

SQA's process for awarding graded National Courses

Here are the different stages involved in SQA's process for awarding graded National Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

1

Development of question papers and associated marking instructions

For each of SQA's National Courses, the Principal Assessor and their team develop question papers and associated draft marking instructions. This development activity takes place within a robust quality assurance process to ensure all assessments are valid, reliable, fair and accessible.

2

Recruitment of marking teams

Markers are practising teachers and lecturers and SQA is dependent on them to mark over 1.3 million graded National Course exam scripts, assignments and coursework every year.

3

Exams/assessments take place

4

Standardisation

Standardisation is led by the Principal Assessor and supported by their senior team leaders and team leaders. Its main purpose is to finalise the detailed marking instructions based on a review of a sample of responses from learners who have sat the question papers and completed coursework.

5

Markers' meetings

The key purpose of these meetings is to ensure a clear understanding of the approach to marking and of the specific marking instructions that apply to the assessment being marked. The meetings allow markers to explore and debate the standard they are being asked to apply. This debate is critical to a clear understanding of the standard and so to markers' ability to apply it accurately and consistently in their marking.

6

Marking takes place

7

Marker check (for example for Higher History)

A sample of marked exam scripts is randomly selected from each marker and reviewed by a member of the exam team to ensure they have applied the marking instructions as agreed at the markers' meeting and that this has been done consistently.

8

Grade boundary meetings

Grade boundary meetings determine the minimum marks needed to get an A, B, C, or D grade or a 'No Award' result. 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 in order to set grade boundaries fairly.

9

Finalisation (for example for Higher History)

Finalisation is a final review of selected scripts before certification. Its purpose is to seek to ensure that any variability in marking does not have an impact on the final grade awarded. This final review is carried out by the senior exam team who have been involved in marker check.

10

Certification

Candidates receive their results and Scottish Qualifications Certificate on Results Day.

11

Appeals

Appeals is the final stage in SQA's process after certification. This is a free service available to learners, who can request an appeal directly from SQA or through their centre if they are unhappy about the grade they have received.