

Scottish Qualifications

There are different types and levels of Scottish qualifications, which all fit within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). They are studied at school, further and higher education level. Qualifications up to Higher National level appear on your Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC), which is issued by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. For more details of this, see our [SQC article](#).

National 1-5 qualifications

You study for National 1-5 qualifications at school.

National 1-4 courses are made up of units and are marked and assessed internally by the school or college. To achieve a National 4, an additional Added Value Unit must be passed. Courses at this level are not graded but are classed as a pass or fail.

National 5 courses can include units that are marked internally by the school or college, plus a course assessment that is either marked internally, or externally by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). The course assessment consists of a question exam paper or coursework. Courses at National 5 are graded A to D or 'No Award'.

National 1-5, or their equivalent, are the usual entry requirements for non-advanced courses in further education and most Modern Apprenticeships.

For more information on courses at National 1-5 level, see the National Qualifications section under [Schools](#) on Planit website.

Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications

Higher courses provide progression from National 5 and lead on to Advanced Highers. They are usually made up of three National Units and a Course Assessment, which is set and marked by the SQA.

Advanced Higher courses are also made up of three National Units and a Course Assessment and are normally taken in sixth year of school.

Both qualifications are graded A-D or 'No Award'.

Highers and Advanced Highers are the usual entry requirements for advanced courses in higher education, such as Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and degrees.

Skills for Work

Some schools and colleges offer Skills for Work courses. These are vocational courses for people aged 14-16. They give knowledge and skills to prepare for work - they include core skills as well as general skills for employability. Subjects include Creative industries, energy and rural skills.

These are National Qualifications, awarded at National 3-5 level and Higher level. (See below, National

Qualifications, for further information.) They are placed in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) at levels 3-6 - see the separate article on [SCQF framework](#).

National Certificate (NC)/National Qualification (NQ)

National Certificates (NCs) and National Qualifications (NQs) can be the next stage in progression from National 3 and 4 level or Skills for Work. They are offered at several levels and can lead to further education, higher education or employment. They can be studied at school or college. You enter at a level depending on whether you have achieved National 3, 4 or 5. (In some schools, pupils can go into NC/NQ courses with no formal qualifications).

NCs/NQs usually consist of a number of National Units which are assessed internally and sometimes also by an external exam set and marked by SQA. Some groups of National Units lead to qualifications called National Certificates (NCs). These are usually run full time at further education colleges. There are courses in over 50 subjects, usually at SCQF levels 4-6.

When you successfully complete a course, you can progress to the next level.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)

SVQs are workplace-based qualifications, designed to improve an employee's skills, by demonstrating competence in tasks needed for a specific job. There are SVQs for almost every job. They are available at five levels, from SCQF Level 4 for more routine jobs and tasks, to SCQF Level 11 for complex jobs with more responsibility.

They are usually made up of 6-10 units. Most SVQ courses are part time, run at college for those in appropriate jobs. There are a few full time SVQs.

Modern Apprenticeships can lead to SVQ qualifications at SCQF Levels 5 through to 9. For more information, see our [Modern Apprenticeships](#) article.

For more information on SVQs see the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) website at www.sqa.org.uk/.

Higher National Qualifications

These qualifications are built up of HN Units that can lead to a Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND). They are run in a wide range of subjects, by further education colleges, some institutions of higher education and some training centres.

They can lead directly to work, often at higher technician or junior management level. They can also give entry to more advanced courses such as degrees or vocational courses such as Professional Development Awards (PDAs) (see below).

Higher National Units (HN Units)

HN Units combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills. Like National Units, you can take them as qualifications in their own right, or as HNCs or HNDs, which can be studied full or part time.

HNCs and HNDs are made up of HN Units. These Units also form the basis of PDAs. For an HNC you need 12-15 Units, for an HND about 30 Units.

Higher National Certificates (HNCs)

An HNC normally takes one year full time, or two years part time, attending college one day or two evenings a week. For entry you usually need 1–2 relevant Highers plus other subjects at National 5, or a relevant National Certificate (NC) or National Qualification (NQ).

With an HNC you will usually be able to get into Year 2 of an HND in a similar subject and you may be able to go into year 1, or occasionally year 2, of a degree.

Higher National Diplomas (HNDs)

An HND normally takes two years full time, or four years part time, attending college one day or two evenings a week. For entry you usually need 1–3 relevant Highers plus other subjects at National 5, or a relevant NC or NQ.

With an HNC in the same subject you can complete an HND in one year full time or two years part time and you may be able to go into year 2, or occasionally year 3, of a degree.

For more information on HNC and HND courses see the SQA website at www.sqa.org.uk/.

Professional Development Awards (PDAs)

Most PDAs are for people in work or looking for employment, who wish to extend their skills. They focus on specialist skills in a particular occupational area.

PDAs are run at different levels, linked to levels 6-12 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) (see separate [SCQF](#) article). PDA titles include reference to the SCQF level – for example, PDA in Administrative Management at SCQF Level 8. People taking the higher level PDAs normally have qualifications or considerable experience in their career area.

PDAs are made up of National Units or Higher National Units and workplace assessed units. Most are run part time, either at colleges or by employers.

Other Higher Education qualifications

Degrees, Diplomas in Higher Education (DipHEs) and Certificates in Higher Education (CertHEs) are awarded by universities, as are postgraduate qualifications. These are not listed on your Scottish Qualifications Certificate, as they are not awarded by the SQA.

Degree courses require 3 years' full time study for an Ordinary, Pass or General degree, 4 years full time for an Honours degree and longer for a degree in Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine, the MEng in Engineering and some other degrees such as MPhys or MChem. For entry you usually need 4-5 Highers, depending on the institution and the subject to be studied.

You can progress to a degree from other qualifications such as HNC or HND. With a relevant HNC you may get into

year 1, or possibly year 2. With a relevant HND you may get into Year 2, or possibly year 3.

Some colleges of further education have formal 'articulation' arrangements with universities or institutes of higher education. These link specific HNC or HND courses to a particular level of entry into a particular degree course.

Taught courses leading to Postgraduate Diplomas normally take 9 months full time, for a Masters degree, 12 months full time. Many postgraduate courses are run part time. For entry you usually need an appropriate degree, or sometimes an HND.

Higher degrees, such as MSc, MPhil and PhD by research are also run by most universities and some colleges.

Useful website

[Scottish Qualifications Authority](#)