



Background information for Attainment Statistics — December 2023

Official Statistics

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Background information

Purpose

Attainment Statistics — December 2023 presents a summary of entries and attainment following the completion of appeals and other post certification procedures.

Status

These statistics are classified as *Official Statistics*.

Geography and time period covered

This publication presents data on attainment in National Qualifications and other courses in Scotland in the 2022 to 2023 academic year and includes data for the previous four years (where available).

Description

Attainment Statistics — December 2023 details the main qualifications taken at school and college level by candidates in Scotland: a mix of current National Courses (National 2 to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher) as well as Skills for Work, Awards, National Progression Awards, and National Certificates.

The purpose of National Courses, as well as Skills for Work, Awards, National Progression Awards and National Certifications, is to enable certification and recognition for the programmes of work that candidates undertake in the senior phase of secondary education and in colleges.

The broad objectives of National Courses are to provide high standards, and breadth and depth of learning for individual candidates, assessed usually via national exams, coursework and / or internally assessed components.

In 2023, awarding operated using the established procedure as far as possible in order to evaluate the performance of the course assessment, but with consideration given to the following factors:

- ◆ Impact of the reducing legacy of disruption to teaching and learning caused by the pandemic
- ◆ Impact of modifications to course assessment
- ◆ Impact of the removal of revision support

Awarding decisions were therefore 'sensitive' to these factors, ensuring that grade boundary decisions recognised that performance continues to be impacted. This was informed by the full range of qualitative and quantitative data used during awarding, with additional data from 2021-22 on the impact of modifications. [Further details about the approach to awarding in 2023 can be found in the methodology report.](#)

In 2022, SQA worked with partners across the education sector, including teachers, lecturers, learners, parents and carers, throughout the year to agree the wide-ranging

package of support that was put in place to enable learners to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do, despite the disruption to learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. SQA implemented various modifications and revision support to reduce the assessment requirements for courses and increase learning and teaching time. [Further details about the approach to awarding in 2022 can be found in the methodology report.](#)

In 2021, the Scottish Government commissioned the SQA to develop an Alternative Certification Model (ACM 2021) for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher for 2021. This model was developed by the National Qualifications 2021 Group. The National Qualifications 2021 Group is represented by the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Colleges Scotland, Education Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), School Leaders Scotland (SLS), the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Scottish Government, National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the Scottish Youth Parliament. The model is based on teacher judgement, supported by assessment resources and quality assurance. [The approach to certification adopted by SQA in 2021 is described in detail in the methodology report for 2021.](#)

In 2020, the Deputy First Minister directed SQA to issue grades, primarily on the basis of teacher estimates. Grades that had been adjusted upwards in an earlier moderation process were also retained. [Details about the moderation process used in 2020 is described in the methodology report for 2020.](#)

With the phased introduction of the Revised National Qualifications, grade D was extended from a notional 45 to 49% to a notional 40 to 49%. No Award was reduced from a notional 0 to 44% to 0 to 39% as a result of this change to grade D. These changes were implemented for National 5 from the 2017 to 2018 academic year, for Higher from the 2018 to 2019 academic year, and for Advanced Higher from the 2019 to 2020 academic year.

Centre types 'Education Authority - Secondary School' and 'Education Authority - Special School' are grouped as 'Education Authority'; centre types 'Independent - Secondary School' and 'Independent - Special School' are grouped as 'Independent'; centre type 'Further Education College' is reported as 'FE College'; and all remaining centre types, including training providers, voluntary sector organisations, HM Armed Forces, prisons and primary schools are reported as 'Other'.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has 12 levels, which, in ascending order (SCQF Level 1–12) indicate the level of difficulty of a particular qualification. The SCQF allows for broad comparisons to be made between qualifications to allow candidates, employers and the public to understand the range of skills and learning that should be achieved at each level. [More information can be found on the SCQF website.](#)

The figures are produced by professionally independent statistical staff in accordance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics.](#)

Source of data

National Qualification, Skills for Work and The Scottish Baccalaureate data have been collected at a point when results are reasonably complete, in this case, 8 November 2023. The data have been collected at around the same time each year to aid year-on-year comparisons.

Award, National Certificate and National Progression Award data have been collected on a monthly basis for the period between 1 August 2022 and 31 July 2023. The data have been collected on, or as near as possible to, the first working day of each month.

Data is merged with school roll data provided by the Scottish Government (Scottish Candidate Number (SCN), centre number and stage information). Stage data is updated where there is a match by SCN on the data and the Scottish Government school roll data.

Methodology

The total entries are calculated for each qualification within selected qualification types contained in the report: National 2 to National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher, Scottish Baccalaureate and Skills for Work. Total attainment for each qualification is calculated for each qualification type contained in the report: National 2 to National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher, Scottish Baccalaureate, Skills for Work, Awards, National Progressions Awards and National Certificates.

For graded qualifications (National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher) attainment is reported cumulatively from A to A to D, with No Awards reported separately. For ungraded qualifications (National 2 to National 4, Scottish Baccalaureate, Skills for Work, Awards, National Progressions Awards and National Certificates) attainment is reported as the number of candidates attaining the qualification. The Scottish Baccalaureate also details the number of candidates obtaining the Pass classification 'Distinction'.

'Stage' is a candidate attribute indicating their progression through education. Candidates can take qualifications from more than one level. Counts of stage are based on the candidates rather than attainment records. For example, a candidate with three National 5 records and one Higher record will be counted once in the National 5 stage table and once in the Higher stage table. If candidates have more than one stage recorded for any qualification level, stage is prioritised as follows:

- ◆ Stage 6 is given priority 1 – 'S6'
- ◆ Stage 5 is given priority 2 – 'S5'
- ◆ Stage 4 is given priority 3 – 'S4'
- ◆ Stage 3 is given priority 4 – 'S3'
- ◆ Stages 1, 2 and 7 are given priority 5 – 'Other School'
- ◆ Stage 10 is given priority 6 – 'FE College'
- ◆ Any other stage given priority 7 – 'Other'

Confidentiality and rounding

All figures are rounded to the nearest five. Figures between one and four inclusive have been suppressed to protect against the risk of disclosure of personal information. All percentage figures for a course have been suppressed where values between one and four inclusive have been suppressed. Cells containing suppressed figures are marked up with the shorthand [c].

Percentages are calculated using figures prior to rounding. Percentages with a value greater than zero and less than 0.05% are marked up with the shorthand [low].

Total values of rows or columns are calculated using figures prior to rounding; the sum of rounded figures may differ from the total reported.

Limitations

SQA external assessments did not go ahead in 2020 and 2021 due to disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Alternative approaches to assessment, relying on teacher judgement, were used to award grades and allow learners to progress. SQA external assessments returned in 2022, but significant assessment modifications were put in place with the aim to increase learning and teaching time. The course assessment modifications were retained for 2023. The different awarding arrangements in place between 2019 and 2023 mean that it is not possible to compare attainment between years without full consideration of this essential contextual information.

In September 2018, SQA adopted the [International Organization for Standardisation \(ISO\)](#), and [Information Standards Board for Education, Skills and Children's Services \(ISB\)](#) categories for legal sex type. These allow the use of the values Male, Female, Not Known, and Not Applicable. Prior to the adoption of the legal sex type categories, Male and Female were the only two options available. As sex and gender were used interchangeably, SQA Statistics historically reported this variable as "gender".

Attainment of any candidate that has not identified as Male or Female will not feature in the published sex tables due to the low numbers of candidates in the 'Not Known' and 'Not Applicable' categories.

FE colleges have relatively low uptake for graded National Qualifications. The range of subjects taken in FE colleges is also considerably narrower than that of the education authority and independent centre types in this release. For these reasons, overall attainment rates for FE colleges are not comparable.

'Other' centre type have relatively low uptake for graded National Qualifications. The range of subjects taken in 'Other' centre type is also considerably narrower than that of the education authority and independent centre types in this release. For these reasons, overall attainment rates for 'Other' centre type are not comparable.

Revisions and corrections

Once published these statistics are not usually subject to revisions. [Further information about revisions and corrections is available in our policy document.](#)

Related publications

For any related publications for qualifications offered in Wales, Northern Ireland and England please contact the [Joint Council for Qualifications](#) or the respective regulators [Qualifications Wales](#), [CCEA](#) and [Ofqual](#).

Useful links

- ◆ [data tables accompanying this release](#)
- ◆ [summary of appeals outcomes 2023](#)
- ◆ [grade boundaries 2023](#)

- ◆ [component marks 2023](#)
- ◆ [assessment arrangements 2023](#)
- ◆ [equalities monitoring report 2023](#)

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Please [contact the team](#) with any comments about ways we can improve a publication to meet your needs.