



# 2025 National Qualifications and Awards Results

## Introduction

I congratulate every learner who has achieved an SQA qualification, either today or during the year. You should be proud of your achievements, which will help you to progress and achieve your goals. Remember there is plenty of support available to help you do that.

This is my first report on National Qualifications and Awards as Scotland's Chief Examining Officer. Having experienced results day as a learner, a teacher, and a parent, I fully recognise its significance for learners, families, and educators alike. It is a profound honour to now serve in this role and contribute to the continued integrity and fairness of Scotland's qualifications system. This year also marks a historic milestone, as it is the last time SQA will deliver results before Qualifications Scotland assumes responsibility in December.

I sincerely thank all the teachers, lecturers, trainers, instructors, school and college support staff, local authorities, parents and carers, markers and assessors, SQA staff, SQA co-ordinators, professional associations and national organisations, for all your hard work to encourage, support and nurture learners. You play a key role in helping learners to achieve their potential and together we have worked collaboratively to deliver for learners.

I am very grateful to the many thousands of educators who work with us as appointees to deliver qualifications. Your professionalism, dedication and subject expertise are invaluable, and we would not be able to deliver for learners without you.

While this report reflects my observations on the delivery of National Qualifications and Awards in 2025, it will also look to the future and how we grasp the opportunities ahead of us all.

In the 2024–25 session, we:

- ◆ Offered National Courses using full course assessment for the second year since the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the evidence of last year's awarding, we concluded that the return of full course assessment following the modifications put in place to support learners during the pandemic had been the right thing to do and would continue in 2025 and beyond. This conclusion was supported by the findings of our [evaluation of 2024 awarding](#).
- ◆ Returned to our well-established approach to awarding. This approach provides a fair and effective way to ensure that learners are appropriately recognised for the

knowledge, understanding, and skills they demonstrate in each course. It also upholds the integrity, credibility, and standards of their qualifications.

- ◆ Continued to provide an Understanding Standards programme, as well as other advice and support, to help educators prepare learners effectively. We published new Understanding Standards material for 49 subjects at a variety of levels. This material included new candidate evidence with commentaries, and audio and video presentations. We also held 32 webinars across 18 subjects.
- ◆ Continued to work closely with the education and skills community to ensure learners are awarded the results they deserve and have the knowledge and skills they need to progress to further learning, training or work.

On 5 August 2025, SQA published the [Provisional Attainment Statistics \(August\) 2025](#) 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 \(August\) 2025](#) have different assessment approaches, summarised here:

### National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher

For the second year since the COVID-19 pandemic, learners who took these qualifications were assessed using the full course assessment. Through our Understanding Standards programme, we provided extensive support for the return of full course assessment in the 2023–24 session with further targeted support this year.

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

- ◆ a range of assessment arrangements to provide appropriate support for learners with disabilities or additional support needs
- ◆ the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service, for learners who were unable to attend an exam or whose performance was impacted by personal circumstances
- ◆ a free, learner direct, appeals service for any learner who has concerns about a grade — further details are available on the [Appeals](#) page of our website

Further information on the approach to awarding in 2025 is available in the [National Qualifications 2025 Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).

## **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 continued to use full assessment requirements in the 2024–25 session.

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

In the 2024–25 session, the approach to the assessment of these qualifications was in line with the requirements set out in the qualification documentation.

Supporting information is available in a suite of documents, published at 9.30am on Tuesday 5 August, including:

[Provisional Attainment Statistics \(August\) 2025](#)

[Grade Boundaries 2025](#)

[Assessment Marks 2025](#)

[Assessment Arrangements Report 2025](#)

[2025 Awarding: Equalities Monitoring Report](#)

## **Context**

Qualifications enable learners to fulfil their potential and take their next steps in life, whether that is continuing in education or going into training or employment.

As a direct result of listening to and acting on the views of educators, this is the last year that question papers will form part of the course assessment for National 5 Practical Metalworking, Practical Cake Craft and Practical Woodworking. This forms part of our review of the balance of approaches to assessment across National Qualifications, as outlined in our corporate plan: [A Prospectus for Change](#). It also aligns with recommendations from the Scottish Government's [Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment](#), which recommended a reduction in the number of exams in S4–S6. The changes to these practical subjects are just the start of far-reaching reform of our qualifications, which will ensure they are fit for purpose and meet the needs of learners and deliver for our society and economy.

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

Building on the collaboration and partnership developed in recent years, SQA continued to work closely with and seek advice from the National Qualifications 2025 Strategic and Working Groups. These groups are made up of representatives from across the education and skills community<sup>1</sup>.

SQA is committed to engaging with learners and their parents and carers. There were learners and learner representative groups on the NQ25 Strategic Group, who provided us with advice on awarding in 2025. Through the year, we visited schools and colleges and heard directly from learners about the qualifications they were taking and what they thought of those qualifications. We have also heard from a broad range of learners in S4–S6 as part of various in-school workshops that we have held around the country.

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. We also communicated directly with learners through a wide range of channels and have created [resources](#) designed to help learners understand how we award qualifications.

## 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 those who use them to make decisions, 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

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<sup>1</sup> Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Colleges Scotland, Connect, Education Scotland, Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFs), National Union of Students – Scotland (NUS-Scotland), School Leaders Scotland (SLS), Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), Scottish Government, Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA), Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) and Universities Scotland.

has performed to set grade boundaries fairly. Further commentary on this year’s grade boundaries is provided later in this report.

Further information on our approach to awarding is available in the [National Qualifications 2025 Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#). Information on assessment marks and grade boundaries is included on [SQA’s statistics webpage](#).

## Attainment

There is much to celebrate in the results this year — in terms of the increases in the number of entries for qualifications and in the increased levels of learner attainment across a wide range of qualification types.

I am particularly encouraged by the increase in the number of achievements for our vocational and technical qualifications — Skills for Work courses, Awards, National Certificates and National Progression Awards — which has surpassed 100,000 for the very first time, reaching 110,390. The number of awards in 2025 represents a 22.6% increase on 2024 and is more than double the figure in 2019.

This reflects learner and educator enthusiasm for skills-based learning and the practical experiences it provides to learners, preparing them for the wider world and giving them a more diverse range of options. It also recognises the hard work of educators in enabling a broader offer to unlock learner potential.

For National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, the distribution of 2025 attainment by grade is summarised below. Further statistical information about 2025 results is available on [SQA’s statistics webpage](#).

**Table 1a: attainment summary for graded National Courses in August 2025 — counts per grade\***

Award level	A	B	C	Total A to C	D	No Award	Total
National 5	130,765	74,780	56,165	261,710	37,670	34,615	333,995
Higher	62,430	49,065	42,225	153,715	28,410	20,360	202,490
Advanced Higher	8,970	6,790	6,170	21,930	3,890	2,785	28,610

\*all counts are rounded to the nearest five

**Table 1b: attainment summary for graded National Courses in August 2025 — percentage of entries**

Award level	A	B	C	Total A to C	D	No Award
<b>National 5</b>	39.2%	22.4%	16.8%	78.4%	11.3%	10.4%
<b>Higher</b>	30.8%	24.2%	20.9%	75.9%	14.0%	10.1%
<b>Advanced Higher</b>	31.4%	23.7%	21.6%	76.7%	13.6%	9.7%

A to C attainment in 2025 at National 5 is 261,710 or 78.4%. At Higher it is 153,715 or 75.9%. At Advanced Higher it is 21,930 or 76.7%.

A to C attainment has increased from 2024 across all levels — National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. Comparisons with other years should be treated with caution given the different approaches to awarding and grading between 2020 and 2023.

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. We continued to see significant numbers of dual presentations at National 4 and National 5. In 2025, dual entries were 34,885, or 10.4% of entries at National 5, an increase of 1.1% from 2024. This is the highest number we have seen.

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 27,655 this year, making this our most popular National 5 course after English (50,655 entries) and Mathematics (34,775 entries). However, it is worth noting that 8,050 learners (29.1%) were also entered for National 5 Mathematics this year. This percentage remains in line with 2024.

In 2024, Higher History was identified as an area of notable concern among learners, educators, and other stakeholders. In response, we implemented a range of targeted actions in 2024 to provide additional support for this qualification. These included three additional Understanding Standards events — one for each component of the course — with increased delegate capacity of up to 200 participants per session. Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions, and we published three corresponding webinar Q&A documents subsequently on the Higher History subject page. We also set up a dedicated email address to support direct queries from teachers and learners. Awareness of the challenges and developments in this subject area was further supported through the publication of the [Higher History Review 2024](#) and the [2024 Higher History Course Report](#). Encouragingly, attainment in Higher History has improved this year, reflecting the collective efforts made across the system.

## Equalities considerations

SQA has a duty to ensure that assessment and awarding is fair for all. In our well-established approach to awarding, we have equalities at the heart of our thinking. Today, we have published an equality impact assessment and child rights and wellbeing impact assessment to reflect how we have considered the impact of our approach to awarding, as well as to demonstrate our compliance with our statutory obligations.

SQA marking and awarding procedures take place without access to any information on the characteristics, circumstances or location of individual learners, to ensure fairness. However, after awarding is concluded, we undertake an equalities analysis, and this is published as the [2025 Awarding: Equalities Monitoring Report](#) alongside results.

This year, attainment at grades A to C has increased compared to 2024 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 attainment gap has decreased at all levels in 2025 from 2024 and is broadly in line with 2019 levels.

As highlighted above, comparisons with other years should be treated with caution given the different approaches to awarding and grading between 2020 and 2023.

Full tables and analysis are available in the [2025 Awarding: Equalities Monitoring Report](#).

## Observations on how the assessment approach for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses worked in 2025

This was the second year of the return to full course assessment following the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision to continue with it was supported by the findings of our evaluation of the return to full course assessment. We continued to help educators prepare their learners by providing an extensive Understanding Standards programme.

We also made a range of resources available to learners ahead of this year's exams. These included targeted information and support on our website, a 'Your Exams' guide and our [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, the evidence from our awarding processes this year indicates that the continued use of full course assessment has often enabled learners to focus on developing key skills, knowledge and understanding.

Under our well-established grade boundary process, a wide range of evidence was considered at each grade boundary meeting, including statistical analysis, marker feedback and educator estimates. We took time to review the evidence to ensure all factors had been fully considered before grades were finalised.

It is my view, as Chief Examining Officer, that the return to full course assessment continues to help learners to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding, balanced across a range of assessments and assessment approaches. This view is supported by our



[evaluation of the return to full course assessment in 2024](#). Learners and educators reported benefits including the opportunity to engage with aspects of courses that were not assessed under modified arrangements. This will help them as they progress onto their next steps in learning in education, training or employment.

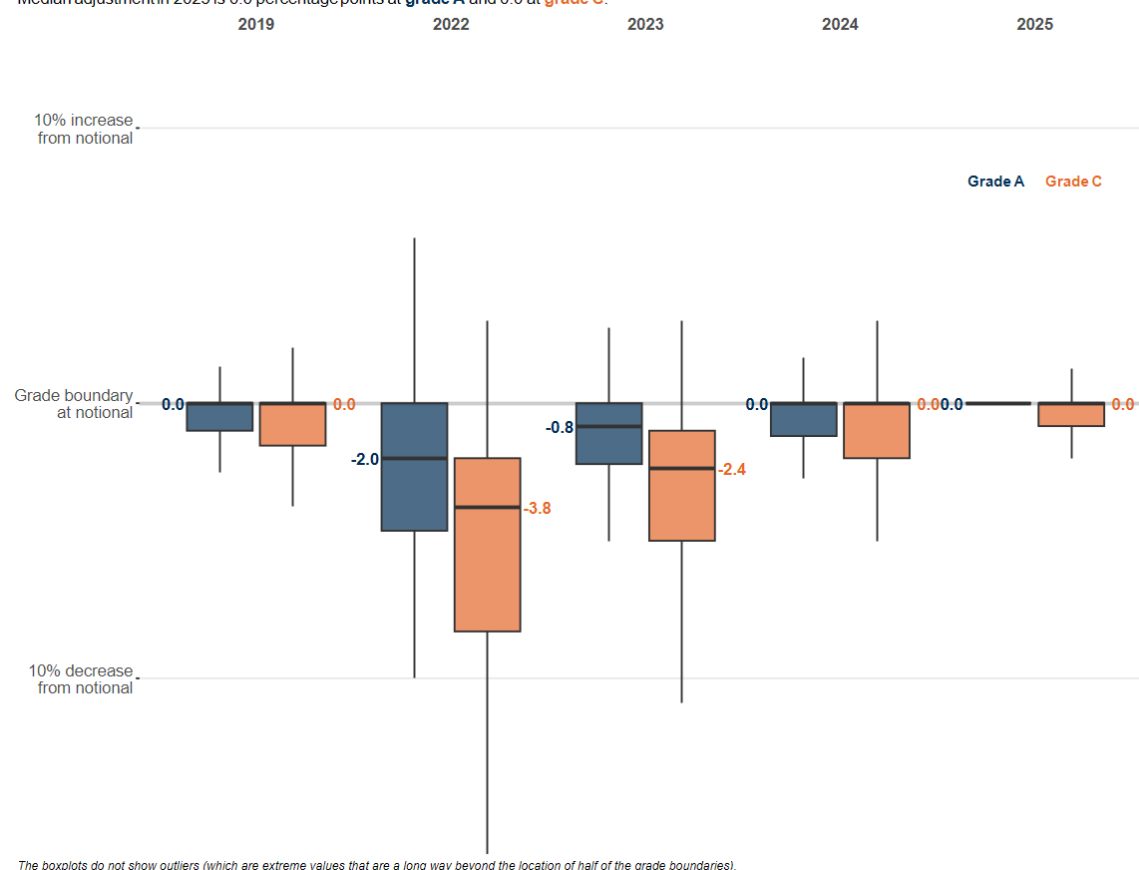
Following on from the full return to coursework components last year, learners engaged well with their coursework tasks, and this contributed positively to their performance across all their assessment components.

In 2025, the median grade boundary adjustment remained at 0.0 percentage points at grade A and at grade C, with the scale of adjustments being smaller than in 2024, as shown in figure 1 below. This provides clear evidence of stronger performance by learners in 2025.

**Figure 1**

Adjustments to Notional Boundaries for Grades A and C.

Median adjustment in 2025 is 0.0 percentage points at **grade A** and 0.0 at **grade C**.



While adjustments were made to some courses to ensure assessment standards were maintained, the aggregate scale of adjustments was smaller than in 2024 and similar to pre-pandemic levels.

This is a strong set of results and overall, I continued to observe strong engagement by learners across SQA assessments and qualifications.



## Vocational and technical qualifications

SQA provides a wide range of qualifications that play a critical role in meeting 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.

Learners can be certificated for vocational qualifications throughout the year, once assessment is complete.

2025 saw learners achieve a record number of these qualifications — skills-based awards that unlock training and career opportunities — with an increase of 22.6% taking the total beyond 100,000 (110,390) for the first time ever.

We have seen increasing engagement and attainment in some of these qualifications at SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6, in areas such as Employability, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Business and Information Technology, Engineering Systems, Fabrication and Welding Engineering, Climate Change and Sustainability, Hospitality, Leadership, Health Sector, Modern Languages for Life and Work, Furniture Making, Personal Finance, Scottish Studies and Sports Development.

SQA qualifications are also 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 has seen 1,813 Foundation Apprenticeships achieved to date.

There was a return to the assessment of Higher National and Vocational Qualifications (HNVQs) in line with the Unit and Group award documentation in the 2024–25 session. There were several qualifications (approximately 100) that retained the alternative arrangements that had been put in place in response to disruption caused by the pandemic, as a permanent option for the qualification.

Since 2019, 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. This project continues in session 2025–26.

This year has seen 1,069 of these Next Generation qualifications achieved to date.

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

# Qualifications Scotland

Qualifications Scotland will replace SQA in December, following the passing of the Education (Scotland) Bill earlier in the summer.

Qualifications Scotland will build on the progress made in 2025 on further recognising the value of skills-based qualifications, not just in schools but also across wider society and among industry and employers.

Our new dedicated Schools Unit aims to serve schools more effectively. This new structure, led by a secondary headteacher, will provide consistent and responsive support to educators and learners.

The unit's mission is to provide help and guidance to support learners to achieve qualifications, ensure meaningful communication and engagement with educators, enhance assessment practice by offering professional learning opportunities, and ensure that educator and learner perspectives are central to the transformation of Qualifications Scotland.

Before the wider large-scale reform of National Courses, we are planning a short-to medium-term review of some qualifications. This will support an evolutionary approach to National Course review in line with the Cabinet Secretary's accepted recommendations from the [Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment](#).

The review will include the balance of assessment methods in subjects where there is an immediate and evidence-based need to do so. We will carry out the work in line with teacher, learner and stakeholder feedback, as we have done recently with some practical subjects.

To support the review and reform of qualifications, the Schools Unit is planning a series of engagement activities. These will include workshops and wider co-design activities to ensure inclusive and collaborative development.

This work will have educator and learner voices very much at its heart.

I want to end as I started, in congratulating learners on their achievements and in thanking the education and skills community for everything they do, and for working with us and providing us with constructive challenge, as part of our shared goal of delivering for learners.

**Donna Stewart**

Scotland's Chief Examining Officer

5 August 2025