

Information for Parents

National Qualifications



The new qualifications Nationals, Highers and Advanced Highers, are being introduced in Scotland between 2013 and 2016. They will replace the existing Access, Standard Grade, Intermediate, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications.



Why are qualifications changing?

The introduction of Curriculum for Excellence has brought with it a different approach to learning in school. Amongst other things there is now more cross-subject teaching, an increased focus on literacy and numeracy and an interactive way of teaching and learning.

This new approach requires new ways of assessing learners' progress and new qualifications have been developed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA – the national body in Scotland responsible for the assessment and certification of qualifications). The new qualifications will support the new curriculum and will have equal status to those currently available.

What are the new qualifications?

The new national qualifications are called **Nationals**. They will replace the existing Access, Standard Grade, Intermediate, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications. Although Higher and Advanced Highers are being revised they will not be re-named.

What is changing?

The chart below lists the current National Qualifications and shows their equivalent new qualification:

Current Qualification	New Qualification	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework level
Access 1 and 2	National 1 and 2	1 and 2
Access 3, Standard Grade (Foundation)	National 3	3
Standard Grade (General), Intermediate 1	National 4	4
Standard Grade (Credit), Intermediate 2	National 5	5
Higher	Higher (revised)	6
Advanced Higher	Advanced Higher (revised)	7

You can find out more about the new qualifications and how they compare with existing qualifications at www.sqa.org.uk/scqf.

What is SCQF and how does it apply to the new qualifications?

SCQF stands for Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. The Framework helps a student understand and compare the various Scottish qualifications. The level of a qualification on the Framework reflects its level of difficulty and the number of credit points the qualification has indicates the length of time it takes to complete. One SCQF credit point represents an average of ten hours learning time. For more information on where the new qualifications will sit on the SCQF go to www.scqf.org.uk/The%20Framework/.

When are the new qualifications being introduced?

The new qualifications will be introduced in phases in 2013, 2014 and 2015. National 1, National 2, National 3, National 4 and National 5 will be available from August 2013.

The new Higher will be introduced in August 2014 and the new Advanced Higher in August 2015.

Learners who have entered S4 in session 2013-14 and thereafter, will study for the new qualifications at school in S4, S5 and S6. Learners will continue to choose the subjects they want to study at each level and your child's school will tell you when these choices have to be made.



How will they be assessed?

National 1, National 2, National 3 and National 4 will be marked and assessed by your child's school. SQA will check assessments to ensure that assessment judgements are consistent and meet national standards.

National 4 Courses will be made up of Units, including an Added Value Unit. In order to achieve a Course at National 4, learners will need to pass all Units plus an Added Value Unit assessment. The National 4 Added Value Unit assessment will be set and marked by your child's school. There is no formal national examination diet.

National 5 (Standard Grade (Credit), Intermediate 2), Higher and Advanced Higher Courses will also include Units that are assessed and marked by the school. In order to achieve a Course at National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher, learners must pass all Units plus a Course assessment. Course assessments will continue to be externally marked by SQA.

The Course assessment will normally be carried out using one or two assessment methods from seven possible types:

- assignment
- case study
- practical activity
- performance
- portfolio
- project
- question paper/test

Assessments will be appropriate to the subject and level of study.

New arrangements are being introduced to ensure that the new qualifications are recognised as a valuable achievement for learners. The local authority, SQA and schools are working together to ensure that all assessments are secure, valid and reliable. We will also make sure they are fair, consistent, in line with national standards and can be trusted by colleges, universities and employers in the future.

How will the new qualifications be graded?

Individual subjects at National 1, 2, 3 and 4 will be assessed as pass or fail. Subjects at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher will be graded A to D or No Award.

If a pupil fails National 5, will they get an automatic National 4 award?

No. Each pupil will be given credit for achievement at the level they were working to, so if they fail the Course assessment at National 5, they will be awarded the Units from the Course at that level. Award of the Course at the level below will depend on the Course.

However, if the National 4 and National 5 Courses have a common structure, the pupils may be able to get a Course award at National 4 by achieving the “Added Value Unit” at National 4. In this case, the pupil would achieve the Course at National 4 and Units at National 5.

What does “added value” mean?

Added value is a unit or part of the course which tests the pupil across all of the units they have studied. It provides evidence that the pupil acquired skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject across the breadth of the subject. For example, in National 4 Practical Woodworking pupils work on three units followed by an added value unit requiring them to produce a finished product.

Will schools be able to set their own standards?

No. Although schools will be internally assessing a number of the new National Qualifications (Nationals 1, 2, 3 and 4), they must follow nationally set standards.

How will SQA ensure that standards stay the same with the new qualifications?

SQA and Local Authorities are providing training and support to schools and colleges to make sure that the national standards are being understood and implemented. They will also provide assessment support and examples to schools in electronic format called the National Assessment Resource (NAR).

Will example question papers be available before the new exams?

Yes. Example question papers and other support materials will be available before the new qualifications are introduced to help learners revise and prepare.

Studying for the new qualifications

SQA has published the following support materials for learners studying towards National 5:

- Specimen Question Papers and Marking Instructions for subjects that include an examination question paper as part of the Course assessment
- General assessment information for parts of the Course assessment that involve Coursework, such as an assignment or practical activity

These materials can be used to help learners revise and prepare. They are available at <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/45625.html> by clicking on the relevant subject and selecting 'National 5'.

Support materials will also be made available for the new Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications before they are introduced.

Where can I find more information?

An increasing range of material is becoming available including:

- <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/58948.html>
- <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/59033.html>
- <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/>
- <http://www.sptc.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/2012-A-parents-guide-to-the-new-NQs.pdf>
- <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/NPF/nationals-in-a-nutshell/>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/>

Some of the information has been adapted with the permission of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC).

SPTC A parents' guide to the new National Qualifications, September (2012)

<http://www.sptc.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/2012-A-parents-guide-to-the-new-NQs.pdf>

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us to discuss how we can best meet your needs.

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