consistent across levels.

The following table outlines the current structure of National Courses following the completion of the Revised National Qualifications programme.

Course	SCQF credit / level	Structure
Advanced Higher	32 points at level 7	Assessed through question papers / coursework and no longer unit-based.
Higher	24 points at level 6	Assessed through question papers / coursework and no longer unit-based.
National 5	24 points at level 5	Assessed through question papers / coursework and no longer unit based.

National 4	24 points at level 4	Internally assessed, unit-based structure with Added Value unit remains.
National 3	18 points at level 3	Internally assessed, unit-based structure remains.
National 3 (Skills for Work)	18 points at level 3	Internally assessed unit-based structure remains.
National 2	18 points at level 2	Internally assessed unit-based structure remains.

SCQF credit points — directed and self-directed learning

- ◆ National 2 and National 3 courses are notionally based on 180 hours of directed learning and equate to 18 SCQF credit points. National 2 courses recognise that learners may need additional time in order to complete units and courses, according to their individual needs. National 3 courses recognise that learners may need an additional half of the time required for directed learning to successfully complete the course.
- ◆ National 4 courses are notionally based on 160 hours of directed learning and 80 hours of self-directed learning, and equate to 24 SCQF credit points. One of the units (6 SCQF credit points) will assess added value; it will require the learner to demonstrate depth of understanding and/or application of skills.
- ◆ National Courses at National 5 and Higher are notionally based on 160 hours of directed learning and 80 hours of self-directed learning, and equate to 24 SCQF credit points.
- ◆ National Courses at Advanced Higher are notionally based on 160 hours of directed learning and 160 hours of self-directed learning, and equate to 32 SCQF credit points.

3 Course development

All National Courses will:

- ◆ provide appropriate opportunities for skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work to be developed
- ◆ take into consideration practical aspects of delivery and should be able to be delivered in a range of centres. The requirements for practitioner expertise and resources should not be restrictive and should be appropriate for general qualifications
- ◆ take into consideration the needs of all learners, and be designed to be as accessible and inclusive as possible to learners who will achieve in different ways and at a different pace

Units

Each unit in a National 2 to National 4 Course:

- ◆ will be coherent and worthy of recognition in its own right
- ◆ can be made up of mandatory and/or optional units. However, at least 6 SCQF credit points must be from mandatory units, and these must reflect the title of the course. In some courses, all component units will be mandatory
- ◆ can be of different SCQF credit values, but they must all be at the same SCQF level of the course

4 Assessment

All aspects of National Course assessments will comply with the relevant requirements of SQA's governing principles.

National Course assessment approaches will be:

- ◆ valid and reliable
- ◆ fair, equitable, accessible and inclusive, and must allow learners to show what they have achieved
- ◆ proportionate and fit for purpose

Assessment of National 2 to National 4 Courses

- ◆ Units in National 2 to National 4 Courses will be internally assessed on a pass/fail basis, and will be ungraded. Units can be assessed individually. In some subjects, it will be possible to gather evidence of achievement of units in an integrated way, combining assessments across units.
- ◆ Assessment methodologies for units in a National 2 to National 4 Course will promote best practice and enable learners to achieve the highest standards they are capable of. They will support greater breadth, depth and challenge of learning and a greater focus on skills development.

Assessment of National 5 to Advanced Higher Courses

- ◆ Course assessment design and assessment load must be based on the Assessment Strategy for National 5 to Advanced Higher Courses implemented in 2017. SQA assessments will promote best practice and enable learners to achieve the highest standards they are capable of.
- ◆ There will be a maximum of four course assessment components in any National 5 to Advanced Higher Course.
- ◆ Course assessment at National 5 to Advanced Higher will sample the skills, knowledge and understanding from the mandatory course content as well as breadth, depth, challenge, application and integration of these, as appropriate. It may involve a question paper, assignment, performance, project, practical activity, case study, portfolio, or a combination of these, as appropriate to the study area.

5 Award of Course

To achieve the award of a course at National 2, National 3 and National 4, the learner must pass all the units of the course.

Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher are graded A–D. The grade awarded will be based on the total marks achieved across all components of the course assessment.

Due to changes in the grade scale introduced progressively from 2017–18, the following bands / percentage mark ranges will apply to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher from 2019–20 onwards. Valid estimate bands are 1–9.

Band	Estimated performance	Notional percent range
1	Band A (upper) range	85–100
2	Band A (lower) range	70–84
3	Band B (upper)	65–69
4	Band B (lower)	60–64
5	Band C (upper)	55–59
6	Band C (lower)	50–54
7	Band D	40–49
8	No award	30–39
9	No award	0–29