



2024 National Qualifications and Awards Results

Introduction

This report reflects my observations, as Chief Examining Officer for Scotland, on the delivery of National Qualifications and Awards in 2024.

In the 2023–24 session, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA):

- ◆ Reintroduced full course assessment arrangements. This follows the modifications to assessments that were put in place to help limit the impact of disruption on learning and teaching caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. This included the removal of coursework and practical assessments. SQA provided an *Understanding Standards* programme, as well as other advice and support, to help practitioners prepare learners effectively for this return to full course assessment.
- ◆ Implemented an approach to awarding that represents the fairest and best way to help learners to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills for each course, while also maintaining the integrity, credibility and standard of their qualifications. This has included considering, as part of our well-established grading processes, any impact on learners from the reintroduction of full course assessment.
- ◆ Continued to work closely with the education and skills community to deliver approaches to awarding all qualifications that ensure learners get the results they deserve and have the knowledge and skills they need to progress to further learning, training or work.

On 6 August 2024, SQA published the [Provisional Attainment Statistics \(August\) 2024](#) 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.

Assessment approaches

The qualification types for which statistics are reported in the [Provisional Attainment Statistics \(August\) 2024](#) have different assessment approaches, summarised here:

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher

This is the third year that learners in Scotland have taken SQA's formal national assessments after they were cancelled in 2020 and 2021 because of the global pandemic. Following discussions with learners, practitioners, parents, carers and other stakeholders, full course assessment was reintroduced this year, having been temporarily removed to help limit the impact of disruption on learning and teaching caused by the pandemic.

Learners have been supported by a package of measures, including:

- ◆ a range of assessment arrangements to provide support to learners during exams
- ◆ an examination exceptional circumstances service for learners who were unable to attend an exam or whose performance was impacted by personal circumstances
- ◆ consideration of any impact from the reintroduction of full course assessments
- ◆ a free, learner direct, appeals service for any learner who has concerns about a grade — further details are available at www.sqa.org.uk/appeals
- ◆ a trial service for learners to request access to their marked exam papers from their school or college in five subjects, which can help learners decide whether to appeal — further details are available at www.sqa.org.uk/markedexamtrial

Further information on the approach to assessment and awarding in 2024 is available in the [National Qualifications 2024 Methodology Report](#).

National 2, National 3, and National 4 Courses, Scottish Baccalaureate, Interdisciplinary Project, and free-standing units at all [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#) levels

Schools, colleges and training providers submitted unit results based on evidence from completed assessments, and evidence of learners' progress and achievements. National 4 courses returned to full assessment requirements in the 2023–24 session with the reinstatement of the requirement for learners to complete the Added Value Unit.

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

In the 2023–24 session, there was a return to the fuller approach to the assessment of these qualifications, in line with those for Higher National and Vocational Qualifications. However, aspects of the alternative assessment approaches, put in place during the pandemic, were retained as they were of benefit to learners and centres.

Supporting information is available in a suite of documents, published at 9.30am on Tuesday 6 August, including:

[Provisional Attainment Statistics \(August\) 2024](#)

[Grade Boundaries 2024](#)

[Component Marks 2024](#)

[Assessment Arrangements 2024](#)

[2024 Awarding: Equalities Monitoring Report](#)

Context

The pandemic necessitated the cancellation of formal external assessments (exams, coursework and practical assessments) in Scotland in 2020 and 2021, and the adoption of alternative approaches to awarding. Formal external assessment returned in 2022, but we made a number of modifications to National Qualification course assessments — such as removing coursework and practical assessments — to help limit the impact of disruption on learning and teaching.

Following discussions with learners, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and other stakeholders, there was a return to full course assessments this year. This decision was based on evidence that suggested the modifications could have a detrimental impact on learners if retained for longer than necessary.

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.

To support learners completing coursework and practical assessments for the first time, we considered any impact in our grading decisions as part of our well-established grading processes. This has provided fairness and safeguards for learners while providing assurances about the continued credibility and integrity of qualifications.

Thousands of practising teachers and lecturers work with experienced SQA staff every year and are at the heart of the awarding process — they set the assessments, mark and quality assure them. They also play a key role in setting the grade boundaries and in SQA's exceptional circumstances and appeals services.

Building on the collaboration and partnership developed in the last few years, SQA continued to work closely with and sought advice from the National Qualifications (NQ) 2024 Group. This group is made up of representatives from across the education and skills community.

Similarly, members of the Higher National and Vocational Qualifications (HNVQ) Group helped to inform the decision to return to a fuller approach to the assessment of HNVQs in the 2023–24 session, while retaining some alternative assessment approaches where they were of benefit to learners.

SQA is committed to engaging with learners and their parents and carers. Our Learner Advisory Group and Learner Panel continued to ensure that the views of young people were fully heard in our consideration of approaches to assessment and awarding for 2024. We continued to engage and share messages with organisations representing learners and their parents and carers, including the Scottish Youth Parliament, the National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the parent representative group Connect. SQA also communicated directly with learners through a wide range of channels and during a nationwide series of centre engagement visits by SQA staff.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone who played a part in the delivery and awarding of all qualifications in 2024. Once again, the education and skills community came together and worked collaboratively to deliver for learners.

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 (such as colleges, universities and employers).

Grade boundaries have always been used — in Scotland and elsewhere — whenever external assessment takes place, using rigorous, well-established and published procedures. Grade boundaries set the minimum marks needed to get an A, B, C, or D grade or a No Award. Every SQA assessment includes questions and tasks that provide opportunities for all learners to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding, if they are presented at the correct SCQF level. Our assessments 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 fairly.

This year, following adjustments to our awarding approaches in 2022 and 2023, we returned to a well-established awarding approach. However, where there was robust evidence that a return to full course assessment had impacted negatively on learner performance, consideration was given to making a small adjustment to the grade boundary, particularly at Higher and Advanced Higher, while maintaining the credibility of the qualifications. This was based on evidence, and drew on the experience of our senior examiners. While adjustments were made across a range of courses overall, at an aggregate level, grade boundary adjustments were similar to 2019.

Further information on our approach to awarding, including grading, is available in the [National Qualifications 2024 Methodology Report](#). Information on component marks and grade boundaries is included on [SQA's statistics webpage](#).

Attainment

The distribution of 2024 attainment by grade is summarised below. Further statistical information about 2024 results is available on [SQA's statistics webpage](#).

Table 1a: attainment summary for graded National Courses in August 2024 — counts per grade*

Award level	A	B	C	Total A to C	D	No Award	Total
National 5	124,505	71,445	57,355	253,305	38,745	35,905	327,950
Higher	59,470	45,915	41,545	146,930	28,690	20,630	196,250
Advanced Higher	8,540	6,690	6,215	21,445	4,160	2,885	28,495

*all counts are rounded to the nearest five

Table 1b: attainment summary for graded National Courses in August 2024 — percentage of entries

Award level	A	B	C	Total A to C	D	No Award
National 5	38.0%	21.8%	17.5%	77.2%	11.8%	10.9%
Higher	30.3%	23.4%	21.2%	74.9%	14.6%	10.5%
Advanced Higher	30.0%	23.5%	21.8%	75.3%	14.6%	10.1%

A to C attainment in 2024 at National 5 is 253,305 or 77.2%. At Higher it is 146,930 or 74.9%. At Advanced Higher it is 21,445 or 75.3%.

Given the return to full course assessment in 2024, and the significantly different approaches to awarding between 2020 and 2023, comparisons with other years should be treated with some caution, noting that it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions on any changes in education performance.

However, we can say that A to C attainment across most courses at National 5 and Higher is similar to pre-pandemic levels, with Advanced Higher being below pre-pandemic levels. This reflects the achievement of learners, combined with our consideration of the impact on learners of the reintroduction of full course assessments in 2024.

A wide range of factors influence attainment, both at an overall level and in specific subject areas. Patterns of presentation, which are determined at a school, college or local authority level, play a significant role. In January this year, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and I wrote to Directors of Education about the importance of well informed and accurate presentation decisions, with a particular focus on dual presentation at National 4 and National 5. We continued to see significant numbers

of dual presentation at National 4 and National 5. In 2024, dual entries were 30,380, or 9.3% of entries at National 5. Although dual entries are down by around 1,200 on 2023, levels remain significantly above pre-pandemic levels, and they continue to impact on attainment.

At National 5, we also continued to see significant growth in the number of learners presented for Applications of Mathematics. The number of entries rose to 24,260 this year and this is our most popular National 5 course after English (49,925 entries) and Mathematics (36,600 entries). However, it is worth noting that 7,835 learners (21.3%) were also entered for National 5 Mathematics this year. At Advanced Higher, there has been an increase in the number of learners — over 18% increase since 2019 to 16,455 — presenting at this level. This year, we saw a wider spread of attainment at Advanced Higher.

Finally, but importantly, I am pleased to see a continuing wider engagement in qualifications across the SQA portfolio. Indeed, this is a record year of achievement across a range of SCQF levels in Skills for Work courses, Awards, National Certificates and National Progression Awards. This shows that the curriculum continues to diversify.

Equalities considerations

SQA has a duty to ensure that assessment and awarding is fair for all. Throughout the development of the assessment approach in 2024, we have had equalities at the heart of our thinking. We have 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.

SQA marking and awarding procedures take place without information on the characteristics or circumstances of individual learners, to ensure fairness. However, after awarding is concluded, we undertake an equalities analysis, and this is published as an [Equalities Monitoring Report](#) alongside results.

Generally, attainment at grades A to C is similar to pre-pandemic levels for most groups. When focusing on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintiles and the most deprived (SIMD Quintile 1) and least deprived (SIMD Quintile 5), the difference in attainment between the two groups in 2024, is higher relative to 2019 at grades A to C at all levels.

As highlighted above, given the return to full course assessment in 2024, and the significantly different approaches to awarding between 2020 and 2023, comparisons with other years should be treated with caution, noting that it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions on any changes in education performance.

Full tables and analysis are available in the [2024 Awarding: Equalities Monitoring Report](#)

Observations on how the assessment approach worked in 2024

Full course assessment returned this year to support learners. This was supported by an extensive Understanding Standards programme for practitioners preparing their learners for the return of full course assessments.

A range of resources were also made available to learners ahead of this year's exam diet. These included targeted information and support on the SQA website, a ['Your Exams' Guide](#) and SQA's [MyStudyPlan](#) app to help learners make the most of their revision time.

While it is very difficult to isolate the impacts on learners' achievements from the range of other factors that may have influenced outcomes this year, it is clear that the return to full course assessment has enabled learners to focus on developing key skills, knowledge and understanding.

Our well-established grading process was at the core of our approach in 2024. To ensure fairness and safeguards for learners, while maintaining standards and credibility, we considered any impact on learners who were completing the full course assessments for the first time.

At each stage, we took time to review the evidence to ensure all factors had been fully considered before grades were finalised.

Where we observed specific challenges that learners had faced, using the evidence and experience of our senior examiners, we were able to make appropriate small adjustments to grade boundaries.

It is my view, as Chief Examiner, that the return to full course assessment was the right step to take and helped learners to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, balanced across a range of assessments and assessment approaches. This will help them as they progress onto their next steps in learning in education, training or employment.

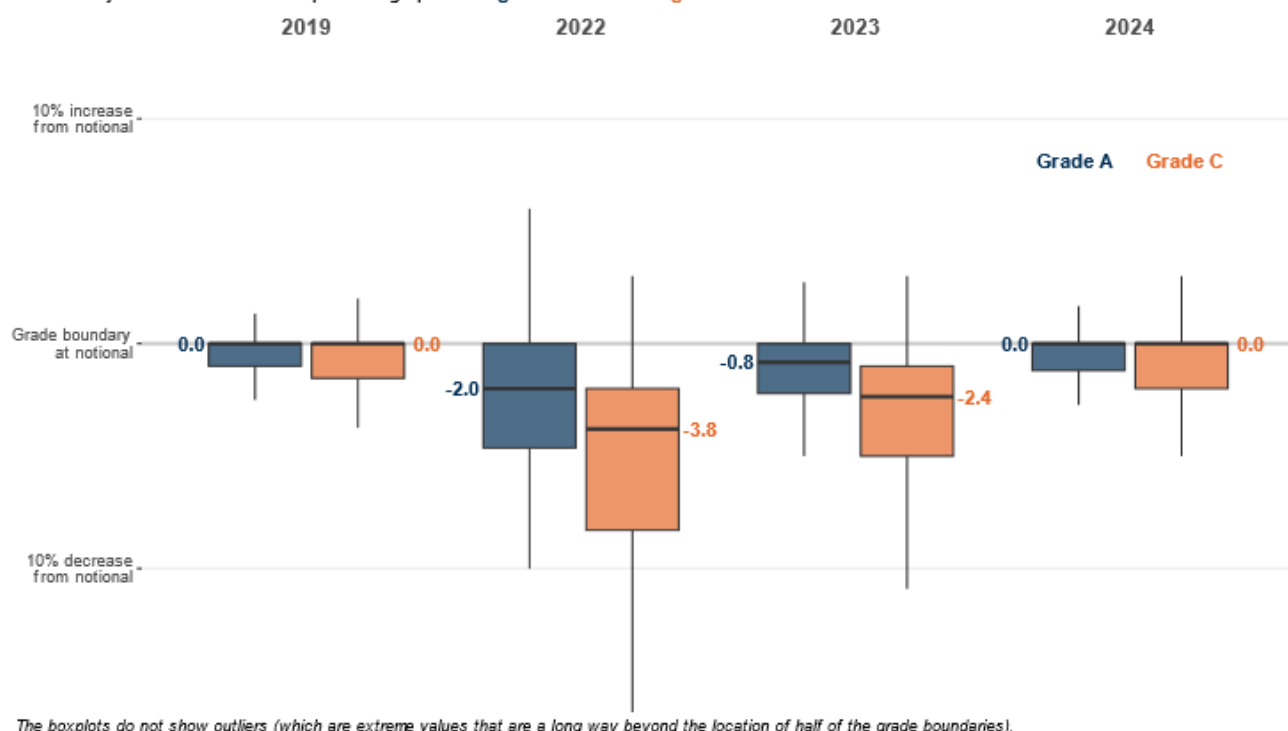
Where comparable, performance in the coursework components of this year's assessments were in line with those in 2019. For example, in language courses learners coped well with the return of the assignment component (writing) and helped address issues seen in 2022 and 2023 with listening and reading skills. This meant grade boundaries did not have to be significantly adjusted this year for these courses.

In other courses, for example sciences, practical coursework was reintroduced, and performance was broadly in line with pre-pandemic levels. In some science subjects at Higher and Advanced Higher, however, small adjustments to grade boundaries were made where there was evidence that learners, while doing well in the coursework, had not fully applied their practical skills to other assessment components.

In 2024, the median grade boundary adjustment was 0.0 percentage points at grade A and 0.0 at grade C, as shown in figure 1 below. These median adjustments are smaller than in 2022 and 2023, reflecting the return to our well-established grading approach and how well learners engaged with the return to full course assessment.

Figure 1

Adjustments to Notional Boundaries for Grades A and C.
Median adjustment in 2024 is 0.0 percentage points at **grade A** and 0.0 at **grade C**.



Overall, I continued to observe strong engagement by learners across SQA assessments and qualifications.

I would conclude that many young people have done well. The return to full course assessment was the right decision, providing a more balanced approach between exams and coursework.

Wider achievement

In addition to the graded National Courses, SQA provides a wide suite of qualifications that play a critical role in meeting a 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 in some of these qualifications at SCQF levels 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, particularly in areas such as Business with Information Technology, Computer Games Development, Electrical Engineering, Employability, Exercise and Fitness Leadership, Health and Social Care, Modern Languages for Life and Work, Photography, Sports Fitness and Travel and Tourism.

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. Foundation Apprenticeships are one of the work-based learning opportunities

available to many senior phase learners. They provide opportunities for learners to engage with employers in various ways, to support their learning and skills development throughout.

This year to date has seen 1,138 Foundation Apprenticeships achieved.

There was a return to the fuller approach to the assessment of Higher National and Vocational Qualifications (HNVQs) in the 2023–24 session. Alternative arrangements had been put in place in response to disruption caused by the pandemic. However, working with members of the HNVQ Group, SQA did retain a number of these alternative assessment approaches and some subject-specific guidance, as they were of benefit to learners.

Since before the pandemic, we have been adapting our Higher National qualifications to ensure they give learners the skills they need to thrive in the modern workplace. The new qualifications are called 'Next Generation Higher National Qualifications', and have been available on a pilot basis in subjects such as Agriculture, Computing, Horticulture and Television. They provide opportunities for learners to develop knowledge and understanding of learning for sustainability, meta-skills and use more digital technology.

To date, this year has seen 443 of these Next Generation qualifications achieved.

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

I remain very grateful, as Scotland's Chief Examining Officer, to everyone in the education and skills community who has once again delivered for learners. Our community is made up of all of Scotland's thousands of teachers and lecturers including markers and assessors, SQA staff, SQA co-ordinators, school and college support staff, local authorities, professional associations and national organisations.

Most importantly, I wish to record my continuing admiration for Scotland's learners, who have 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

6 August 2024