

# Parent's Guide to the Exam System



**Falkirk Council**  
*Education Services*



Dear Parent / Carer,

This guide to the exam system was produced following a request from a parent.

The guide explains what national qualifications are, how each course fits into the national qualifications framework and what flexible curriculum arrangements are in place to suit individual children. We've also included a 'jargon buster' to explain some of the terms used in the education system.

Links to useful websites for further information are included at the back of the guide.

I hope this guide helps you to support your children at exam time. Please contact your child's school if you have any other questions and they will be happy to help you.

Julia Swan  
Director of Education

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## **JARGON BUSTER**

ACC	Access Course
AH	Advanced Higher
H	Higher
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
Int1	Intermediate 1
Int2	Intermediate 2
NAB	National Assessment Bank
NQ	National Qualification
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SG	Standard Grade
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SQC	Scottish Qualifications Certificate
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualifications

### **SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority)**

The SQA is the national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment, and certification of qualifications other than degrees.

#### ***SQA functions are to:***

- devise, develop and certify qualifications, and keep them under review
- accredit qualifications
- approve schools, colleges and other providers as being suitable for entering people for the qualifications
- arrange for, assist in, and carry out the assessment of people taking SQA qualifications
- quality assure schools, colleges and other providers which offer SQA qualifications
- issue certificates to candidates

## National Qualifications

NQs are qualifications for students in secondary schools and some are also offered in colleges of further education. NQs are Standard Grades, National Courses and National Units.

Standard Grades	National Courses / Units
	Advanced Higher
	Higher
Standard Grade – Credit	Intermediate 2
Standard Grade – General	Intermediate 1
Standard Grade – Foundation	Access 3
	Access 2
	Access 1

## Standard Grades

These qualifications were introduced in the 1980s to replace Ordinary (O) Grades. They are generally studied over two years in S3 and S4 in secondary schools although some schools allow pupils to study the courses in S2 and S3 and sit the end of course exam at the end of S3. Your child's school will explain their arrangements to you. Students generally study 8 subjects including Maths and English. There are 3 levels of study and students - usually take exams at two levels - Credit/General or General/Foundation to make sure they have the best chance to achieve the highest level possible. The level of study followed will usually be determined by a student's performance in the subject.

Level	Grade
Credit	1 or 2
General	3 or 4
Foundation	5 or 6
Course completed	7

## **National Courses / Units**

National Qualifications were launched in 1999 to replace previous qualifications. These Courses or Units can also be studied by adult learners without having to complete the relevant Standard Grade first.

### **Access 1 / Access 2 / Access 3**

Access 1 is designed for students who need considerable support with learning, while Access 2 meets the needs of students with more moderate support needs. Access 3 is comparable to Standard Grade Foundation level. Access courses are assessed by the school or college and do not involve sitting a final exam. These courses may be offered in some subjects in S3/4 and S5.

### **Intermediate 1 / Intermediate 2**

Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2 are comparable with Standard Grade at General and Credit levels respectively. These National Qualifications are usually studied in S5/6 although some schools may offer Intermediate 1 and 2 courses in S3/4 in place of the corresponding Standard Grades.

Intermediate 2 acts as a stepping stone towards Higher for students who have not studied the subject before. It is also a good course for those students who are progressing from a General or Credit pass at Standard Grade who would find studying for a Higher in one year very demanding.

### **Highers**

These qualifications are aimed at students who have passed subjects at Standard Grade Credit level or completed Intermediate 2. Highers are the main qualifications needed for entry into University or College to study for degrees or Higher National courses (HNCs or HNDs) and are usually studied in S5/6.

### **Advanced Highers**

Advanced Highers are aimed at students who have passed Highers and are usually taken in S6 at school or at college. They extend the skills and knowledge needed for further study or entry to the workplace.

## Baccalaureate Awards

The Scottish Government has introduced Baccalaureate awards in Science and in Languages which will be first examined in 2010. These awards will require students to study successfully a group of Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications and to undertake a related interdisciplinary project in either Science or Languages.

## Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) shows the relationship between all mainstream Scottish qualifications. For example, the level of demand of a Standard Grade General course is comparable with that of Intermediate 1 and SVQ level 1.

SCQF level	Schools	Schools and Colleges	Colleges and Universities	Workplace (SVQs)
12			Doctorate	
11			Masters Degree	SVQ 5
10			Honours Degree	
9			Ordinary Degree	
8			HND / Diploma of Higher Education	SVQ 4
7		Advanced Higher	HNC / Certificate of Higher Education	
6		Higher		SVQ 3
5	Standard Grade – Credit	Intermediate 2		SVQ 2
4	Standard Grade – General	Intermediate 1		SVQ 1
3	Standard Grade - Foundation	Access 3		
2		Access 2		
1		Access 1		

## **Curriculum for Excellence**

The Curriculum for Excellence will reform the curriculum for all learners from 3 years to 18 years. The first examinations within the new certification structure will take place in 2014.

## **Flexible Curriculum and Access Arrangements**

Secondary schools in Falkirk Council operate planned curriculum links across the area, including links with Forth Valley College in Falkirk. These managed 'Consortia' links allow senior students to access certain subject courses, and a developing range of vocational courses, through attendance at another school or the College.

These arrangements enable access to subjects which may not be available in every school, have a low uptake, or where the nature of the course requires specialist facilities or expertise not normally available in schools e.g. certain Advanced Highers or Construction, Psychology or Tourism courses.

Whilst the classes for these courses will be held outwith the student's school, there will be additional study or preparation work that requires to be undertaken by the student as part of their school timetable, working under supervision in their school. This timetabled time is an essential study element of such courses and must be undertaken. Schools will receive progress reports from other schools or the College, and these will be shared with parents in the normal way.

## **Choosing Courses**

Students select their subjects with help and advice from their teachers and careers advisers based upon their progress, interests and potential careers. Parents and carers play an important role in helping young people make these decisions. Course choices have to be made in S2 (or in some cases during S1 if the student intends sitting Standard Grade exams at the end of S3). Students are given a great deal of information from the school, which will help them make course choices and may be given a copy of the booklet 'Which Way Now' produced by Careers Scotland. Course choices are also made for S5 and for S6 and depend on performance in previous exams and the student's potential career or further study intentions.

## **Unit Assessments / External Assessments (exams)**

Unit Assessments are tasks set by teachers and drawn from the National Assessment Bank (NAB) and form the internal component of the assessment of Intermediate 1 to Advanced Higher Courses. Each Unit in the course (usually 3) must be passed as well as the final external assessment (usually an exam) to gain the full course award. Grades are awarded according to performance in the final external assessment and all students in Scotland are assessed in the same way.

## **Core Skills**

These core skills are developed as part of all Standard Grade and National Courses and Units. Students are credited with their achievements in these areas on the certificate issued by the SQA. Specific Core Skills units can also be studied in their own right. The Core Skills are:

- **Problem Solving**
- **Communication**
- **Numeracy**
- **Information Technology**
- **Working with Others**

## **Revision**

It is important to prepare well for Unit Assessments, prelim exams and other internal assessments as well as external exams. Subject teachers will give students information on when the Unit Assessments will take place and when the exams will be. Teachers will also advise students on a course of revision, some of which will take place in the school, so that students have access to further information and support from teachers if they encounter a problem. Students should also revise at home using course work covered throughout the year with support from books and internet resources such as the Falkirk Virtual Teacher Centre. - [www.falkirkvtc.org.uk](http://www.falkirkvtc.org.uk)

## **Prelims**

Schools will normally arrange for students to sit a prelim in a subject as a trial run for the final exam. Prelims help students find out what the exam is likely to consist of and get used to exam conditions e.g. how much time they have to answer questions. The prelim gives schools an indication of the student's performance and is useful evidence of the student's ability in the event of an appeal (see below).

## **Appeals**

Around April schools submit estimates to the SQA of the grades they think their students are likely to achieve in their final exam based on their performance in prelims, Unit Assessments and other work. A school or college can appeal to the SQA on behalf of a student who failed to achieve the grade expected but there must be strong evidence to support this. This is good reason to prepare well for prelims!

## **Dates of Exams**

SQA exams start on 5 May and finish on 12 June 2009. Timetables will be given out in school or can be downloaded from the SQA website - [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)

## **Study Leave**

Study leave is granted for children in S5 and S6 studying for Intermediate Courses, Highers and Advanced Highers. Study leave is no longer granted for students in S3 or S4. Students in S3 or S4 have access to help, advice and a range of support materials in their school and can study in a structured, supervised environment.

## **The Day of the Exam**

Students should arrive at least 10 minutes before the start of the exam and bring the appropriate equipment e.g. pens, pencils, ruler or calculator. Calculators may not be allowed in some exams. No mobile phones are allowed in the examination room. The student should remain in the examination room until the end of the exam. If the student is unable to attend the exam the school must be informed immediately. Schools will discuss these arrangements with students and also give them a copy of 'Your Exams' a booklet produced by the SQA which contains further information about the examination process.

## **Results**

The SQA issues all students with an information pack and a Scottish Qualifications Certificate listing the National Qualifications they have achieved. There is also a profile of Core Skills achievement. This is usually issued in early August. The certificate is updated every time a student receives a new qualification so that there is a lifelong record to show employers and others. If the student fails the final exam or only completes part of the course the certificate credits them with the Units they completed successfully so they get full credit for what they have done.

## **Useful Websites**

SQA – [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)

Information about Standard Grades, National Qualifications and Exams.

Parentzone – [www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk](http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk)

Information for parents, carers and others responsible for school age children about all education issues.

Careers Scotland – [www.careers-scotland.org.uk](http://www.careers-scotland.org.uk)

Careers information, advice and support for young people, parents and adults.

Continuing Education Gateway – [www.planitplus.net](http://www.planitplus.net)

Information about subject choices, careers, learning and work in Scotland.

Virtual Teachers Centre - [www.falkirkvtc.org.uk](http://www.falkirkvtc.org.uk)

Information about individual subjects and help with homework.

### **Bo'ness Academy**

Gauze Road

BO'NESS

EH51 9AS

Telephone No.: 01506 822028

### **Grangemouth High School**

Tinto Drive

GRANGEMOUTH

FK3 0HW

Telephone No.: 01324 660210

### **Braes High School**

Newlands Road

Reddingmuirhead

FALKIRK

FK2 0DA

Telephone No.: 01324 719551

### **Larbert High School**

Carrongrange Avenue

Stenhousemuir

LARBERT

FK5 3BL

Telephone No.: 01324 554233

### **Denny High School**

Mydub Road

DENNY

FK6 6EE

Telephone No.: 01324 827440

### **St Mungo's High School**

Merchiston Avenue

FALKIRK

FK2 7JT

Telephone No.: 01324 628416

### **Falkirk High School**

Westburn Avenue

FALKIRK

FK1 5BZ

Telephone No.: 01324 629511

### **Carrongrange School**

Carrongrange Avenue

Stenhousemuir

LARBERT

FK5 3BH

Telephone No.: 01324 555266

### **Graeme High School**

Callendar Road

FALKIRK

FK1 1SY

Telephone No.: 01324 622576

### **Education Services**

McLaren House

Marchmont Avenue

POLMONT

FK2 0NZ

Telephone No.: 01324 506600

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