



Scottish Qualifications Authority
Ùghdarras Theisteanas Na H-Alba

08 August 2023

Sue Webber MSP
Education, Children and Young People Committee
By email to: ecyp.committee@parliament.scot

Contact: Fiona Robertson
fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk

Dear Ms Webber

Today, around 140,000 learners across the country are receiving their Scottish Qualifications Certificates. I know you and your fellow Committee members will want to join SQA and Scotland's education community in celebrating their achievements.

Results Day is a major milestone in the life of every learner, and the grades they receive today will allow them to take the next step on their learning journey; either continuing at school, moving on to college or university, or entering employment or a workplace-based training programme.

This year we recognised that while the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may have been less severe than in previous years, things have not yet returned to normal. We have an approach to assessment and awarding that helps to support recovery while maintaining the standards and credibility of our qualifications.

We continued with the course assessment modifications put in place for session 2021-22 and our exam exceptional circumstances service supported learners unable to attend an exam or whose performance was impacted by personal circumstances.

We also adopted a sensitive approach to grading which provided an extra layer of protection for learners, and our free appeals service – which opened at 9am this morning – is for any learner who has concerns about a grade.

The achievements of this year's learners are again a testament to their dedication and resilience and demonstrates a further step forward along the road to recovery and normal awarding.

To help you mark this important day and support young people, I am pleased to share with you information about today's results, and importantly, the help and support that is available to learners as they take their next steps in education, training or employment.

Results Day 2023

Learners are receiving their results by post today and those who signed up for and activated their MySQA account will also be receiving their results by text and/or email from 8am this morning (Tuesday 8 August).

The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow, G2 8DQ
An Tògalach Optima, 58 Sràid MhicDhonnachaidh, Glaschu, G2 8DQ

T: 0345 279 1000 F: 0345 213 5000
E: customer@sqa.org.uk W: www.sqa.org.uk

Lowden, 24 Wester Shawfair, Dalkeith, EH22 1FD
Lowden, 24 Shawfair an Iar, Dal Chè, EH22 1FD

Chair: David Middleton CBE
Chief Executive: Fiona Robertson

Together with Nationals, Highers and Advanced Highers, learners will be achieving a wide range of Skills for Work courses, Awards, National Certificates and National Progression Awards, which are part of a broadening of the curriculum and support a range of initiatives such as Developing the Young Workforce.

We are a proud Corporate Parent and SQA colleagues and their families, along with representatives of Who Cares? Scotland, MCR Pathways, and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, will be sending a congratulatory video message to all care experienced young people to recognise their success in their SQA courses and awards.

The alternative awarding arrangements in place in 2020 and 2021, the generous approach in 2022, and the significantly different circumstances in which exams took place in 2019 and before, mean that comparisons of attainment between years should be treated with caution and do not allow for any conclusions to be drawn on changes in education performance.

However, A to C attainment across most courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher are above pre-pandemic levels. This reflects the achievement of learners, combined with the sensitive approach to grading we have adopted in 2023.

We also thank Scotland's teachers, lecturers and the wider education community for their dedication over the past year.

The headline attainment figures for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses are:

National 5	Higher	Advanced Higher
321,360 entries	191,810 entries	27,750 entries
A-C attainment rate 78.8%	A-C attainment rate 77.1%	A-C attainment rate 79.8%
A attainment rate 38.6%	A attainment rate 32.8%	A attainment rate 33.0%

For any young person who has a concern about a grade, our free direct appeals service is now open. Our advice is for learners or their parents and carers to speak to their school, college or training provider in the first instance if they have concerns. They are best placed to address any concerns and provide their learners with advice and support.

Support for learners

- SQA's Appeals 2023 service is free of charge and opens at 9am today. More information has been sent to learners' homes, and can be found at sqa.org.uk/appeals
- If learners have a query about their certificate, they can call SQA's Candidate Advice Line on 0345 279 1000
- Skills Development Scotland's Results Helpline: 0808 100 8000
- UCAS: Clearing resources can be found at ucas.com/clearing-launch

The national attainment statistics and further information about how the qualifications were awarded can be found at:

- [Provisional Attainment Statistics \(August\) 2023](#)
- [SQA Chief Examining Officer's 2023 National Qualifications and Awards Results Report](#)
- [Grade Boundaries 2023](#)

- [Component Marks 2023](#)
- [Assessment Arrangements 2023](#)
- [National Qualifications 2023 Methodology Report](#)
- [2023 Awarding: Equalities Monitoring Report](#)
- [SQA Press Release](#)

How results were arrived at in 2023

The global COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the cancellation of exams in Scotland in 2020 and 2021 and alternative approaches to certification. Since 2022, we have returned to formal external assessment (exams and coursework). However, it has been clear to SQA that measures continue to be needed to support the recovery of learning and teaching, while maintaining standards.

SQA worked with partners across the education community, including teachers, lecturers, learners, parents and carers, throughout the year to agree the approach to assessment. A wide-ranging package of support was delivered. This support aimed to enable learners to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do, within the context of the ongoing recovery. It included:

- a continuation of the course assessment modifications, building on the approach in 2021–22, which was based on consultation with teachers and lecturers, and welcomed by them, which reduced the volume of assessment to ease learner, teacher and lecturer workload and maximise time for teaching and learning. These either:
 - removed or reduced elements of an exam and/or coursework
 - provided more choice in an assessment
 - removed a topic from an exam
- an Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service for learners who were unable to attend an exam or whose performance was impacted by personal circumstances
- a sensitive approach to grading, to help ensure fairness for learners while maintaining standards
- a free appeals service for any learner who has concerns about a grade — they can appeal either via their school or college or by using SQA’s learner direct service. Further details on the appeals service are available at [Appeals service 2023](#).

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 the assessments (exams and coursework), 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.

In conclusion, learners can be confident that the qualifications they receive today are credible and fair, and reflect the knowledge, understanding and skills they have acquired in difficult circumstances. Universities, colleges and employers can also be confident that standards and integrity have been maintained in 2023.

I look forward to joining you at Committee in September.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Robertson
SQA Chief Executive and Scotland's Chief Examining Officer