



2022 National Qualifications and Awards Results

This report reflects my observations, as Chief Examining Officer for Scotland, of the delivery of National Qualifications and Awards in 2022, another challenging year for everyone in Scottish education and especially for learners.

In the 2021–22 session, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has:

- ◆ been responsive to the continuing and changing impact of the pandemic on learners and has developed an approach to assessment that helps to address the disruption they have faced while maintaining the credibility of the qualifications. This has included modifications to assessment and revision support
- ◆ supported teachers and lecturers by freeing up more time for teaching and learning and providing them with understanding standards materials, as well as advice and support to help them in preparing for SQA's assessments for the first time since 2019
- ◆ worked closely with the education and training sectors, including members of the National Qualifications 2022 and Higher National and Vocational Qualifications 2022 Groups to deliver approaches to awarding all qualifications in this challenging year, ensuring that learners get the results they deserve and have the knowledge and skills they need to progress to further learning or work

On 9 August 2022, SQA published the [Provisional Attainment Statistics \(August\) 2022](#) for the National Courses and Awards. It 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.

The different assessment approaches taken for the different qualification types for which statistics are reported in the [Provisional Attainment Statistics \(August\) 2022](#), are summarised below:

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher

This year, for the first time since 2019, Scotland has returned to formal national assessments (exams, in addition to coursework). The return of national assessments has been supported by a package of measures, including course assessment modifications and revision support, as well as wider support from across the education system at a national, regional, local and school/college level.

Further information on the approach to assessment and awarding in 2022 is available in the *National Qualifications 2022 Methodology Report*.

National 2, National 3, and National 4 Courses, Scottish Baccalaureate, Interdisciplinary Project, and free-standing units at SCQF levels 5, 6 and 7

Schools, colleges and training providers submitted unit results based on evidence from completed assessments, and evidence of learners' progress and achievements.

In keeping with arrangements in 2021, learners did not need to complete the additional assessment for the added value unit in National 4 courses. This was agreed with partners to keep free time for learning and teaching and for assessing other units in these courses.

National Certificates, National Progression Awards, Skills for Work courses and Awards

The alternative assessment approaches developed with the Higher National and Vocational Qualifications Group for the 2020-21 session, continued in the 2021-22 session. All results are based on a holistic assessment decision-making process. [Find out more](#) here.

Further supporting information is available across a suite of documents, published at 09:30 on Tuesday 9 August, including:

[*Provisional Attainment Statistics \(August\) 2022*](#)

[*Grade Boundaries 2022*](#)

[*Component Marks 2022*](#)

[*Assessment Arrangements 2022*](#)

[*2022 Awarding: Equalities Monitoring Report*](#)

Context

On 17 August 2021, the Scottish Government confirmed a return to formal external assessment (exams and coursework) for National Qualifications at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher for the first time since 2019. This came after COVID-19 pandemic disruption, which required the adoption of certification models based on alternative approaches to assessment in 2020 and 2021.

However, the 2021-22 session was not a return to 'normal'. In the best interests of learners, it was clear to SQA that measures continued to be needed to address the disruption to learning and teaching that young people continued to experience, while maintaining standards. It was also recognised that this ongoing disruption, impacting now on a third academic year, and the absence of formal exams for two years was likely to affect learners' acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding and their performance in SQA national assessments, including formal exams.

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. This support was designed to be flexible to the changing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and would help to enable learners to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do, despite the disruption to learning.

Every year, SQA's role is to evaluate performance in assessments in an equitable and fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that qualifications remain credible – and this year was no different. Learners' demonstrated attainment – evidence of a learner's knowledge and skills in a course measured against the required national standard – is at the core of our approach.

Thousands of practising teachers and lecturers are at the heart of the awarding process every year – they set the assessments (exams and coursework), mark them, train their peers, are involved in setting the grade boundaries and in the appeals service – teacher and lecturer judgement and expertise are what the whole process and results are based on.

Building on the collaboration and partnership developed last year, SQA continued to work closely and seek advice from the National Qualifications 2022 Group, made up of representatives from 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), the Scottish Government, National Parent Forum of Scotland, Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs), the Scottish Youth Parliament and Universities Scotland. It was supported by the National Qualifications 2022 Working Group.

The Higher National and Vocational Qualifications Group, established in January 2021, also continued to review and develop advice and guidance to support assessment for Higher National and vocational qualifications in 2021–22, as well as develop and deliver timely and informative communications. The group is made up of representatives from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Colleges Scotland, the College Vice Principal Forum, Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), Educational Institute of Scotland – Further Education Lecturers' Association (EIS-FELA), the National Union of Students (NUS), the Scottish Funding Council, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Training Federation (STF), Skills Development Scotland (SDS), and sparqs. This was also supported by a working group.

SQA is committed to engaging with learners and their parents and carers. Our established Learner Panel continued to ensure the views of young people were fully heard in our consideration of approaches to assessment and awarding for 2022. We continued to engage and share messages with organisations representing learners and their members, such as Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament, and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. We also continued to engage and share messages with the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFOS), Connect and the Scottish Government's parental engagement network to make sure information reached parents and carers.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone who played a part in the delivery of all qualifications in 2022. The education and training system came together, and worked tirelessly and collaboratively in the most challenging circumstances, to deliver for learners.

Developing the approach to certification

The return to formal exams and coursework for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses reintroduced the existing approach to assessment and certification but in an environment that remained challenging and uncertain for learners, teachers and lecturers.

To underpin preparations for a return to formal assessments SQA announced and rolled out a package of support, developed in partnership with the wider education system. This included:

- ◆ course assessment modifications, building on the approach in 2020-21, based on consultation with teachers and lecturers, and welcomed by them, which reduced the volume of assessment to ease learner, teacher and lecturer workload. These either:
 - removed or reduced elements of an exam and/or coursework
 - provided more choice in an assessment
 - removed a topic from an exam
- ◆ for the first time, revision support, to help learners undertaking National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher courses to prepare for their exams – including advance notice of content that will, or will not be in the exam, study guides and learners' own study notes
- ◆ Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service that included a new detailed criteria to cover COVID-related disruption — for learners who were required to self-isolate or stay at home on the day of the exam
- ◆ Packages of learner support, including online advice from across the sector – including Education Scotland, schools, colleges and local authorities
- ◆ where necessary, a more generous approach to grading than in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for learners while maintaining standards. This was in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams had done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019, having experienced disruption to their learning over three academic years
- ◆ a free appeals service – including, for this year, the option for learners who did not achieve their estimated grade to directly appeal to SQA. Further details on the appeals service are available [here](#)

Maintaining national standards

SQA has a statutory duty and responsibility to individual learners and to the wider community to ensure that the standard of our qualifications is maintained. Standards are vital in ensuring the credibility and long-term integrity of qualifications, for those who take them and for end users of qualifications.

As announced in February 2022, where necessary, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for learners while maintaining standards.

This was in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams did so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019, having experienced disruption to their learning over three academic years.

Grade boundaries set the minimum marks needed to get an A, B, C, D grade or a No Award. Every SQA assessment, both exams and coursework, includes questions and tasks that provide opportunities for all learners to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. They are also designed to differentiate between different levels of performance.

Grade boundaries help ensure assessments have worked as planned and that standards are consistent from one year to the next. Every year we review how each course assessment has performed to set grade boundaries.

Grade boundaries have always been used – in Scotland and elsewhere - when exams have taken place using rigorous and well-established and published procedures. The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2022.

Where necessary and appropriate, these adjustments were more significant than in a normal exam year to benefit learners, but only so far as the credibility of the qualifications was maintained.

Further information on our approach to awarding, including grading, is available in the *National Qualifications 2022 Awarding Methodology Report*. Information on component marks and grade boundaries is included on [SQA's statistics webpage](#).

Attainment

The distribution of 2022 attainment by grade is summarised below. Further statistical information about 2022 results is available on [SQA's statistics webpage](#).

Table 1: attainment summary for graded National Courses in August 2022

Award level	Counts* per grade						
	A	B	C	A to C	D	No Award	Total
National 5	125,100	71,225	54,400	250,730	34,825	24,615	310,170
Higher	65,540	45,680	37,320	148,540	23,625	16,060	188,220
Advanced Higher	9,510	7,350	6,080	22,940	3,420	1,860	28,220

*all counts are rounded to the nearest five

Award level	Percentage of entries						
	A	B	C	A to C	D	No Award	
National 5	40.3%	23.0%	17.5%	80.8%	11.2%	7.9%	
Higher	34.8%	24.3%	19.8%	78.9%	12.6%	8.5%	
Advanced Higher	33.7%	26.1%	21.5%	81.3%	12.1%	6.6%	

A to C attainment in 2022 at National 5 is 250,730 or 80.8%. At Higher it is 148,540 or 78.9%. At Advanced Higher it is 22,940 or 81.3%. This is a strong set of results.

The alternative awarding arrangements in place in 2020 and 2021, and the significantly different circumstances in which exams took place in 2019 and the years before, mean that comparisons of attainment between years should be treated with significant caution and do not allow for any conclusions to be drawn on changes in education performance.

Equalities considerations

SQA has a duty to ensure that assessment and awarding is fair for all. Throughout the development of the assessment approach in 2022, we have had equalities at the heart of our thinking and have developed and published equality impact assessments and child rights and wellbeing impact assessments to inform our approaches and decisions, as well as to demonstrate our compliance with our statutory obligations.

Attainment at grades A to C has decreased for all groups across all qualifications. Generally, attainment is between 2021 attainment and pre-pandemic levels. When focusing on SIMD quintiles and the most deprived and least deprived groups, in 2022, the attainment gap is similar or narrower than 2019 at grades A to C and generally wider than 2021 at grades A to C.

Full tables and analysis are available in the [2022 Awarding: Equalities Monitoring Report](#).

Observations on how the assessment approach worked in 2022

There is no doubt that the disruption caused by the global pandemic over the last two years continued to affect learners in 2022. The education system has taken steps to ensure the continuity of learning and teaching. SQA developed an assessment and awarding approach that has helped to address disruption to learning, but it has not been a normal year.

The modifications to course assessment introduced in 2020–21 were designed to free up time for learning and teaching. These modifications were largely retained in recognition that the 2021-22 session remained an uncertain time for the education system and that the disruption to learning experienced by learners this year continued to impact on learning, teaching and assessment throughout the session. It was also an approach supported by stakeholders from across Scottish education and subject specialists.

Revision support was formally announced on 1 February 2022 when SQA moved to Scenario 2 following substantial Covid disruption to learner and teacher attendance at a national level. Details of this revision support were published on 7 March. This was produced in tandem with a range of other resources made available to learners ahead of the exam diet, which included the SQA website, a 'Your Exams' Guide and SQA's MyStudyPlan app to help learners make the most of their revision time.

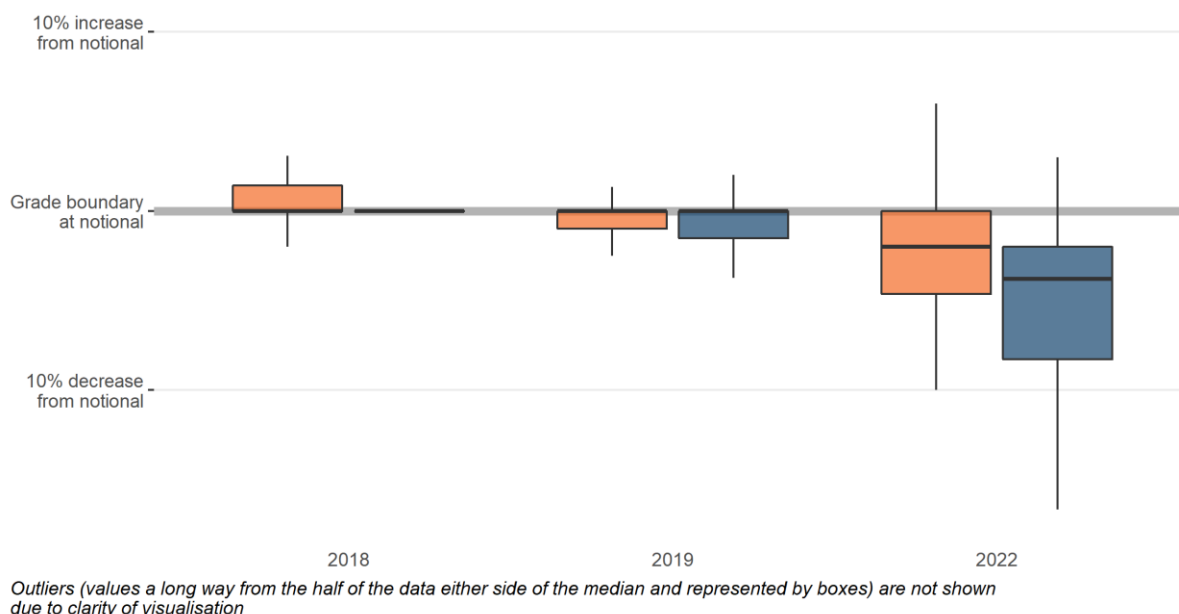
We considered the impact of modifications and revision support during the awarding process. Whilst it is very difficult to isolate the impacts on learners' achievements from the range of other factors that have influenced their performance over this year, it is clear that in key areas they have enabled learners to focus on developing key skills, knowledge and understanding.

Where we observed specific challenges with learner performance in a subject, backed up by marker feedback, as a result of the pandemic disruption, we were able to make appropriate adjustments to grade boundaries, to benefit learners.

Typically, fewer than half of all grade boundaries are adjusted (up or down) from expected or notional boundaries and, on average boundaries are notional. In 2022 consideration was given to the impact on grade boundaries of course assessment modifications (for example, the removal or reduction of coursework) and revision support. The impact of disruption on this year's learners, specifically how this has impacted acquisition of skills and knowledge, was also considered. Taking all of this into account, grade boundaries were adjusted. In many cases, where appropriate, these adjustments were on average more significant than in a normal exam year but only in so far as the credibility of qualifications was maintained. The median adjustment is usually around zero but in 2022 was - 4 percentage points at grade C and - 2 percentage points at A, as shown below.

Adjustments to notional boundaries at grade A and grade C

Median adjustment in 2022 is -4 percentage points at grade C and -2 at grade A. Both are usually around 0.



Despite a strong package of support, further adjustments needed to be made to respond to the challenges learners have faced this year. However, I observed strong engagement by learners across all their SQA assessments and qualifications and this is testament to their resilience against the backdrop of continuing disruption this session.

In particular, I was pleased to note the continuing engagement in the wider qualifications across the SQA portfolio and the strong uptake in new provision such as the Higher Applications of Mathematics.

I would conclude that, for a year where exams have been reintroduced as part of national assessment, this is a strong set of results.

Wider issues

Foundation Apprenticeships

SQA qualifications are also being taken as part of Foundation Apprenticeships, in a range of subjects including engineering, financial services, information technology, and social services.

SQA and Skills Development Scotland agreed new arrangements for Foundation Apprenticeship frameworks for 2020–21, following extensive engagement with stakeholders that continued through to 2021-22. These new arrangements include the introduction of customised units as options alongside SVQ and Diploma units, and the pilot of a Work-based Challenge Unit in five frameworks.

Customised units were developed using a broader definition of 'the workplace' to offer more flexibility of delivery and assessment. The customised units are based on the National Occupational Standards of the related SVQ or Diploma units currently in the Foundation Apprenticeship frameworks. As an alternative to attending the workplace, learners have engaged in practice-based activity, involving employers, that is aligned to the same knowledge and understanding outcomes of the original frameworks. Learners have engaged with employers in various ways to support their learning throughout.

This year has seen 1,724 Foundation Apprenticeships achieved.

Wider achievement

In addition to the Nationals, Highers and Advanced Highers, SQA provides a suite of qualifications that play a critical role in meeting a wider range of learners' interests and abilities. These include awards in areas such as leadership, employability, and personal finance, as well as a range of Skills for Work courses, Awards, National Certificates and National Progression Awards. These are part of a broadening of the curriculum and support a range of initiatives such as the Developing the Young Workforce programme.

This year we have seen increasing engagement and attainment of some of these qualifications at SCQF levels 3, 4, 5 and 6, particularly in areas such as Mental Health and Wellbeing, Computer Games Development, Engineering Skills, Hairdressing, Cyber Security and Digital Media.

SQA worked together with the Higher National and Vocational Qualifications 2022 Group, to develop alternative assessment approaches and provided subject-specific guidance for these qualifications. A number of these qualifications contain a high proportion of practical skills and given the extended period of remote learning it has not been possible for as many learners to complete the learning and assessment this year in time for August certification. Amongst these qualifications, some of them may be deferred into the next academic session. Learners can be certificated for vocational qualifications throughout the year, once assessment is complete.

This wide range of qualifications will help young people reach their full potential as they progress from their broad general education through to college, university, apprenticeships, other learning, training and employment.

Final remarks

This has been another very challenging year for everyone involved in Scottish education. I remain very grateful, as Scotland's Chief Examining Officer, to all of Scotland's thousands of teachers and lecturers, SQA staff, SQA co-ordinators including markers and assessors, school and college support staff, local authorities, professional associations and national organisations who have collectively delivered for learners in difficult circumstances.

Most importantly, I wish to record my admiration for Scotland's learners, their parents and carers. Learners have shown great resilience and worked exceptionally hard to achieve their best. The results that they receive today reflect their achievements and should allow them to progress to further study, training or employment.

Fiona Robertson

Scotland's Chief Examining Officer

9 August 2022